



Park & Recreation Commission Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
Aug 27, 2025

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: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation; Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison

Saefke reported that Perez Umphress submitted her resignation from the Commission due to personal circumstances. She enjoyed her time on the Commission, gaining insight, and getting to know the community members.

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 asked under the parks budget what the building maintenance contractual services are for and why it is in the red. Hansen replied that it could be for a portion of Public Works and then any of the park buildings. For example, there was a heater in one of the buildings that went out, which the majority of that cost is for that heater. The other cost is for ongoing HVAC issues at Circle Terrace Park. He indicated that it is something that the Park & Recreation Commission previously reviewed if old park buildings should be removed that are no longer in use, because the building is still minimally heated during the winter to avoid pipes bursting. This should be considered in the future as the parks are being redone because many buildings are not used for programs and mostly used for storage. The city pays for insurance on the buildings, there are maintenance costs, and the group should think about what service the building is providing for the community. Windschitl replied there are a fair amount of rentals for the buildings that are usable. We only rent the buildings at Ramsdell, Huset East, Keyes, and McKenna Parks. All other park shelters are on a first come first served basis. Hansen indicated the type of budgeting that is done is not a line item by line item. It is an overall total budget for the parks, and as of July 50% of the budget has been expended. Any one line item can be over or under, but at the end of the day what is really monitored is what the budget total is.

Ostergaard asked what the actual usage is for the park buildings. If that is reported towards the end of the year she often misses that meeting due to other conflicts. Windschitl replied that typically that number is reported when discussing the rental rates of the parks. Staff can get those numbers for her at the end of the year. Ostergaard asked if people are upset or have issues using the shelters on a first come first serve basis. Windschitl replied no we rarely hear of issues, one that was reported was someone putting table clothes on the tables, but then they left and when they returned the plastic tablecloths were thrown away. It actually was one of the parks staff who cleaned up the shelter because they thought it was left behind from the previous evening since no one was on site. Saefke informed the Commission that if you go to the Rec Desk website you can view the calendar for each park and see what weekends it is used or reserved.

Eisenbise asked if there isn't a meeting in November. Windschitl indicated in the past they have merged the two

November and December meetings and held it in early December. Hansen replied it depends on what is going on for the commission. There are two active planning processes that will be going on at that time. One is going to be Sullivan Lake Park and then the ongoing soccer field. If there is a need to meet then there will definitely be a meeting scheduled.

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 fitness court update.

Macko indicated that the mural is very pretty and he knows the artist. Hansen asked if any other members have been to the park. Ostergaard replied she was there slightly before the mural was finished. Macko said it is vibrant.

Hansen indicated the current contractors will finish the restoration along the sidewalks, and benches need to be installed and they will be wrapped up. Next year the city will put lighting in for the fitness court next year, there will be four lights around the fitness court. City staff will be doing the restoration work where the tennis courts were. He informed the Commission that the grand opening of the fitness court is September 8th. This date was chosen because the National Fitness Campaign is available on that date. The city council, park and recreation commission and public are invited. It will be at 10am. Hopefully members will be able to attend. Hansen indicated there are routines available for the fitness court, pictures and a QR code are posted.

Buesgens asked if there will be more trees planted to create future shade around the fitness court. Hansen replied that the city will do a landscape plan around the court area. Planting trees is certainly part of that. He indicated that some of the plants around the splash pad need to be divided, plus some from the roundabout and they will then be used at Sullivan, particularly around the north side and also the lake side or west side between the court and the trail. Buesgens added that there are security cameras at some of the parks and is wondering if there is one at Sullivan Lake Park. Hansen replied there is a mobile camera. Buesgens stated there are cameras permanently located at other parks. Hansen replied if that is something that the Commission wants to recommend to the city council that would be one thing to include when the playground is being planned. Windschitl stated the cameras around Huset Park haven't always provided the clearest pictures. Hansen indicated the cameras at Huset Park do not have a great resolution and are already considered old in technology standards. Hansen replied the IT Department is working with the police department to replace the cameras to high definition models around Huset Park.

Macko stated he is excited to check out the fitness court when it is not so hot outside. He informed the Commission that the mural artist also won a few first place awards for her art at the State Fair this year.

Macko stated the September Park & Recreation Commission Meeting will be held at Sullivan Lake Park.

Sullivan Lake Park Master Plan

Hansen indicated the Sullivan Lake Park Master Plan will be updated based on public feedback. Invites will be sent out to a large area of residents around Sullivan Lake Park to invite them for input on updating the master plan. This focuses on access to the park, the playground, and we will not get into the type of courts other than indicating the removal of the pickleball court as previously discussed as possible amenity. Due to noise with pickleball Huset Park would be a better fit to place a court in the future. There isn't any funding for the construction of any courts right now at Sullivan Lake Park. The grant was for trails, lighting, and a larger playground area. Hansen indicated this meeting will be an opportunity for the community to engage in the planning process. A consultant will be hired to go through the planning process. A master plan needs to be updated because to get the playground built everything needs to be in place with construction

plans done early next year. At the next meeting there will be the Sullivan Lake Park Open House to discuss the master plan of the park. There will also be a second open house to continue the discussion of the soccer field development. At this open house the feedback that has been received from the community on the plan options will be presented. What the community feedback has been to locate a full size soccer field at Huset Park. This meeting will be after the Sullivan Lake Park open house in September.

Macko asked for the walking path around the park and lake the retaining wall that is dilapidated will be included in this project. Hansen replied that none of the walking trails are included in this current grant. We had previously applied for a grant to completely redo the walking trail around Sullivan. There are some tree root issues that have headed the walking trail and on the south side is the retaining wall that needs to be replaced in order to have a ten foot wide trail. None of that is included in the grant we received, so staff will continue to look for funding options. Ostergaard clarified the current grant funding is only for the area around the playground. Hansen replied it is to access and update where the playset will be relocated. Eisenbise asked where the relocation of the playground is. Hansen replied the playset was located on the south side of the shelter and now the fitness court is there. Staff have taken all of that equipment and will be able to reuse most of it up at Hilltop Park. There are a few parts that need to be replaced. A new larger playset will be installed. That is one comment we often received was that the playset was too small. The Commission previously discussed making sure the playset is accessible and that same comment was given to Hansen while he was inspecting the fitness court and a group of people were at the park. He believes what is meant is that the future playset is not only accessible for handicapped people but also forms of autism or other disabilities. Often times for autistic children there is a separate area away from the larger denser structure. Eisenbise asked if the new playset will be in the northeast side of the park. Hansen replied that is what needs to be determined. We are also required by the National Fitness Campaign to have any playset to be located 150 feet away. He reminded the Commission that whatever changes are made to Sullivan Lake Park, it is meant for all citizens and not just one specific area. We will listen to all concerns and feedback. If we can accommodate concerns we will do our best to do that. Buesgens indicated for decades the parks have been fairly quiet and now that we are trying to reactivate them people are used to them being quiet. Parks are meant to have games, gatherings, kids playing, and it is a change. Hansen indicated that it is unknown as to what type of court will be installed at Sullivan because the needs of the community might change by the time there is available funding. It could be basketball, tennis, pickleball with some kind of screening to help with sound transmission and that will be a future discussion.

Saefke asked Hansen to inform the Commission of how the public meeting process will go for the September meeting. Hansen replied that one thing that is typically done, it needs to be recorded as to whomever is speaking, it becomes part of the minutes and what their comments are. Basically, we listen to what they're saying, people are limited to five minutes. Ostergaard replied they are the same rules as during our community forum in a regular meeting. Hansen replied it is more of a community engagement. The five minutes can be flexible as long as they are not repeating the same information. He stated that he will go through the park process; this is the first step to listen to public comments, create a final plan recommendation, the Commission reviews that recommendation, then passes that recommendation on the City Council, the council adopts the plan, staff then takes the plan into our construction design and prepare plans. The role of the Commission is to determine what is important, relevant, should they try to accommodate certain things, and then relay that to staff and the consultant. Hansen informed the Commission if they have any clarifying questions of a community member to please ask them. For example, the residents that have voiced concerns mostly are speaking about noise related issues. Buesgens asked if there is a screen around the port a potty. Hansen replied it is a chain link fence. This is for appearance and not screening because when there is vandalism at the parks it often is burning of the port a potty. He indicated if there is a concern with seeing a port a potty or hearing a door close, that native plantings or arborvitaes would be a way to help alleviate those concerns. Ostergaard feels a lot of people have opinions and thinks it is a matter of getting the word out there regarding the meeting. Hansen replied the notices will be mailed out to residents up to 53rd, down to 51st, over to Central Ave, and as far west would maybe be halfway in between Sullivan Lake and University Avenue. Typically notices are given out 7 to 10 days notice. If the Commission wants to do a larger area

they certainly can. It will also be on the city website. Eisenbise replied next month the meeting will be at Sullivan Lake Park and a time with the community and after that an open house regarding the soccer field.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the summer youth programs have ended. The last trip was today. The participation numbers were good all summer. Programs were successful. There were a lot of new staff this year. Men's softball ended last week. The next program of focus will be youth soccer.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen reported that the seasonal positions were full this year with twelve in parks and they are starting to roll off. There are a few that are not going to school so they will stay on staff as long as we are able to keep them. Seasonals can only work 67 days if they are going to school or 100 days if they are not in school.

C. Commission Members

Deneen indicated he is involved in a lot of theater activities and rehearsal space is for limited. He had an idea that using rooms inside Murzyn Hall could be a source for these groups to rent out. Windschitl replied there are a few rooms that do not get used on a regular basis. There are civic groups who use rooms and recreation programs are scheduled throughout the facility. Hansen replied the open space on the fitness court at Sullivan Lake Park would be a good idea. Buesgens replied they should check with local churches as well.

Buesgens attended the Recreation Theater performance of by the Millstreet Players. It was very good, and she found out that they can use other resources on stage through the school. There were 22 kids, and they did a really good job. Windschitl indicated that it has been a better fit to use the PAC instead of Murzyn Hall. It is a nice opportunity that we get from the school district, and they also utilize the Hylander Center gym during the school year. It gets used more often than he has been aware of. He is working with the principal to get a schedule. The only concern with additional use because of the wear and tear on the equipment. Windschitl stated that the adult open volleyball on Monday and Friday evenings has been very busy. Buesgens has been seeing more and more volleyball nets in people's yards.

Eisenbise gave a suggestion for programming to hold a seasonal clothing swap. Buesgens replied that she might want to work with Nathen at First Lutheran because they host a Buy Nothing Group. Ostergaard asked what is different for the type of event Eisenbise is thinking of. Eisenbise indicated it has more intention of just clothing, there are often time organizers that will take dropped off items and organize them. Sometimes it is open for more than one day. Buesgens replied that she has hosted a puzzle swap in the Senior Center.

Motion by Ostergaard, 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