



MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrea Ostergaard called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzger, Andrea Ostergaard; Brian Timm

Staff present: Tim Lund, Public Works Parks Foreperson; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison; Will Rottler, Communications and Engagement Coordinator

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

Eisenbise asked what the purchase for a fish magnet is used for. She wishes that she had one. Lund replied staff recently used it to get a key out of a gate valve that broke. Eisenbise asked what the Green Expo is. Lund replied the Green Expo is a trade conference with all the green organizations for cemeteries, cities, schools, and parks with a focus on the maintenance side for those groups. There were classes, speakers, and vendors from all over the country. Eisenbise asked how many staff attended. Lund replied that two staff attended three days, and all of the parks staff attended at least one day.

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

Letters and Requests

Letter of appreciation for the discounted rental of John P Murzyn Hall from the Tvislaamaa organization. Saefke indicated the organization is located north on Central Avenue in Fridley. This group used the hall one year ago for the same event. They wanted to express their appreciation.

Old Business

Park Passport discussion. Saefke reported that Perez Umphress sent a message that she got pulled into a work meeting at the last minute and was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting but would review the notes from tonight. Rottler introduced himself to the commission. He reported that staff discussed the best publication for the passport, accordion style or a booklet. Staff are willing to print out maybe 100 copies and see how that goes. Prizes could include a swag type of item; a shirt, hat, bag, or mug, but often those things get used once or tossed. Maybe the Recreation Department can use a voucher as a prize for people to sign up for a class or program. The deadline to get this information in the summer newsletter is May 5. Communication staff will start tweaking the current layout and bring it back to the April meeting for feedback. Staff will be taking more recent photos of the parks to use in the passport. The city website will also be updated with the new photos. Another question is how you get people to actually go to the parks. In the past the youth program coordinator had a scavenger hunt where a specific item was hidden at each park. During his research Rottler found a Playground Passport from Waukesha Wisconsin. They had specific questions that pertained to each individual park. What color is the slide or what kind of tree is at a certain location. There can be a spot for notes to get feedback on what people like or don't like in a park, or what they want to see in the future. This will give leads to staff and the commission when it comes time for creating master park plans. Should the passport be a summer

activity or continue into the fall with a return deadline of Truck or Treat. The Art & Info Fair could be the kickoff in June. Staff will update the amenities for each park location. Rottler indicated this is a very good starting point.

Macko indicated that a prize could be a discount on a class, and another idea is to be a part of the parade. The person could participate with their family and be with the Recreation Department or Lions Club. He likes the questions on the Waukesha example. Having a QR code at each park would be a way to prove you were at each park and give a piece of information about our programs. For example, how many teams were in recreation baseball or basketball last year. The QR code would give a number, and they would put that number on the passport. Rottler added the number could just be posted so people wouldn't even need to scan a QR code. He added some programs have corporate sponsors for prizes, which the commission members could go and ask for donations or sponsorship. Eisenbise likes the idea of a Columbia Heights swag item that would be related to something you could use outdoors. An example could be a cooler bag, a frisbee, or a ball. Things they could use at the parks. Ostergaard indicated that in previous discussions the group talked about this being conducted over the summer and ending at Truck or Treat. The members are also not tied to this specific design, Perez Umphress created this as a mockup. The park photos obviously need to be updated.

Ostergaard asked what steps are needed from the Commission to get this moving. Rottler replied if the members are comfortable with the Communications staff making changes to the document then they will work on it and bring it back to the April meeting. Recreation staff can work on questions and come up with a prize for a tangible item and class discount. Eisenbise reiterated the Commission has a vision but is relying on staff for their expertise in communications and design. Rottler indicated the start date could be June 1st. Eisenbise likes that there is a timeline attached to the program in order to obtain a prize but wants the passport to be available all year round as a resource for people to use and discover the parks. Then over the next few years it can be evaluated and changed. Rottler replied the passports can be available all year, and it can be in the Spring and Fall newsletters. For the Spring 2026 newsletter it could be a prize to complete the passport by June 1st to be in the Jamboree parade. The questions could be changed periodically. The summer recreation programs can give out the passports and encourage participation. The Active Agers could participate as well. Macko added that he is blown away by the variety of events offered throughout the year. Ostergaard suggested that the passport include things like at Huset Park East the annual Jamboree carnival is held. Eisenbise had sent an email with a general timeline to staff. Rottler indicated the timeline looked good and that staff would be updating the park photos once the landscape looks good. They were waiting to see what the direction of the Commission was before starting work on the passport. Staff will present an updated passport at the April meeting and once approved they can start with printing one hundred copies and go from there. Ostergaard stated it would be nice to have people at the parks in as many photos as possible. She realizes this can be challenging. Her daughter is in the photo for the tumblers class in the recent city newsletter and was very excited about it. Rottler replied that for this first publication it will most likely be photos of just the parks without people. Eisenbise asked about the staffing hours that will be involved in this project and what kind of costs there will be. Rottler replied that projects come up all the time. For example, the city forester needed new signs designed and printed. For the passport after this first go around it will just be a matter of updating the park photos which should happen regularly. Staff are budget conscious of what we are doing and are not spending an absorbent amount of money but do not want to pinch pennies. If this gets people out into the parks, it is probably a good thing to spend a few hundred dollars on it. Staff can give an update on estimates along the way.

Ostergaard asked if there is any idea of what success will look like with the parks passport. Should this be defined or just let it go? Macko replied that if one hundred copies are printed and at the end of the year there are still ninety some left, then it probably isn't a success. If there were closer to twenty at the end then it probably is worth doing again. With new ventures there can be a slow roll off. Eisenbise indicated there is a variety of success components; this passport provides a resource for public use and encourages people to get out into the parks. Timm asked if getting a corporate sponsor could be tied back to a particular improvement within the parks. If so many people turn in the passports maybe a business would give back a certain dollar amount. Rottler mentioned the Columbia Heights Dentistry has adopted Huset Park and takes part of a workday to go and clean the park. Eisenbise asked if there is a chamber of commerce in the City.

Buesgens replied no but there is a North Metro Business Council that meets quarterly. There was a chamber of commerce when Commissioner Kordiak was around but after he retired no one else took over. The Community Development Director Mitch Forney attends the North Metro Business Council. Rottler reported that he and the city forester Liam Genter are currently asking community groups for sponsorships towards the fitness court at Sullivan Lake Park. The group will receive their logo on the fitness court. There isn't a large business within the city that is interested in giving a large sponsorship, so they decided to approach the community groups. Buesgens indicated small amenities within the parks could be things like park benches, permanent chess tables, drinking fountains, bike racks, or grills. Ostergaard remembered that people were asking for bike racks last year. Timm agrees that tangible items are great for business and residents to see. Eisenbise asked how they ask businesses for donations or sponsorships. Rottler replied that other cities will have foundations that host fundraisers. Often it is just one person going to talk directly to a business. With the rotary group that he is in they have asked each person to go to one business and ask them to sponsor a specific event and give what they can. Saefke added that staff are unable to approach businesses for donations. Rottler agreed yes and Commission Members can do those things. Staff do apply for grants.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported that the spring newsletter went out to residents last week. Sign up is open for the spring programs like baseball and softball. Boys' basketball is ending in the next week or two.

Ostergaard asked when the details for the summer park programs will be available. Saefke replied there is a mention in the spring book, and it is mid-April. Ostergaard indicated it is challenging for a parent to sign up for some of the programs that begin registration in January or February, so they have care during the time when the recreation programs are not happening. It is super helpful to have the program dates listed. Eisenbise asked if the programs are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Fridays. Saefke replied yes. She also noted that the Recreation Coordinator Katie is trying to set up camps for those weeks when the park programs are not in session. The staff who work in the summer are college and older high school students, so we need to wait until they are out of school as well to have staff training. Ostergaard indicated the recreation programs are great and her kids loved it last year.

Eisenbise asked if the ice skating lessons were attended well. Windschitl replied yes they were well attended. 19 people had signed up. Eisenbise mentioned that her child's hockey association does skating lessons throughout the summer. If kids wanted to continue skating she has information for that. Windschitl indicated staff were at the park longer than the class times to have the warming house open for other people who wanted to skate. Ostergaard asked if information is ever shared in the newsletter for things like this association skating in the summer. Windschitl replied that space is limited. Saefke replied that we could share the information through email with the participants from the classes since it is a specific topic related to that sport.

B. Public Works Director

Park Foreperson Lund reported he has worked with the city for 28 years. He reported that the ice rink maintenance ended as of last week. It was a good season regarding temperatures. Unfortunately, the snow events happened on Saturdays and clearing the rinks is lower on the priority list compared to the streets. Any time the ice rinks can be used after President Day is a good season. The catch basins at the rinks were opened today.

Staff replaced the decking on the pedestrian bridge at Sullivan Lake Park this week. It is nice for staff to do that when the lake is frozen, so they do not have to be in waders and use ladders. Buesgens asked if the reason there is a storm drain in the middle of Lomianki Park was because it was an ice rink. Lund replied yes.

The focus is now switching to summer and preparing for summer activities. Seasonal help is essential in taking care of the parks. Three seasonal workers are returning from last summer. Advertising is out for employment, and they already have a few applicants to interview. They hope for at least eight seasonal workers in the parks department. Those workers really help with the grass cutting, ballfield maintenance, trash, picnic areas, and wading pools.

C. Commission Members

None at this time.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 6:53 pm.

Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary