

MINUTES

City of Lake Elmo Park Commission May 18th, 2015

Members Present: Weis, Steele, Silvernale, Nelson, Frick, Zeno, Ames

Members Absent: Hartley, Hieptas

Others Present: Administrator Zuleger, Homestead HOA Representatives, Roger Knutson et al (on Pickleball), Mayor Pearson, Rolf Larsen, Anthony Manzara, DPW Mike Bouthilet, Jaime Colemer

The meeting was called to order by Chair Weis at 6:32 PM.

Approval of Agenda

M/S/P: Weis/Frick: To approve the agenda as printed.

Approval of April 20, 2015 Minutes

M/S/P: Frick/Steele: Approved as amended 6-0 with minor syntax changes with Ames abstaining as he was not present at the April 20th meeting.

Presentations

Pickleball Presentation – At the request of Commissioner Nelson, a group of Lake Elmo residents, led by Roger Knutson, made a presentation to the Park Commission on the growing popularity of the sport of pickleball and the interest many Lake Elmo residents have in the sport. The sport is a cross between tennis, badminton, and ping pong. The sport uses a hard paddle and wiffle ball and is played on a 20'X44" court. The sport is noisy. Woodbury converted some tennis courts and the sport has evolved where they have formalized clubs, which have become revenue generators for some cities. The Stillwater School District and the Stillwater Community Recreation teaches lessons.

Commissioner Frick asked if participation is limited by warmer than average temperature in the summer. Knutson noted that it was not a limiting factor. Commissioner Steele asked if there were currently any courts in the area. The group noted that there were several in the area including North Hill Park in Stillwater, Walton Park in Oakdale, Oak Park Heights, Tartan Park, and several sites in Woodbury.

Commissioner Ames asked where an ideal location might be in Lake Elmo. The group thought that Tablyn Park could be a good location as the tennis courts are in bad shape and could be converted. There was consensus that Tablyn should be considered. Lions Park was suggested for its central location. It was noted that Wildflower / Gonyea would be including a pickle ball

courts in there new park. The area next to the tennis courts in Pebble were discussed as a possibility. The costs of courts were discussed with pricing ranging from \$11,000 to convert a tennis court into 4 courts to \$650,000 for a build new complex for a 12 court complex with lights in Arizona. Commissioner Ames asked about maintenance. It was noted that it was similar to a tennis court.

M/S/P Weis/ Zeno: Investigate with the Stillwater School District the possibility of adding pickle ball to the tennis courts and for staff to assemble costs / potential other park locations for installation.

Sunfish Fish Lake Nature Center - Mr. Anthony Manzara presented a concept (Via Power Point) to the Parks Commission to construct an Interpretive Nature Center in Sunfish Lake Park as a memorial to his wife, who loved Sunfish Lake Park. The Center would be built with private funds through a foundation of some sort so that funds could be tax deductible, and that Mr. Manzara would match up to \$125,000 and then the facility would be turned over to the City. The City would be responsible for utilities, maintenance and building security. Perhaps a private, on-going fundraising endowment could be utilized to fund staff, signage, and other educational matter Mr. Manzara noted that he had approached a local architect for pro bono design work. The timeline for the project would be to obtain approvals from all governing bodies in July 2015 (Park Commission, Planning Commission and City Council), break ground in the Spring of 2016, and then open in August 2016. Commission Ames thanked Mr. Manzara for his generosity and asked about the cost of operation. It was noted that an annual operating budget would be approximately \$100,000 with a ½ time naturalist and volunteers running the facility. Commissioner Ames continued with a question about what the unmet need for this facility. Mr. Manzara led a roundtable discussion that noted the building would be under local control, it would be utilized by school groups and other naturalist groups, and it could be used for special events like the Volksmarkt.

Commissioner Frick noted there was a substantial turnout for the Sunfish Lake Nature Event and a nature center such as proposed would have been helpful and she saw a great opportunity for school children use of a building. Commissioner Steele said that such a facility could broaden the conceptions / use of Sunfish Lake Park. Planning Commissioner Larson asked how long it would be before the City could hire a Parks Director. Administrator Zuleger noted that he saw that as far off in the future. Commissioner Silvernale noted that he felt that the center would be used by school children as he had traveled to the Warner Center (2X) per year for school. Commissioner Frick wondered if there would be any available grants for a project of this type. Commissioner Steele asked if there were any MN Land Trust implications. Commissioner Frick noted that the Park Commission would have to consider if Area 2 was eligible for such a facility.

M/S/P Frick/ Ames: Proceed looking into the development of the Nature Center and to encourage Mr. Manzara to advance his project to the Planning Commission and City Council.

Old Business– Homestead Park Plan Update

Homestead Pollinator Project – Administrator Zuleger wanted the Park Commission to know that the city had planted over 300 trees in Area B that were mowed down by the developer. Shelli Wilk from the Homestead HOA noted that only 2 of the original 18 homeowners now live there and no one could recall trees being planted. Bouthilet noted that the trees were provided by the MNDNR for free and labor was minimal. The work was done in accordance with the MN Land Trust. The Commission agreed to move ahead with the previously approved plan to turn Outlot B into a pollinator conservancy.

Sunfish Lake Forestry Plan – Contract Forester Steve Kunde gave an update on his activities with respect to a management plan for Sunfish Lake. He has spoken with Ann Thies of the MN Land Trust who is very cautious and wants to make sure things are done correctly. He has spoken to Steven Handler who is a climate change specialist about “right” strategies as to not affect the ecosystem. He has spoken with Lee Froelich of the University of Minnesota as well as Wiley Buck from the Great River Greening Commission on buckthorn. He has also spoken with Chad Gellner from Lake City who is experienced in tree harvesting in difficult situations. The topography, the buckthorn, and disease control like Oak Wilt are all things that have to be considered when managing this forest. Currently Kunde is looking for supplemental funding for this fall/winter tree harvest. In addition, Kunde has been evaluating the present hazardous tree situation.

Commissioner Frick asked if there was any funding available from grants Kunde noted that he was trying to put a coalition together. Commissioner Frick, noting the time it has taken to get this far, asked Kunde if he was 100% certain that harvest would happen this winter. Kunde noted that most of the plan is drafted and he was hoping to break-even on the harvest. Commissioner Frick noted that we have to strike a balance for the ecosystem. Kunde said that that he is trying to accomplish this without major logging, but ultimately the Commission will have to make a decision on balance after the plan is developed.

Mike Bouthilet noted that he has marked 723 trees and another 100 limbs that could be considered hazardous. He has received two quotes to drop trees: One for \$20,000 and the other for \$8,000. Commissioner Steele asked if there is any liability if trees are not removed. Administrator Zuleger noted that he would check to see if this would be covered under any recreational immunity clause. Kunde noted that the City should be working with firewood contractors to remove the trees when they are taken down. Kunde also stressed that Oak trees should not be taken down to mitigate the spreading of oak wilt. Kunde then went into detail on what trees should be cut. Chairman Weis thought it would be best to get some quotes from firewood contractors based on Kunde’s overall harvesting plan.

M/S/P **Steele/Frick: To drop all hazardous non-oak trees for a quote of \$8,000 and to obtain a quote for the cost of moving fallen trees off of the trail. (6-1, Ames opposed).**

Commissioner Ames asked for the process to be clarified as he understood it to be first drop hazardous trees and then remove them off the trail and allow folks to come in for firewood. This was the understanding of the Commission. He stressed that the Commission should spend time thoughtfully considering what kind of environment they wanted within Sunfish Lake Park.

Sanctuary Park

Mike Bouthilet and Jaime Colemer reported that the tether ball and bench have been ordered and they have the hardware to build the gaga ball pit. The gaga ball pit may be a little difficult due to topography. They have also ordered six trees to screen the Sletten property from the playground. Bouthilet will be working with engineering and others to make sure the grade for the trail meets ADA requirements. Commissioner Steele noted that if the gag ball did not work at Sanctuary Park, then it may work at Demontreville Park due to the openness.

New Business - Tablyn Park

The Parks Commission engaged in a planning effort to determine the modifications to Tablyn Park as part of the 2015 Park Commission Plan of Work. The Commission decided to eliminate the baseball field in Tablyn Park and move it to Pebble Park. DPW Bouthilet stated that Lake Elmo Baseball supported this decision – the baseball area would be converted into a large open area suitable for soccer. The Commission reviewed its own survey to determine the improvements it wished to make to the park. Commission discussion initially centered on Tablyn Park becoming a winter destination park; by clearing more of the sledding hill and adding a skating rink to the lower north level by the road. Two pickle ball courts are to be added as well as a new playground feature called the “Unity Dome”. It was determined that the existing basketball court be removed and the parking lot extended (with the existing lot seal coated). From a security standpoint, The Commission was opposed to a security gate but was open to a security camera if supported by the Washington County Sheriff’s Department. The Commission wished to add more lights near the sledding area and near the tennis courts, but wished them to be of the dark sky nature. The current stairs will be replaced (w/ wooden stairs) and the current trail system will be made ADA compliant. If possible, a trail near the creek to the east side of the park should be created. Staff was tasked with put together a cost estimating sheet and presenting the overall cost when available.

Chairman Weiss noted that for the next meeting he wanted to start to look at Reid Park as it was next up in the modification queue. Administrator Zuleger stated that he would get a map out to the Commission for them to use for design purposes that would include new additions by developers as part of their Parkland Dedication.

Staff Reports & Commission Updates

Administrator Zuleger noted that the Parkland Dedication Financial Summary was in the Commission’s packet. He also noted that the Stillwater School District has solved some of their site issues and has executed the JPA with the City.

Commissioner Frick reported on a successful Sunfish Lake Spring Family Event. She stated that the event was well attended and thanked the volunteers that participated.

Meeting adjourned at 9:17 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

**Dean A. Zuleger
City Administrator**