



Park & Recreation Commission Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
May 28, 2025

MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:00 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; Sara Ion, City Clerk

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

Ion presented the updated guidelines and form for speaking at Board and Commission meetings. She indicated there is a request to sign in and give information to staff for anyone wishing to speak at a meeting. The sheets will be available at the front of the meeting room. We can direct people to sign in, but we cannot make them sign in because of freedom of speech. The Commission can set guidelines and time limits. The Library Board and the Park & Recreation Commission are the two boards that have a community forum. The Planning Commission has public hearings.

The second handout explains the differences between a community forum and a public hearing. Ion indicated the biggest focus is if there is someone taking up more than the five minutes that is allotted. If that happens the Chair, or any member can make a motion to stop the conversation. If someone is being disruptive, this Commission has the right to have an orderly meeting. There are times when you can recess the meeting. A script is included with things that can be said to do that. Three different types of pauses are a temporary recess, a recess due to disruption or disorder, and a recess to a future date. If needed when recessing due to a disruption or disorder the staff liaisons will contact 911 to assist if need be. Ostergard asked how much of this information, if something were to occur, needs to be documented in the minutes. Ion replied all of it. This is a public meeting and any time that you are keeping the minutes of the meeting, it should be as accurate as possible. It doesn't need to be given extra attention or embellished on but needs to be reflected. Buesgens added that during a city council work session it was discussed that if someone is being disrespectful the mayor or council member can stop that discussion. Is that something that can be applied here. Ion replied that people need to be cautious of what one person considers disrespectful and what another person doesn't. Especially when considering the right to free speech in a community forum. Buesgens replied that the council no longer allows anyone to direct their concerns or start calling names to one specific person. Ion replied that you can ask someone who is speaking to please refrain from using profanity, or please refrain from directing your comments to staff, or directly to a specific member.

Ostergard asked if you could ask someone who is not discussing an issue that pertains to parks or recreation to move on, because people could come to the meeting and literally talk about anything for 5 minutes. Ion replied because this Commission has an open community forum that invites free speech. We are not here to limit free speech. So, when someone wants to address the commission that is within the community forum scope. If it is something that you do not want to have on the agenda the group can discuss it in the future. Eisenbise asked if there wasn't a community forum and a community member showed up would the commission still be able to address them at some point or not. Ion replied once again you need to be really careful because you cannot legislate or direct who is or isn't allowed to speak based on your personal preference. When the guidelines are followed and regulating discussions based on time limits

and meeting descriptions, that is the appropriate avenue to regulate instead of the content of speech. As councilmember Buesgens said, if someone is using profanity, being disrespectful, is creating a condition in which you cannot continue the meeting, then absolutely use these options to recess the meeting. Saefke added if there were no guidelines and someone showed up to speak but were told they were given five minutes to speak; this is a clear standard for everyone. Ion stated it seems that it is a priority to this particular commission that you have public input and that you get information that way. If that is the path that you continue it just needs to remain mindful that we are being mindful to the time limits and preventing disruptions, not monitoring people's speech. Herzallah asked if free speech conditions go both ways. For example, can a commissioner or city council member respond. What are the conditions placed on city officials versus the public. Ion replied there isn't a hard and fast answer for this question. It is truly situational to each circumstance. If there was a disruption, by replying are you creating a disruption, are you furthering the issue, does it help get the business done with your response. Buesgens replied that it comes up at the city council meetings a lot that people are expecting an answer or a response but as we see it a community forum is a time for a person to speak their concerns, questions, or whatever and that is it. If it is something that they want worked on they are told the topic will be given to staff and will get back to them. It is not a time for discussion. It is a time for members to listen, take notes, and that's it. She stated you don't want to throw a rope out and start creating a tug of war situation either. The speaker should be addressing the commission as a whole. Ostergaard replied unless they are addressing one person specifically. Buesgens replied they are not supposed to and that is in the guidelines. Ostergaard stated that is something that can be said, you cannot address one person but the group as a whole. Ion replied instead of saying you cannot, it would be please address the whole commission. If they are not following that direction that would be when you could say that you are taking a break, we are going to recess and be back in five minutes. That will indicate what the boundary is.

Ion read the community forum, what to expect handout. Community members can speak briefly about any topic of concern. The commission listens but will not respond or act right away. Comments made during the community forum will be noted by city staff for follow-up and review by the commission as needed. This is also what is provided when people are asking to speak and what is laid out on the agenda. She recommends if someone is here to speak for the community forum, the chair says we are moving into the community forum time period and read exactly what is on the agenda. It lays out the five minutes, and it lays out the expectations for this time period. If someone is causing a disruption by going over the time limit that is when you act. Disruption means different things to different people and when you are talking about the context of a meeting, disruption means that you are not able to conduct business. Herzallah asked if the chair has the discretion to go beyond the five minutes if a good discussion is occurring. Ion replied yes but if you are going to set a guideline for five minutes and you don't enforce it, then someone can come back and ask why one person got more time and another person didn't. The guidelines are to keep order. Ostergaard asked if the commission can say this is a great topic can they add it as an agenda item for future discussion. Ion replied yes. Or if there are multiple people to speak on the same item you can thank one individual for their five minutes, move onto the next person and if there is time at the end we will ask you to speak again.

Ion stated that she hopes this helps the commission move forward. Ostergaard replied yes. Ion indicated this can be fine tuned if there is something that the members have feedback or questions on. She is available to the members to make the meetings easier or help answer questions. Ostergaard asked if there is a formal time keeper or if someone needs to be chosen for that. Ion replied that you can ask that staff do that because they will receive the form from a person asking to speak. Eisenbise verified that this commission and the Library Board will receive these forms but other commissions don't have this. Ion replied the Planning Commission does as well because they have public hearings. That is why it is delineated on the sheet what the difference is between the community forum and public hearing. Eisenbise indicated she attended a Sustainability Commission meeting and if she wants to speak on any part, where do they put that on the agenda. Ion replied if someone from the community wants to participate in that way it is suggested that you contact staff liaison and asked to be put on the agenda. Eisenbise asked if they would just ignore her if she was not on the agenda. Ion replied yes but it depends on how formal of a meeting they are running.

Macko stated this is all great information and it is nice to have good documentation for the forum. Ion replied that she wants the members to feel empowered and to say if something is disruptive and you need to pause if necessary. She is here to help if a different kind of script is needed or someone feels uncomfortable. Saefke clarified that a pause to recess would need a motion. Ion replied yes if you are completely recessing. Think of a temporary recess in that the environment is hot and something needs to happen right away. The chair would say we need to take a brief recess; we are going to reconvene in five minutes because you are still at the same place, same time, and same meeting. Sometimes a meeting is recessed because someone needs to use the restroom. There isn't a motion for a brief recess. This is a determined amount of time. When there is a disruption going on, it is along those same lines. You are saying due to the disruption of the meeting we are going to recess and will resume the meeting when it is safe. If you recess the way option 2 reads, you do need to have a full statement of the date, time and location the meeting will resume. Someone will need to make a motion for that. Ostergaard asked if the chair is the only that can make that statement. Ion replied no, anyone can make a statement to pause. Windschitl has seen the Minneapolis City Council do that often. Ion replied that you need to be clear about what your expectation is for the pause. There should be a specific time frame and time to reconvene. Everyone is an equal member of this commission, and all have abilities to make motions, all are voting members, and should feel empowered that this is something everyone can do. We do not want anyone to feel uncomfortable in a meeting because then you can't conduct business.

Eisenbise replied she appreciates this. The members agreed. Ion replied that she appreciates that the members are such diligent students, taking notes and asking questions. If there is anything that they need after the meeting to please reach out to her. Macko thanked Ion for attending.

Consent Agenda

Saefke asked for everyone to introduce themselves since there is a new member. Macko has lived in Columbia Heights his whole life. Buesgens is a current city council member and current liaison for this commission. Herzallah has been on the commission since 2023. Deneen is brand new to the commission and happy to be a part of it. He has lived in Columbia Heights for five or six years. Ostergaard has been on the commission since 2023 and lived in Columbia Heights for ten years. Eisenbise has lived in Columbia Heights for eleven year and been on the commission since 2023. She was on the Library Board for 4 years prior to that. Saefke has worked for the city for 20 years this July. Windschitl has worked for the city for 28 years this August. Hansen has been with the city for 28 years also.

Eisenbise asked if a member resigned or if we are gaining an additional commissioner. Saefke replied that Deneen is replacing Timm after his first term and he did not reapply. Windschitl explained it is a two term maximum and then you can go to a different board or commission and come back or just take a break. It was the idea of the City Council to get new people involved. Buesgens indicated there is an average of fifteen applications for boards and commissions each year.

Eisenbise asked on page 8 under parks there are a few line items that have over 100% of the budget used like local travel expenses, taxes and licenses; do you expect to have to pay into those again. Hansen replied probably. When the annual budget is done each line items is really the best guess of what that particular expense might be for the upcoming year. Any line item might be over or under what is estimated. At the end of the day, it is more important to be in line with what the total amount is. Things change from year to year. Windschitl replied he looks at the previous year end balance and makes adjustments. If there are new staff or increase steps that are needed or no longer applicable. The bottom line that is estimated is what you want to try to not go over. Hansen stated the budget is watched closely in October, November to see where the bottom line is and if needed cut back or watch costs. Eisenbise verified staff are currently creating the budget for next year. Hansen replied yes. They typically look at a three year trend for any one line item. If there is a blimp in one year they look into it but if there is a trend up or down it will be adjusted. Deneen asked when the fiscal year ends. Hansen replied it is a calendar year. Eisenbise stated staff create the budget and it is approved by

the City Council. Hansen replied yes staff create the budget, the finance department reviews it, the city manager reviews it in July, it is required statutorily to have a preliminary budget approved by the city council in September, the final budget is approved in December.

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

Letters and Requests

Letter of Request for the Event Wagon Rental Fee to be Waived for HeightsNEXT on September 13, 2025 for the Pride Festival.

Macko read the letter of request for the waived rental fee of the Event Wagon. Windschitl indicated this fee was waived in the past for this event. He stated the rental fee is \$75. Deneen indicated the tables from the wagon are used for vendors during the event. Macko asked if there is a lot of demand for that date. Windschitl replied no. The wagon is very popular throughout the whole year as it only goes out once each weekend.

Motion by Herzallah, second by Ostergaard, to waive the rental fee of the event wagon on September 13, 2025 for the Pride Festival. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

Parks Guide / Playground Passport Discussion.

Saefke relayed notes from Rottler regarding the parks guide and playground passport. The Parks Guide will be printed through a printing company. The communications department felt they covered as much information as they could in this guide. There is a list of questions for the public feedback form on the website. Ostergaard asked if the commission will see the feedback forms quarterly or how it would be used. Saefke replied when the forms are submitted they will be given to staff. Part of what this form is for users of the park to indicate that an item might be broken at a park. The commission would not need to know those types of replies, but for other park feedback that could be brought back to the group. Ostergaard indicated there are a lot of good questions on the feedback form that talk about what people like and dislike at the park. Hansen replied staff will report summary information in their packets for the meetings. It is relevant for the commission to consider. Saefke displayed the feedback form that was recently received regarding Gauvitte Park. Saefke indicated the Parks Guide will be something that is updated and available year round. The Playground Passport is going to be guided more by the commission. People can fill out the passport and turn it in this fall and the commission can revisit the usage at that time to see if it is something that they want to continue and at what frequency. Herzallah asked what the frequency people use the feedback form. Saefke replied the report a concern has been a feature on the city website for a long time but this park feedback form is new and the questions can be changed to what staff feel is most helpful. Hansen replied he hadn't seen the comments on this one yet. It is also something that can continue to be developed. There are a few questions that will be useful for development considerations. For example on this comment regarding development at Gauvitte Park, that is one location considered for a soccer field. Gauvitte Park also has a long term plan that is not necessarily park orientated. It is intended to be a storm water treatment site. Rottler indicated he put the questions together on this feedback form that he saw in other cities. He is more than happy to change the questions to better reflect the feedback you are looking for regarding the park systems. Hansen stated that as feedback is obtained the questions may need to be adjusted as time goes on.

Ostergaard thinks this will be very useful. Macko is excited to see this grow and understands new things can be slow to start. Deneen stated a laminated sign in the park themselves would be helpful with a code to scan. Saefke replied that it was mentioned at the previous meeting as well. Macko said the documents are very eye catching and likes the color. He asked if these will be available in other languages. Saefke said that was not discussed but will send that to the communications department. Ostergaard replied having them translated, at a minimum, in Spanish would be great. That is what the school district does. Herzallah asked if the passport would be its own separate paper or part of the guide. Saefke replied it will be printed separately and available as its own single sheet of paper. That way people can pick it up,

fill it out, and turn it back in. Eisenbise asked if the circle is supposed to be a seal. Saefke replied it is the city clock tower icon. She also stated there is a newly hired Spanish translator at city hall and will most likely be working on these two documents. With no further changes the playground passport will get printed and available at the Art & Info Fair on June 18th. Anyone from the commission is welcome to sit at the table during the event as well.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the new city newsletter should have been received by residents. There are twelve pages of recreation programs and twelve pages of city information from the other departments. This same newsletter was previously brought to the school district and changed beginning with this publication. There is now a separate recreation programs with six pages in English and six pages in Spanish. This is a summary or highlight of program information. This is distributed to all of the Columbia Heights district schools, Immaculate Conception School, and an email link was sent to Prodeo Academy.

Windschitl indicated spring sports are up and running, girls softball, boys baseball, and men's softball. The department is hiring summer staff. About half of the staff are returning from last year but others have moved on. Candidates are being interviewed for one or two caretaker positions at Murzyn Hall. These will be replacements for people who recently left. Windschitl reported that he and Rottler visited the city parks to get the pictures updated that show more of the amenities at each location. If the members feel anything is missing please let him know.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen reported that the parks department is somewhat understaffed. There are typically six full time and there are three but recently hired a new parks foreperson. Tim Lund retired from that position after thirty plus years and an individual from the parks department was promoted to that position. Applications should be posted now for two positions. The seasonal positions are in good shape. Over thirty-five applications were received and there have been times in the past where only five applications were received. There should be ten to twelve seasonals total.

Hansen indicated at the previous meeting he reported the city council directive of the development of a soccer field plan. The contracts were just signed. This will be on the agenda for the next meeting. There will be informational meetings with the public for this topic. Windschitl reported one soccer field with goals has been put up at Huset East. It will be used for recreation soccer camps and the community over the summer. It might be in rough shape by the fall but we will still use that area as planned.

Ostergaard asked why the pool is closed at McKenna Park. Hansen replied a tree fell into the pool, he wasn't sure if the filter got clogged, but the water takes time to get back to the correct level for operation. It will be reopened. Ostergaard stated there appears to be some land work being done at McKenna Park and other people keep asking her about it. Hansen replied the city acquires excess dirt, excess material every year most often through watermain breaks. This last year was an above average year for watermain breaks; fifteen to eighteen. Not all of that dirt goes back into that hole because a lot comes out frozen. The excess material needs to be disposed of in some way. Often times staff will find an area in the parks that needs a little work or will create an area of interest. Prestemon Park is one example where there are moguls or mounds with plant materials that create interest in the park. At McKenna Park there was a dilapidated retaining wall that was removed. Staff are filling and leveling off that area. It is a means to get rid of material dirt in a cost effective manner and have an opportunity to enhance the park. It is expensive to get rid of the dirt if not used.

Ostergaard asked if the new development happens at Sullivan Park or the old Medtronic site, how does that affect the

current park plans with the fitness court, and the playground. Hansen replied this is related to sequencing. In terms of planning this is something that is considered so that completed work doesn't need to be redone. The work that may be done with the redevelopment of Medtronic will not impact Sullivan Park itself; it is a separate property. We want to redevelop Sullivan Lake Park in the plans that you have seen and approved. The first part is the fitness court and that will happen over the course of this summer. The existing playset staff will remove. Contractors will pour the concrete slab. We will host the September meeting there. Staff are waiting for the approval of the DNR grant and should find out in mid to late June if we are approved. In addition to that we need to move the building that is there because the new playground will go there. Staff must sequence those steps. Funding for that project is eligible through the development TIFF. We are waiting until fall to get going with a lot of that. The building will come down, and the lift station will be relocated, so the area will be ready to build a new playground in the spring. Ostergaard asked if the new play set area will come from TIFF money. Hansen replied no. The playset comes from city funds. The source for that is general tax dollars and or park development funds. Some fees from the redevelopment will help pay for the redevelopment of Sullivan Lake Park. The TIFF supports infrastructure costs related to the development. If not for the new housing development we wouldn't necessarily be doing the sanitary sewer and lift station upsizing. That is a good way to think of how the TIFF funding is eligible. The DNR doesn't actively manage the lake; they permit what entities can do in the lakes. The MWMO, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, is doing a study for some of the ways they feel is appropriate to clean up the water over time. They should be done with that study some time late summer. They look at what the lake bottom looks like now, water quality testing, and then look at the contributing area for surface water runoff. With the new housing development there will be significant stormwater quality improvements.

Herzallah asked if there was a volunteer program where people could help to cut grass. Hansen replied not. There is adopt a park that is a formal process and is focused on the clean up and trash pick up at the parks.

Deneen asked if there has been any discussion in partnering with organizations like the MN United in building the soccer field. Hanen replied there will be a limited exploration of that through this study. It is a possibility for funding sources.

C. Commission Members

Macko reported at the end of June the Columbia Heights Lions will have the 103rd annual Jamboree. The carnival will run Thursday through Sunday at Huset Park East. The band City Knights will be on Thursday night. Friday is the parade. Saturday is live AWF wrestling outside and fireworks that evening at dusk. Sunday is the family fun day with free admission to the carnival. Saefke indicated that if it rains on Saturday the fireworks are on Sunday. Macko indicated the Lions are still looking for volunteers to help at the carnival gates. Ostergaard asked if volunteer groups get paid. Macko replied yes, a group of at least three people for three hours is \$100 donated towards their cause or organization.

Eisenbise asked what kind of upgrades can be considered at Murzyn Hall. Hansen replied that the city did an analysis on the Murzyn building. They tried to analyze between replacement and a few upgrades over time. The direction of the city council was to make upgrades over time. The upgrades that need to happen were identified by an architect, were estimated between four and six million dollars. This is something that the city council needs to consider in the next year or two. Ostergaard verified that this process was on hold because the focus really needs to be on the public works facility first. Hansen replied yes. In 2005 about 2 million dollars was put into the building but are at the point where we are not going to invest any additional money in the building other than keeping it safe. Ostergaard said that the tour of the public works building was great, and the group should have one for Murzyn Hall as well. Windschitl replied that could be done. Eisenbise asked if the 4 to 6 million is for a new building or just updates. Hansen replied a new building for public works is around 30 million and for Murzyn Hall it depends on what the community and city council wants that facility to be moving forward in the future. Do you want it to be a more traditional community center and that would be a lot more money. Windschitl replied that the decision needs to be made if there continues to be a rental facility or not. If it is there are various levels to which the facility could be as well. The HVAC system is currently located in the attic and needs to be moved. The restrooms are not ADA accessible and to meet those requirements they need to be larger.

There is a lot of water filtration in the basement, roof leaks, and other areas of the building that people do not see from the outside. Buesgens asked if there are any old pictures of what the facility looked like before the addition and remodel.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:20 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary