



**Park & Recreation Commission Meeting**  
**City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**March 25, 2026**

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## **MINUTES**

### **Call to Order/Roll Call**

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm

Members present: Michael Deneen, Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Herzallah, Andrew Macko, Andrea Ostergard

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Director; Deanna Saefke, Interim Recreation Director; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Commission is to foster a healthy, inclusive community by providing a diverse park system and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for people of all ages while fostering sustainability and environmental stewardship for future generations.

### **Community Forum**

None at this time.

### **Consent Agenda**

Eisenbise questioned the maintenance charge for over \$4000. Saefke replied that was actually for a service in 2025 to steam the roof at John P Murzyn Hall to remove the ice dams that caused water leaks inside the building.

**Motion** by Eisenbise, second by Deneen, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

### **Letters and Requests**

None at this time.

### **Old Business**

#### **Sullivan Lake Park Update**

Staff presented examples of playground structures with approximate pricing to give the members an idea of what current costs are for equipment. Cullen indicated staff are working with ISG to prepare an list of requirements and conduct interviews with playground equipment companies to determine which company to use. Some companies will offer grants to help fund some of the equipment costs. Ostergaard added these companies can receive tax write offs for offering grant assistance. Cullen replied that staff want to look into all options to choose the best company for the project. He and Saefke are working with ISG to gather that information. Ostergaard indicated these examples are really to help set expectations appropriately for the Commission. Cullen replied yes. Herzallah asked what the lifespan of the playground equipment is. Cullen replied 25 to 28 years for some pieces. That is one aspect he wants to include in the requirements for choosing a manufacturer. There might be a cheaper manufacturer but they won't carry replacement parts. He wants to get as many years out of the equipment that we can. There is a process for criteria, competitive bidding, and tailoring the specifications to meet our community needs. Staff will share more information as the project progresses.

Cullen reported another project along with the playground equipment is the rebuilding of the lift station at Sullivan Lake Park. He is working with the Utilities Superintendent and Director of Engineering on this part of the project. There are certain pumps that are used within the city and prefer to use those same pumps because we can stock replacement parts, crews are familiar with that style, dealer support, and other reasons. Staff were just informed that there is a thirty week delay on that pump. We need to get the pump in the ground prior to installing the playground equipment. Staff are working with the consultant to resolve the delay or find an alternate pump that is similar. Cullen wanted to share the

current situation with the Commission but also reiterated that the situation is being worked on with changing situations. With this slight delay there is time for due diligence in choosing the best play equipment.

Herzallah asked if the budget is \$235,000 one large play feature could be chosen and then one or two other small features and that is it. The cost of installation could be estimated at about 50% of the price indicated for each feature. Cullen has additional questions regarding the budget for the Finance Director. One of being the flexibility of funding between this project and the soccer field. There may be some available funding from the soccer field project because the estimated costs decreased by moving it from the East side of Huset Park to the West side. For both projects; the soccer field and Sullivan Lake Park playground and lift station the estimated budget is approximately \$720,000. There was a DNR grant with a match of \$350,000. This grant will include funds for consulting and other fees. Staff will work with the engineering department on the specifics for those details. Buesgens asked if the playground equipment can be looked at in stages as far as purchasing and labor costs for when more funds become available. Every two years something else could be added to the park. Cullen replied that it is a good question and is something that has been raised previously and will be discussed with ISG. Saefke replied she asked ISG that same question and was told that with the poured in place type of playground and footings for the equipment are done in the first round of installation, when you go back to install more equipment you need to hire a whole crew for the entire process and potentially need to dig up some of what is already there. So it may sound like a cost savings option, in the long run it doesn't save. Cullen replied there are additional park funds for this project, staff need to discuss the options with the finance department to address these questions. The project is still moving forward. Ostergaard indicated the park is not that large so the equipment shown in the examples is about what will fit in that area appropriately. Herzallah asked for the \$720,000 budget for the fiscal year of 2026 or the total amount even if it is in 2027. Cullen replied in 2026 the available \$720,000 is a fund balance that has been building year after year. Buesgens reported there is a TIF that expired years ago and it was requested at that time to set up a park improvement fund. That \$100,000 specifically goes towards parks each year. There is also some money added to the park development fund when there is development within the city. Ostergaard replied this is money specifically allocated for parks and will not go away in next years budget. Costs may increase but the same money will be available.

Cullen indicated there are a lot of different playground manufacturers, this was just an example of a few. Saefke indicated there are four manufacturers in the first example and ISG just picked a few companies that the city has used in the past for these examples. Game Time is one manufacturer that has been used at McKenna Park, and the equipment that was at Sullivan Lake Park. One of the biggest things to note when speaking with other residents is to recognize that we haven't had a big project like this in our park system for years, and now this particular project at Sullivan Lake Park has multiple aspects at the same time. If we were just focusing on playground equipment that would be a much quicker timeline. This is a unique project for us with the lift station, the water treatment portion, various entities involved like the DNR, MWMO, MNDOT, the development at the old Medtronic site, the playground equipment, and community involvement for the park. Saefke asked the commission to be mindful when they are out at other cities to look at their parks and see if there is a piece of equipment that they would like to see or not want to see in this park.

Eisenbise asked if the play sand with a bridge over it will not have any water in it, just sand. Cullen replied this a solution to help keep costs down. Instead of a poured in place area, or rocks, this is a way to have a small area where kids could dig up poured fossils. Ostergaard replied this is becoming popular at many parks within a ten mile radius of the city. Herzallah replied this is a great feature for multiple age ranges.

### **New Business**

Cullen reported he and Saefke were on a staff committee to choose a consulting company that will prepare a master plan for the entire city park system. The committee is recommending the firm Mend. Their presentation included impressive ways in which they engage with the community to gain feedback from the public. One highlight was that their staff understand some of the situations that our community faced during the metro surge and they know there will

be some challenges encouraging residents to attend or participate. When they plan engagement events they always have ways to involve children of all ages. Mend will be attending a future Parks & Recreation Commission meeting. Staff are excited to work with them. Saefke reported this will be a year long process working with the Commission, attending community events, they may even ask Commission Members for help along the way, and work with the City Council to develop a master plan for the entire city park system. This will become the guide moving forward to indicate what parks need which type of amenities and a timeline for improvements as funding becomes available. Cullen added they will conduct a rating of all the park amenities including equipment, facilities, trees and vegetation. A plan will be developed for a replacement timeline that works within our budget. There will be a comparison between us and other communities as well. Saefke and Cullen will be attending a kickoff meeting with Mend and other city staff tomorrow.

## **Reports**

### **A. Interim Recreation Director**

Saefke reported the new Parks & Recreation Director John Stutzman will start on April 27<sup>th</sup>. He brings experience not only in recreational activities but also park and facility improvements. One of his recent projects was with a facility similar to John P Murzyn Hall. Cullen replied he is well known in the recreation community and came very well recommended. Ostergaard asked what his background is regarding the differences between the community in St Peter versus Columbia Heights. Saefke replied that he grew up in the cities, worked in Chanhassen, and went to school in Mankato, so he has worked in the metro area and not just St Peter. Cullen reported that Stutzman will be taking over a lot of the park development process.

Saefke thanked the outgoing members Ostergaard & Herzallah for their time on the commission. We may be calling them in the future to provide feedback during the Park Master Plan process or invite them back for public feedback during the meetings with Mend. Ostergaard is not opposed to coming back but didn't feel right staying on the Commission with limited availability due to traveling for work.

Saefke reported that activities at Murzyn Hall have been quiet but are starting to ramp back up for spring and summer. There are a few youth trips coming up next week with days off from school. The active agers program has monthly activities and outings. Spring sports are filling up and will be starting practices soon.

### **B. Public Works Director**

Cullen reported street sweeping operations are starting. The parks department is removing a lot of brush and overgrowth. They removed the basketball hoop backboards at Huset Park East to sand and repaint them. The police department thought they might have been stolen and the kids at the high school were asking during a police youth event if they could be replaced at the park. The backboards are now back up after being down for just a few days. This time of year is when projects like this can be done in-house to save money. The park sign was refinished at Lomianki Park. Cullen will do his best to communicate those projects.

### **C. Commission Members**

Macko thanked Ostergaard and Herzallah for their time on the Commission. Herzallah gave out treats and said it was an honor and privilege to be on the Commission. This was the first type of role like this that he has participated in and learned a lot. He is willing to be called back for future park discussions. Ostergaard indicated she would be willing to meet with the future members to help transition them or give some history on what has been worked on.

Saefke indicated there is a Boards & Commission social on April 14<sup>th</sup> at 6pm at city hall to welcome new members and thank outgoing members.

**Motion** by Herzallah, second by Deneen, to adjourn the meeting. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Macko adjourned the meeting at 6:55 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary