



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
October 23, 2024

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Herzallah, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzgar, Priscilla Perez Umphress

Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Amada Marquez Simula, Council Representative

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Department 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

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

Letters and Requests

None at this time.

Old Business

Update Sullivan Lake Master Plan – Fitness Court

Hansen indicated the Commission had recently held a meeting at Sullivan Lake Park. After that discussion regarding park amenities, staff worked with a park planner to put together two master park plans. The purpose of this isn't to add on to Sullivan Lake Park but to determine the best location for the fitness court. Hansen reviewed the two attached park plans. The requirement for the fitness court is to have spacing away from any children's amenity area or playground. The fitness court is intended for adult use and adult programming. Staff looked at how adding the fitness court will integrate for future master planning.

The first concept has the fitness court in the northern part of the open green space. It looks at reconfiguring some of the walking trails. This would expand the park itself, active features, and would look at adding parking stalls. Staff looked at the placement between an amenity that really needs to be redeveloped or an amenity that, due to future redevelopment, staff feel it would be appropriate for the park. This concept indicates a pickleball court and Hansen feels this would be a good opportunity to get a pickleball court in the city. This would be a shared overlay with a tennis court. This would keep the play structure and allow for expansion of the playground equipment. The expansion would allow for a 2-5 age group and an area for the 5-12 age group. This

plan is very modular and could be done without much disturbance to the existing amenities or have a large impact on the usage of the park. With the fitness court on the north side of the park the playground equipment can still be used during construction. The other item discussed is the existing building will be relocated to the south side of the park for better access if work needs to be done on the lift station.

The second concept gives a focus on a lot of the active features within the park and rebirthing the play area. This shows the fitness court in the location where the existing play structure is located. The other active area shows two pickleball courts, and a tennis court. One of the previously mentioned items was the number of trees within the park. Staff are working with the city forester to keep as many existing trees as possible, but the number kept will depend on how many additional parking stalls are added. With the redevelopment of the Medtronic site there will be some kind of park access along the northeast side of the park.

Macko likes the size of the larger playground in concept 2 but is wondering if that can be placed in the current location or added onto the existing equipment. Hansen replied the existing playground equipment would be repurposed at another park location. Macko stated one downside might be that the picnic shelter is further away from the playground if it is located at the northern end of the park. Hansen replied that staff discussed which location is better for the playground equipment in regard to the picnic shelter. Macko also expressed a concern with having a fitness court next to a shelter area where people might be having a party. Eisenbise asked if the existing trees would stay. Hansen replied staff intend to add new trees for shade in the landscaping design. He indicated if the fitness court is installed where the existing playground structure is, there would be a lengthy amount of time that the park would not have any playground equipment; one to two years possibly.

Herzallah asked if there is an estimate of cost is for the project. Hansen replied the original projection for the fitness court is approximately \$108,000 installed. In concept 2 with the removal of the play structure and reconstruction that would add around \$40,000 to \$50,000. Staff are trying to find additional funding or grants for this redevelopment. Herzallah stated that neither estimate includes the removal of the tennis courts. Hansen replied no they do not. The next step right now is to determine the location for the fitness court. The final park plan will come back to the Commission for review. Herzallah asked about public review. Hansen replied that public comment will be done later to determine what is appropriate for the neighborhood. Eisenbise stated that she likes concept 2 slightly better because of the larger play area, larger canopy, and open lawn space. She agrees that if people are at the picnic shelter parents can still see the children at the play area because of the open space so she is comfortable with that distance. If the fitness court is located next to the shelter could there be a privacy element between the two. Hansen replied there is not one indicated but could be created through landscaping. Eisenbise asked if the wall on the fitness court that has the artwork would be facing the street. Hansen replied yes. Eisenbise liked that idea. Herzallah mentioned in the meeting held at Sullivan Lake Park there was a discussion regarding child safety and the proximity to the lake, he asked if that is a concern with the play area further away. Hansen replied it is no difference in the proximity for a child to find their way to the water's edge. There is no other way of creating additional distance unless it was moved over to where the tennis courts are. Macko likes the large seating areas. Marquez Simula likes the addition of parking stalls. Hansen indicated the retaining walls will be kept and either nine or thirteen stalls can go with either plan. He stated the conversation of the commission is that they really like the large play area and ultimately with the public comment and review it will be whatever size play area is appropriate for the area. Eisenbise asked if concept 2 has a play area for the age range of 2-5 or higher. Hansen replied all the concepts will include both age ranges. Herzallah clarified the open lawn space could be used for additional amenities in the future and the concept shows three pickleball courts which might seem like overkill unless there is a tournament happening. Hansen replied that history has shown that people do not want basketball courts because of the behavior that type of activity can bring. It is completely up to the neighborhood if they want to have one or not. Hansen asked what

the preference is for the fitness court location, north or south. Macko liked the big structure at the north end. He asked the parents of the group how they would feel regarding the distance between the picnic shelter and the location of the play area on the north side of the park. Hansen indicated that distance is approximately eighty to ninety feet in concept 1. Discussion was held regarding parking and accessibility when the Medtronic site is redeveloped as to how residents will access the park area. Perez Umphress brought up a concern with a fitness area located next to a picnic shelter. Macko agreed. Hansen reported that concept 1 could be used and regarding a larger play structure, that can be accommodated later in the planning process. He stated the number of pickleball, tennis courts, and a basketball hoop can be determined at a later time as well. Eisenbise asked if the parking area is limited due to trees. Hansen replied yes, and with the relocation of the lift station there needs to be room for service vehicles to access the building too. We also need to follow our own tree policy for preservation or replanting of removed trees. Herzallah likes the fitness court location in concept 1. Macko likes the modular feel of both concepts. Hansen summarized the discussion in that the commission likes concept 1 for the location of the fitness court with some redevelopment of the play structure area. The commission agreed. Eisenbise asked when the process for the art element will begin. Hansen replied the artist has already been selected. Chirpich indicated it is a local artist that has done renditions of the city posters.

New Business

Setting rental rates for John P Murzyn Hall 2026, Park Facilities and Event Wagon for 2025.

Windschitl indicated this is an annual process to set rental rates for the next available year in Murzyn Hall. Staff is recommending the rates do not increase from 2025 to 2026. The rates were increased significantly in the middle of 2022; by \$1,500 to \$2,000. From 2024 to 2025 the rental rates are increasing around one hundred dollars. The rental rate on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday in 2025 is \$3,146.25 including tax. He stated that renters of the facility are allowed to bring in their own food as long as it has been cooked off site. This is a unique option that we provide and a significant cost savings for renters. Staff compared the number of rentals on Saturdays in 2023 there were 32 and in 2024 there were 27. Friday and Sunday rentals were very few compared to years prior. Before the increase in 2022 the rental rate for Fridays and Sundays was so low that we were barely covering our operational costs. Now with the higher rate we are making a little bit but in turn not having as many rentals. This doesn't have the wear and tear on the facility like we did in previous years. Saefke added that without as many rentals on Sundays it opens the availability for nonprofit groups to use the hall at a reduced rental rate and offers that community aspect to the facility. Windschitl stated the nonprofit groups are charged a minimal fee to help cover the costs for heat/cooling, lights, and staffing. Staff are recommending keeping the same rental rates from 2025 to 2026.

Herzallah asked if the rate increase applies to any other room in the building. Saefke replied yes it is applied to all the rental rates of the facility. Herzallah presumes there are a lot less rentals during the week based on the numbers presented from the weekend days. Windschitl replied Monday through Thursdays the facility is used for recreation programming. Herzallah asked about the use of the main hall area. Windschitl replied that exercise classes are held on some evenings, and many Wednesdays the hall gets used by the school district for sports banquets, or other civic groups for banquets and even the Red Cross Blood Drive. He also mentioned the Columbia Heights Lions Club is the exclusive provider for alcohol during events. They are licensed and insured to operate the bar service. Eisenbise asked if a security officer is an additional fee. Windschitl replied yes. Currently it is billed to the renter at thirty-five dollars per hour plus tax. We are using a third-party company for the service. There were some issues with the service but since we have been staying on top of the schedule each week with the company it has been much better. He did research using other companies and the rates were significantly higher. Windschitl indicated the decision is at the pleasure of the commission. In previous years when researching other facilities, it is hard to compare what we have to offer due to many places having minimum rates or required caterers. Herzallah is in favor of keeping the rates accessible and that the facility is

not in the best condition compared to other places. Windschitl agrees. Eisenbise asked if by keeping the rates the same if that will inhibit the funding available for any future updates. Windschitl replied no. Saefke indicated these rates will be for the 2026 year and as of the first business day of 2025 the public can reserve dates in 2026. So in regard to remodeling the building or any major improvements that needs to be decided that far in advance due to the rental schedule.

Motion by Herzallah, second by Perez Umphress, to keep the rental rates for John P Murzyn Hall from 2025 to 2026. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Windschitl reported in 2024 the only parks that were available to rent were the ones that have a usable building. Some parks have buildings that are unusable. The ones that could be rented and guaranteed that the facility would be clean because it is locked, were Ramsdell, McKenna, Keyes, and the Huset East Park Jefferson building. In 2024 there were 60 park rentals this year for all four parks. In the past when the picnic shelters were rented there was approximately 280 rentals for one year. He feels this year was successful with the rentals we had and with the first come first serve usage of the picnic shelters. The reason for implementing this policy was because there were not enough park staff on the weekends to guarantee the shelters would be clean for each rental. Staff are suggesting keeping the same usage policy for the picnic shelters and rental of usable park buildings for 2025 at the same rental rates. The current rental rates, including tax, for the park buildings are \$75 for a resident, \$175 for a nonresident, and a resident with a large group of over 100 people \$150. Windschitl stated it is hard to compare rates with other cities that have blocks of time with more than one renter per day and staff to clean in between the two rentals. Park reservations are told to be done by 8pm. Staff are suggesting keeping the rates and rental policy the same from 2024 to 2025, but it is up to the pleasure of the commission.

Herzallah asked the group if they should go back to renting the shelters. Macko replied if there weren't any problems with the policy this year to keep the same procedure. Eisenbise stated that this year showed more usage at parks that were previously underused. Saefke reported in 2024 Huset East Park was rented 25 times, Ramsdell Park 17, McKenna Pak 8, and Keyes Park 10 times. Eisenbise indicated she was weary at the beginning of 2024 with the new usage policy and checked in a few times throughout the year, and it pleased that the year went smoothly.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Metzgar, to maintain the same rental rates from 2024 to 2025. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Windschitl reported the last three rates to discuss are for the Event Wagon, the ballfield rentals, and the rate for the garden plots. The event wagon is a sixteen-foot trailer that is delivered to residents with twelve eight-foot tables, about sixty metal folding chairs, and various recreational equipment. The trailer gets dropped off where the resident wants it, they get a key, and it is picked up the following business day. The current rental rate is \$75 including tax. The trailer was originally donated by the Columbia Heights VFW. Saefke reported there were fifteen paid rentals, not including any city usage. Herzallah asked when the last time the rate was increased. Windschitl replied three or so years ago, it was increased during COVID due to additional cleaning procedures. He indicated most of the items inside have been funneled through usage within the department so there is minimal cost for staff time on the delivery and pickup. Macko stated with it being rented most weekends he feels the rate is good. Eisenbise asked if there has been feedback from users on the quality of items. Windschitl replied people love it and there are rarely any problems with equipment. Saefke replied the chairs are very old and that also helps with the mass usage and keeping the price low.

Windschitl stated the other two fees are for the ballfield rental at \$75 per day or \$20 per hour, and the garden plots on Reservoir Boulevard where there are 48 plots. All the garden plots were rented this year. Windschitl reported the ballfield rental does not occur very often, but there is a group that uses one of the fields for a kickball group. Herzallah asked about other groups that use the fields at Huset Park. Windschitl replied that often there are groups that show up in the park in full uniforms and with referees and staff do not know who they are.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Herzallah, to maintain the rental rates the same from 2024 to 2025 for the Event Wagon, ballfield rentals, and garden plots. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the carpets were cleaned in Murzyn Hall, the LaBelle Lounge, the Senior Center, and M/M Room in the lower level. Some of the meeting rooms carpets are getting to the end of their life but the carpet upstairs turned out pretty well. The HVAC contracted company came out last week and replaced a hundred dollars in parts. There were a lot of air conditioning problems at the beginning of the year and have done well over the second half of the season. Men's softball has ended the fall league with no rainouts all season. There were seven teams in the league. The youth soccer program will end in the next few weeks.

Herzallah asked if the recreation program schedule is set for the next season. Windschitl replied they do not know about how many teams will be using the Hylander Center yet. Herzallah asked about the publishing for the brochure. Windschitl replied no as we are waiting for the election results to be finalized before going to print. This will include basketball and other programs. Herzallah asked about giving suggestions for programs or classes. Windschitl replied that he should talk with Katie Holznagel the Recreation Coordinator.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen has nothing to report at this time and offered this time to City Manager Aaron Chirpich to talk with the Commission. Chirpich indicated he has worked with the city for five and a half years in Community Development and became the City Manager in June. He thanked the members for their service, and it is an important park of the city. He has read through previous meeting minutes he can see there is a lot of passion from this group, and he shares those same goals and desires to add more amenities to the park system. He knows the impact parks play in community development. He encouraged the group to hang in there while plans are being developed. Once traction gets going for future expansion it will be really exciting from a staff perspective as well. He thanked the members for their time.

C. Commission Members

Eisenbise asked about getting the book, How to Turn a Place Around, that Councilmember Buesgens introduced to the group. Hansen replied that he is getting them. She asked if there was an update on the park passport idea presented by Perez Umphress. Saefke asked if Perez Umphress had spoke with the Communications Coordinator Will. Perez Umphress indicated she will work on a template that can be used for all the parks.

Marquez Simula stated that she has enjoyed the use of the Event Wagon and has seen many community groups take advantage of it as well. It is easy to move around the lightweight tables and because the chairs are sturdy and old and metal, as a user you do not have too worried about using them or putting them back in the wagon. She knows that it is advertised in the newsletter, but maybe there should be an additional decal on the wagon saying that it is available for rent. Windschitl replied that it does have that on the front and back of the wagon. She reported that there is a garden at First Lutheran Church that is in great quality, but the coordinator is not

going to be taking care of it anymore. The church would be happy if the city would want to take it over, they do not want to take in money for it, but would like to see the space used. She told someone from the church to reach out to the city. It is a really nice garden area with a hose, fencing, and raised garden beds.

Macko reported the last item of business is to determine a meeting date for November and December. Windschitl indicated with the holiday weeks around the same time as our regular meeting dates, we typically combine the November and December dates into one meeting. He suggested Wednesday November 20th would be one week earlier than our regular meeting. Hansen would prefer a later date. Windschitl suggested Wednesday December 4th. Commission Members agreed.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:24 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary