



**MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
March 7, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 pm.

Present: Mayor: Charlie Miner; Council: Jahn Dyvik, Mike Feldmann, Gina Joyce, and Deirdre Kvale

Staff Present: City Administrator: Scott Weske; and Public Works Director: Sean Diercks

Absent: None

APPROVE AGENDA

A motion was made by Joyce, seconded by Dyvik, to approve the agenda, as presented. Ayes: all.

OPEN CORRESPONDENCE

No one appeared to address the City Council during Open Correspondence.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Park Board Presentation: Discuss Outdoor Recreation Grant Application for the Conceptual Holbrook Park Skate and Splash Plaza Project

Mayor Miner welcomed Erika Leachman, Park Board Secretary; and Suzanne Caswell, Park Board Chair.

Park Board Chair Caswell shared that she felt that the Park Board had been a bit more aggressive this past year in allowing themselves to be more creative. She indicated the Board has been able to find a great grant opportunity for a 'Skate and Splash Plaza' project at Holbrook Park. She noted that Park Board Secretary Leachman was instrumental in burning the midnight oil in order to complete the grant application in time for consideration.

Park Board Secretary Leachman reported that she had begun serving on the Board about a year ago and explained that her day job involves grant writing as well as park and recreation planning. In 2023, the Park Board started tracking grant funds and cycles, reviewed City goals, and reviewed 2040 Comprehensive Plan documents. As part of this process, the Board worked to identify strong candidates for various park and trail projects and outlined some of the possible project ideas that they came up with during their discussion. The Board also is of the opinion that there may be a need for a refreshed park needs survey for the public and to find ways to increase the use of various park programs and events. She reviewed the key City goals that brought them to the potential project at Holbrook Park and outlined the current condition of the ice rink area within the park. She advised that they found there are some current issues related to the Holbrook Park ice rink including things like the current ice surface being exposed to the ground which can lead to inconsistent ice quality. She outlined the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program through the MnDNR which is designed to enhance local and community

parks. The grant matches up to 50% of the project costs and the local match can consist of a combination of cash and other elements such as in-kind labor, equipment usage, donations, and/or staff time. Applications are due by April 1, 2024 and require a resolution of support from whoever the local sponsoring agency would be. She presented specifics of the Park Board's proposal for a Skate and Splash Project which would essentially create an all-season recreation facility in the City and be the first of its kind in the area. She reviewed a diagram that laid out the project concept using an aerial view of the area; shared examples of other ice rink/splash pad combination facilities in other locations; and the general understanding of the cost/benefit considerations for this type of skate and splash facility. She highlighted a case study of Goat Hill Park in Eagan and how they were able to finance it through a public-private partnership. She pointed out some of the area organizations that have an interest in ice and a potential timeline for action on this proposed project. She concluded that the Park Board and City staff would only proceed with the grant application submittal with direction from the Council.

Mayor Miner thanked Board member Leachman for her presentation.

Council member Dyvik indicated that the Orono Youth Hockey Association has been talking to the City for a few years about finding a way to become partners and do something over at the rink. He asked if anyone from the Park Board had spoken with Orono Youth Hockey.

Board member Leachman responded that she'd thought about emailing them earlier today to see if they could come for the work session.

Council member Dyvik commented that he would like to see the City get together with them and have Board member Leachman give this presentation again because he thinks this may be great timing for what they have already been discussing. He volunteered to try to set up a time for Board member Leachman to give her presentation to the Orono Youth Hockey Association in order to hear their thoughts on a real plan rather than just standing out there brainstorming ideas.

The Council discussed the importance of being able to have open skate times, generate revenue, possible partnership organizations, and the importance of documenting any partnerships in writing so the expectations for all are clear.

Council member Kvale noted that the example used in the presentation was from Eagan and she encouraged the planning for this type of facility in Long Lake to be scaled to its population and demographics and not be the same as Eagan, which is a very different city.

Council member Joyce stated that she liked the idea of being able to use the space during the summer for a splash pad because not everyone has access to the lake.

Council members discussed the drainage system that would be necessary for a splash pad and how that could be combined with the needs for the ice rink; as well as various iterations and sizes for pleasure rinks and splash pad layouts.

Board member Leachman mentioned that one of the other grants available through the MnDNR is for local trails and one of the Board's ideas was to extend the internal park trail through the Long Lake owned property out to Willow Drive, but the problem they ran into was with City boundaries and the trail concept would require approval by Orono.

Council member Kvale asked if the City collected revenue from the use of the baseball field.

Weske confirmed that the City receives park rental fees for that use.

Council member Feldmann voiced that he likes the idea that the project would enhance the current use. He added that he does like the concept of having some revenue opportunities, but also stressed the importance of making sure that open skate access is maintained. He commented that he would like to see more about the finances and estimates of costs associated with this concept.

Public Works Director Diercks noted that there would not be detailed financial information available until the City decides what they actually want to do.

Council member Kvale reiterated that the examples shared in the presentation were from larger cities that had resources to staff the facilities. She asked if the City could have a splash pad that would be unstaffed. She expressed concern about the potential for a possible large cost for this type of facility in a smaller city such as Long Lake as well as the number of people who would actually use it.

Council member Joyce mentioned that another idea would be that if they held special events, like a movie night, they could encourage a \$5.00 donation towards the cost of it.

Board member Leachman observed that it looks like oftentimes, things like open skate are conducted unsupervised and they could have signage at the park to make it clear that users are skating at their own risk. She shared examples from other cities that had facilities on automatic timers with the times skating is allowed clearly outlined. At closing time, the lights would automatically turn off and the warming house door would be locked.

Council member Kvale stated that the City had never done that before and believes that it was not open if they did not have an attendant.

The Council discussed the difficulty the City has had in staffing the warming house in the past.

Board member Leachman noted that an advantage of being able to have a consistent schedule with this type of proposed facility is that they would also be able to guarantee work hours for employees because it wouldn't be dependent on weather conditions.

Council member Dyvik mentioned that once word gets out that the City has a rink that is refrigerated and maintained, he believes people will come to it.

Weske gave the example of the dog parks in the City and in Orono and noted that Long Lake's is free, but people are willing to pay money to go to Orono's because it is a nicer park. He believes this shows that people would be willing to pay for a nicer facility.

Mayor Miner noted that he thinks the next step would be to present this information to the Orono Youth Hockey and gauge their interest in partnering with the City.

Council member Dyvik noted that he can give them a call tomorrow and try to get things set up.

Council member Joyce reminded the Council that the grant application was due on April 1, 2024 and the next City Council meeting was March 19, 2024.

Council member Dyvik asked if the City needed to have a defined plan in order to apply for the grant.

Board member Leachman explained that the City would need to have an educated guess on what they were asking for and gave examples of what information she should be able to pull together for discussion at the next Council meeting.

Weske asked if the City would phase this project if that meant each phase would require a different grant application and be able to continue to reapply for those funds.

Board member Leachman confirmed that they could reapply with each phase; however, with phasing a project there could be some inefficiency in cost because they would be breaking it into smaller pieces. It would be more efficient to do it as one large project, but to City Administrator Weske's point, that requires a larger 'bite' up front. She stated that they could start with finding some 'low hanging fruit' initially in order to get something working and then they could go back and put all the bells and whistles in for the next phase.

Council member Kvale indicated that her opinion would be for it to be done in phases because she wasn't sure the City had enough funds.

Council member Dyvik noted that he believed the City would be able to combine efforts in order to fund the project through partnerships, fundraising or finding sponsors.

Council member Kvale noted that with so many unknown expenses, going all in would be of concern.

Diercks recalled that the majority of the City's funding for the improvements would be coming from the grant.

Council member Kvale responded that her understanding was that the City was supposed to match those funds.

Council member Joyce reminded the Council that matching funds do not have to just be cash and can be equipment, staff time, and funds from partners or fundraising.

Council member Kvale asked if Board member Leachman had a bid proposal for how much this would actually cost.

Board member Leachman reviewed the ballpark figure and noted that it was based upon the basic information she was able to obtain because there had not yet been design or specifications put together.

Council member Joyce noted that she thought there may be an opportunity to speak with a local business about a partnership as well because, for example, if they were to be the official skate rental, they may be interested. She gave the example of a shop located in downtown Grand Marais that just started renting skates and their business has been growing like gangbusters.

Weske shared other examples of ways the City can work with Orono Youth Hockey by agreeing to keep the pricing decent if they agree to staff the rink.

Board member Leachman suggested that the Council liken this to Little League where many times they are the ones that operate the concessions stands.

Council member Kvale reiterated that the City has had trouble staffing the warming house in the past.

Council member Dyvik observed that there would be a lot of details to be worked out. He asked if Board member Leachman may be available to present this information to the Orono Youth Hockey Association sometime next week.

Board member Leachman replied that she would love to present this information to them sometime in the near future.

Council member Dyvik indicated that he would expect there will be a lot of interest on their part in supporting this.

Board member Leachman noted that the grant requires that they state what their objectives are, but they do not need to have it all designed before submitting. The application could state that their objective is to accommodate pleasure skating as well as hockey league play, and it is not necessary to have all the details solved at this point in the planning process. She repeated that the City's in-kind matching can consist of the efforts by Public Works Director Diercks and his team, and every staff hour and piece of equipment that is used can be documented as part of the grant recording. She gave a brief overview of what had been included in the draft resolution language and mentioned that much of it is stock language from the grant and in compliance with state statute.

Council member Joyce suggested that this item be placed on the next Council agenda, and in the meantime, Board member Leachman and Council member Dyvik along with City staff can meet with the Orono Youth Hockey Association and see what their interest may be.

Mayor Miner agreed that would be a good approach, and may also offer a bit more time to flush out the financial information further.

Board member Leachman asked the Council to consider whether there may be other potential partners that the City should meet with, for example, the Orono High School, coaches, or the Chamber of Commerce.

Council member Joyce thanked Board member Leachman, Board member Caswell, and the Park Board for all the time they have put into this effort. She also expressed gratitude to Public Works Director Diercks for being their sounding board on many of the Park Board's brainstorming ideas.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

ADJOURN

Hearing no objection, Mayor Miner adjourned the meeting by general consent at 6:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Weske
City Administrator