



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

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, Avery Metzgar

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 parks department spending 100% of their office supply budget in January. Cullen replied \$300 does not get very far. One reason for this expenditure could be the department purchasing supplies to build the frames for standing desks instead of buying the full desk as one unit.

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

Saefke asked if any commission members have questions on the attachments in the agenda. Macko indicated he likes that there has been so much public feedback on what they want to see at the park. Cullen replied the participation during the second round of public outreach definitely went down compared to others, but it is all sought after feedback. Macko stated that no matter what you put into the park there is always going to be someone that is unhappy with a decision along the way and that is the unfortunate part. It is also good for everyone to be able to reach out with their personal opinions. Saefke iterated these are the results after the second round and open house that was held at City Hall. The previous commission meeting contained a recap of results and feedback from the first open house at Sullivan Lake Park, and this one contains the results from the most recent survey with pictures of various types of park amenities. Macko stated he remembered that concept A had a slightly higher percentage than the other concept. Cullen indicated there was a slight rearrangement in how the park was laid out from north to south. Deneen asked since this will be the first full season with the new fitness court; will the usage be monitored. Cullen replied there are QR codes embedded into the fitness court that show how to use it and describe the exercises that can be done; those are tracked each time someone scans that code. He isn't sure how or who on our staff can access that, but it is trackable. Saefke responded that is the communications department. Cullen reported that the recreation department is in the process of planning athletic programs there. Saefke responded it will be an open house kind of event to show people how to use the QR codes and the various functions. Macko is under the impression that if someone scans the code once and then uses various pieces it will only count as one time. The person may use several exercise pieces so the tracking of usage might not be accurate, but you will know that one person was there. Cullen believes for the people living next to the

park to see it being used will be the loudest critic of tentative use. Deneen was curious because it is mentioned so often in the survey results.

Saefke indicated on concept A in the agenda packet has adjustments that were made after the open house, public survey results, and staff comments. This indicates a larger open green space in letter H. So this isn't exactly like the first two concepts we saw in previous meeting. Eisenbise asked if H would be a totally open greenspace area or contain picnic tables. Cullen replied as of right now in this plan it is completely open, but the addition of picnic tables is something that can be added as the intentions are fine tuned. Herzallah asked if that is the same intention for the area north of H. Cullen replied you cannot see it on this map but there is a project on Central Avenue that is part of the larger stormwater requirements in this area. Staff are unsure of where that will be built at this time. He stated that it isn't visible on this concept map but slightly northeast is a lift station that is getting replaced and in some plans was being moved south towards the parking lot, but the engineer is looking at that station. The lift station will probably be staying in the current area based on the engineer indicating the flow of the water, and the sizing of what needs to be installed, but the size of the panel is much smaller than the current building.

Deneen asked if there is any consideration of EV charging stations. Cullen replied no, not that he is aware of. Eisenbise asked what the parking lot will look like. Cullen replied the parking lot isn't changing from the location it is at now. He is unsure if there are any changes to the amount of parking. Eisenbise replied there was talk at one time of changing it due to other amenities needing space. Macko stated the amount of trees in the area was in question as well. Cullen replied if you look at the project in terms of bang for your buck, not touching the parking lot saves so much money. Eisenbise asked if the perimeter fence on the concept is the same as the one in the photos she thinks it is great. That is the kind of fencing she likes to see on playgrounds. The shade sails are great too. She often gets comments from friends saying they wish there was more shade at Huset Park.

Eisenbise asked if the pictures of play structures were something they should be choosing. Cullen replied they were different examples given during the survey to show types of structures that are available. The next phase we will be looking at play equipment. This part of the survey was trying to narrow down a theme; super modern or more naturalistic. The results landed in the middle where people want to be able to use the play structures without looking like a bunch of rocks. It should be able to blend in with nature but still be functional for all age groups.

Cullen reported the next steps go into design and bidding phases. This is tied to the lift station project timeline, along with the stormwater treatment project. As the months go on there will be more updates at future meetings with higher level designs. Herzallah asked if this will be completed in 2027. Cullen replied no, it is projected for 2026. The tough part is timing this with the other projects. Staff want to time the digging and placement of pieces, so they do not need to go back a second time and redo the area. All three of the projects have separate contractors. We are lucky to have one point of contact with the same consultant involved with the lift station and playground.

Eisenbise asked if the fitness court demo was going to be done by recreation staff. Saefke replied that it might be her, the Program Coordinator Kate, or another one of our parttime staff. The intent is to have a few evenings to encourage people to come to the fitness court when someone is there to help direct or encourage them. She indicated there is still a need for instructors who would like to teach a class on the studio side if any members know of someone that would be interested. Saefke encouraged commission members to attend those open house nights as well. April 30th and May 6th from 6-7:30pm. The department is open to other options if members hear people would like a daytime open house or if members want to host one on their own.

Soccer Field Update

Cullen reported that in 2025 staff were asked to begin plans for a soccer field. Staff, along with consultants, and discussion with the Commission, determined that the best location would be at Huset Park for a full sized field. WSB

created a topographical map with a basic plan for a soccer field at Huset Park West. Staff provided the members with a copy of the plan and rough estimate of costs for the project. Cullen foresees that some of the line items such as removals or grading can be completed in-house by Public Works staff. WSB created an agenda which may be altered. One benefit is that there is already a connection for irrigation in that area near John P Murzyn Hall that was put in place years ago. Staff do not know the condition of that equipment, but the potential is there for irrigation. It is really important for the heavy usage of the field to be able to have irrigation. It was asked at a previous meeting to have a cost comparison for artificial turf, and it is significantly higher. The two largest and most expensive aspects of the soccer field are lighting and what is shown in the proposed estimate is a top of the line example. Staff asked WSB to provide examples for other affordable options. The irrigation system is the second most expensive cost. This would be a pop-up system across the field. Questions came up regarding placement. Staff are trying not to disrupt the other fields because they do get used so often. The plan is being reviewed for function and placement for use. Is it too close to the parking lot and how will users be able to watch the games. The consultants will go back over our comments and see if there are ways to make adjustments for the best layout. On the plan there is an accessible trail, but we do not know where that trail leads. Without having an updated master plan for this park, it is something that can be extended later or even eliminated now. Cullen feels that it is a nice amenity to have for people in wheelchairs, pulling wagons, or getting equipment to the far side of the field and you wouldn't need to go through the grass or wet mud. There are cost differences between gravel and asphalt. His preference would be asphalt. Gravel has the potential to washout into the field and could damage equipment. He asked if the commission has an opinion on whether to have a trail at that point or not. Eisenbise replied it is an interesting feature and doesn't think she has seen that at other parks before. Macko sees it being a nice feature for wheelchairs and strollers. Eisenbise asked if the trail would stop in the middle. Cullen replied yes for now and could be extended in the future. Herzallah likes the trail but is not sure about asphalt. Buesgens indicated with asphalt you do not have to deal with muddy trails and small gravel under wheels. Cullen indicated with gravel trails you need to use a weed killer. There is also mitigation of the material, and it can shift with heavy rains. The downside to asphalt is that there is a lifespan to it and will need to be replaced. He is unsure if there will be any safety concerns near the field. Is this a feature that the commission would consider removing if costs needed to be cut back. Macko replied the trail could certainly be removed if the overall costs needed to be scaled back. Eisenbise asked if the idea for the trail is to get spectators with wheelchairs and strollers on the far side of the field to watch the game. Cullen replied yes. Herzallah indicated from his experience playing, it is really nice to have a dry space to put your bags and equipment on.

Cullen reported there is approximately \$280,000-\$300,000 set aside for this project. The lighting is a large portion of the proposed costs and that is why he wants to keep working with the consultants on various options. Herzallah asked what the lighting would look like. Cullen reported it appears there will be footings and posts on all four corners with potential for two more light posts on each side of the midfield. Buesgens asked how much money is in the park improvement budget. Cullen replied he is unsure with both projects happening at the same time how much is being set aside. Macko asked if line 15 and 24 are almost the same thing. Cullen replied that we have one of the best quality stripers in house and he would be able to remove that from the proposal. Herzallah asked about the removal of the ballfield gravel. Cullen replied that he would leave that in for the two fields due to the large equipment needed to move the earth. Deneen asked if there are any costs needed for lighting to help grow the grass installed in the area. In a professional setting they use giant lights to help grow grass seeds. Cullen reported there are a few professional companies that work specifically in athletic fields, and he is going to make sure those companies have a chance to bid on that part of the project. There is a lot of work that happens below the turf and the blend of seed that is best for an athletic field. The sweet spot for the growing time would be after August for the following year. The area would then be protected by snow fencing to keep people off the grass during the growing period. To receive proper establishment the field would not be used until summer of 2027. Saefke indicated the demolition of the area would not be started until after Jamboree. Herzallah indicated it might be nice to have a discussion with the consultant about continuing the trail all the way around the field. Saefke replied there was a discussion for leaving the north side open so there is potential to shift the field a little in order to alleviate the wear and tear in the same area each season. Cullen indicated with the

installation of this field right now there are compromises happening without an updated master plan for all of Huset Park. Currently the larger field is laid out diagonally and it gets adjusted each year to help with the wear and tear of the outfield. With the proposed field being in a north to south alignment we will be limited to the amount of movement from year to year. Herzallah indicated there will be brown spots in front of the goals and at midfield no matter what irrigation system is in place. He is unsure how that would work in a season to move the field. Saefke replied it would be restriped and potentially adjusted each new year. Cullen asked how long the members feel the turf for a field this size will last. Herzallah and Deneen replied it should last one season. Buesgens asked what other cities do. Cullen replied that many are going to fields with artificial turf. Other cities with youth fields have large spaces where they can shift the fields around to different sections each year. Deneen asked what happens at ballfields. Cullen replied the baseball fields are not getting used in the outfield in the way a soccer field is. He added that the city previously used Chemlawn for weed control in the athletic fields and this past year they dropped the contract and he has not found another company willing to bid on our contract. The city is not currently set up to provide this service in-house, but staff are working on a management plan. Many companies left the proposal discussion when they heard it was a park and athletic field. In general society is moving to the philosophy of using less chemicals. Buesgens asked if Cullen heard about a corn product for weed control. Cullen replied staff have spent a lot of time researching organics and for the type of weed control at an athletic field it is not possible to use just organic methods. There are some partial methods, and staff will continue to keep doing research. Buesgens asked about the cost for a streetsweeper. Cullen replied that it is required with the large project and amount of material being moved. Eisenbise asked about the signage and striping cost. Cullen replied that is something that can be done by city staff.

Cullen asked what the commission feels about having irrigation and lighting. He feels that irrigation installation is a must. Regarding lighting, the members are for or against it. Herzallah feels there needs to be lighting, especially when the sun sets around 8pm people will still be playing until 10pm. Buesgens replied if the ballfield gets lighting the soccer field should have lighting. Members agreed that it does not need to be full stadium lighting but one on each corner that is sturdy and will last several years. Cullen indicated the current light systems were often just laid in the ground. He wants to see the lighting for this project be laid in conduit and have additional conduit for future projects. Light pole footings can go as far as fifteen feet deep. One other problem with the current lights at Huset field 5 is that the poles are taller than our truck can extend.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Interim Recreation Director

Saefke reported the spring city newsletter should be in residents' homes. In case members didn't know, there is a smaller version of the city newsletter with just recreation programs geared towards families with youth that is translated into Spanish and goes to students in the school district, a few schools send it out electronically, and we also bring copies to some of the private schools.

Currently three people were called for second interviews with the Parks & Recreation Director position.

Saefke indicated staff, including Cullen, are interviewing four consulting companies to develop a master park plan for all the parks in the city.

Upcoming events at Murzyn Hall include CoHi Con by HeightsNEXT, and wrestling sponsored by the Columbia Heights Lions Club. There are still other events such as Midwest Polka and Train Collectors. A few events have canceled or postponed their celebrations; for example, a quinceanera was supposed to happen this month and due to the immigration operation they canceled their event with hopes of having it next year and this family lives in Columbia

Heights. AARP offers a free tax assistance program and uses our Senior Center each year from February to April. AARP handles all of the appointments and just uses our facility to offer the program. Staff have received numerous comments on how thankful people are for this opportunity. Buesgens asked if there has been any mention of getting new carpet at Murzyn Hall. Saefke replied she has not had any conversations for that improvement and will speak with the city manager on that soon.

Saefke mentioned there will be a city wide garage sale the first weekend in June. This year staff are introducing a kids flea market that will take place at the Hylander Center June 6. This will be a great opportunity for kids to clean out their toys and learn about selling items. At the Art & Info Fair there will not be a fee for people that want to sell items in the art section. People still are asked to sign up for a spot, so we know how many vendors to expect. They are asked to bring their own tables or fixtures. Staff have been thinking about having an entrepreneurship class or even just a table at the fair to sell old rec t-shirts and put money into a fun summer event. Kids are also welcome to have a spot at the art fair. Buesgens replied that old or stained shirts can be cut into strips and used to make dog toys.

B. Public Works Director

Cullen reported this is a slower time for staff being in between seasons, so staff work on inhouse projects. Staff repaired items in the wash bay with cement and lighting issues. Staff conduct inventory reviews and are ordering supplies. They are reevaluating inhouse policies and procedures. The shop maintenance supervisor retired, and the new Fleet Maintenance Supervisor started last week. He came from Ramsey County with a lot of fleet maintenance experience.

C. Commission Members

Eisenbise mentioned the discussion for the park passport at a future meeting.

Deneen invited people to the CoHi Con event on March 14th.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:06 pm.

Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary