

MINUTES

City of Lake Elmo Park Commission Wednesday, February 19, 2014

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

Members Absent: Hartley, Silvernale

Others Present: Administrator Zuleger, Planning Commissioner Larson, Mayor Pearson, Taxpayer Relations & Communications Coordinator MacLeod, PWS Bouthilet

The meeting was called to order by Chair Weis at 6:33 PM.

Approval of Agenda

M/S/P: Steele/Ames: Approved 7-0

Approval of December 16, 2013 Minutes

M/S/P: Steele/Hietpas: Approved 7-0

Approval of January 30, 2014 Minutes

M/S/P: Steele/Frick: Approved 4-0 Weis, Zeno, Ames abstain

Assign Mary Frick to Full Member/David Steele to Alternate

Zuleger explained that at the previous meeting officers had been elected but, as an alternate, Frick was inappropriately appointed as vice chair. Steele volunteered to switch to role of alternate to allow Frick to become a full member.

M/S/P: Ames/Zeno: Approved 7-0

Presentations

a. Dennis Bloom, ISD 834, Joint Park at Oak-Land Junior High

Dennis Bloom, Director of Operations Stillwater Public Schools addressed the commission to talk about a partnership between city and the district concerning a park expansion at Oak-Land Junior High School. The district is planning to completely reconstruct the tennis court area of the park at a cost of \$310,000 (alternate facility funds - not levy funds). The project includes the reconstruction of three existing courts. For an additional \$80,000 three new courts could be constructed in addition to the three existing.

The district proposed that the park commission pay \$80k to cover the three additional courts and to form partnership for future (public) park development.

Ames asked about the demand of the parks and if there was a need to double court space. Bloom responded that the courts are heavily used by public and the added space would also helpful for the schools.

Ames asked about the plan for maintenance over time. Bloom confirmed that the school district would be completely responsible for maintenance.

Bloom stated that the district would be going out for bids early April, with the bid offering on April 17, 2014. Bloom added that the projects would be bid separately and that the park commission would be committing to no more than \$80k.

Frick asked about public use of the facility. Bloom responded that they do advertise public use of the facilities and that they are opening Oakland Junior High as community center. Frick asked about signage stating that it is public access. Bloom confirmed that there currently is no signage but that it could be added. Hietpas asked if there was lighting. Bloom confirmed no lighting. Steele asked who primarily uses current courts – if they were Lake Elmo residents. Bloom could not confirm.

Ames asked about the proposed bike path along Manning. Bloom responded that they were part of the Manning project but wasn't certain when they would be going in. Ames asked if there would be flexibility to extend a trail from the west to the Manning Ave. bike path. Bloom confirmed that it was a possibility, and mentioned that there was already an unofficial trail developed.

Zuleger stated that from a cash flow standpoint it is difficult to develop a park in that area because the land is guided for commercial use. In this case, Zuleger said that they would likely be getting the investment back in parkland dedication funds from development in that quadrant. Zuleger also said that it makes sense location-wise.

Steele asked about the timeline on development of the park, and expressed hesitancy in funding the project if the park wouldn't be developed for several years. Zuleger and Bloom responded that the commission would set the pace. Bloom further expressed that it would be a great partnership and that they were already collaborating on projects such as the student drop off point at Lake Elmo Elementary.

Steele stated that he did not see organized sports as a high priority based on the park survey and was concerned that roughly 8% of the commission's 2014 designated funds would be invested in something that he wasn't sure there was much demand. Ames referenced Zuleger's earlier comments that the commission would be benefitting from future parkland funds that they would acquire from future development, while already having a park in place. Zuleger added that this partnership makes sense because staff has not been able to determine where to put the park in that quadrant, and this would help solve the placement issue.

The entire area is 40 acres; an estimated 5 acres would be allocated for the community park space. Ames stated that he was supportive of the idea, but would like more information about the wooded area and its restrictions.

A motion was made to support the concept of a shared park space and tennis court expansion at Oak-Land pending details of Joint Powers Agreement.

Ames/Hietpas: Approved 7-0

b. Megan Schmidt, Resident, Access to LEPR via 27th Street

Resident Megan Schmidt moved to Lake Elmo in September, near the northwest corner of the Lake Elmo Park Reserve. Her neighborhood has been using an unofficial path into the Park Reserve and addressed the commission to express interest in making an official entrance.

Weis clarified that they are looking for a neighborhood trail instead of public access. Schmidt confirmed.

Frick asked about ownership of the land in that area. According to the map, part is city-owned, part privately owned and part watershed.

Currently the private property owners grant access. Schmidt is concerned that if the property, which is for sale, is purchased residents would be restricted from future access. Schmidt asked if there was a way to make a permanent easement for access into the park.

Ames suggested that they would need to acquire the ROW at the private property to gain access to the park. Ames added that he liked the idea of access to park in the northwest corner but expressed concern toward limiting access to one neighborhood, especially if they would be paying to create the access.

Ames stated that the commission is already looking to obtain access to the LEPR in the northwest part already, so timing works well. Weis expressed concern that cutting through the privately owned land for access may be a problem.

Steele asked Zuleger for guidance. Zuleger stated that they would have to acquire more information about the easement, and added that they would need to go back to the county about access control. Weis answered that it was a watershed easement. Zuleger replied that a watershed easement would be difficult to pave or improve.

Frick expressed concerns about offering neighborhood access to a county park that requires fees. Zuleger confirmed that it was an issue that would need to be discussed.

Steele stated that overall he believes the commission thinks it is a good idea.

Zeno pointed out the possibility that creating an entrance in this area would result in people driving into the neighborhood and parking on 27th Street to get into the park.

Old Business

a. New Park Sign Design (MacLeod)

MacLeod presented material options and pricing for two different sign designs. The estimate was acquired from Impression Signs and Graphics in Oakdale. Sign designs incorporated elements from the Damon Farber theming.

Signs options range from \$3,300 to \$9,000 per sign based materials, which include Extira, aluminum, High Density Polyethylene (HDP).

Ames asked what the CIP allocation was for signs. Zuleger responded that it wasn't determined; an overall budget was determined at \$220,000. Zuleger added that with the addition of equipment and signs they would be at about \$340,000.

The commission was asked to select a design to move forward with. Design 1 was a more contemporary option; Design 2 a more traditional option. Motion made to approve Design 1 to acquire more details.

M/S/P: Weis/Ames: Approved 7-0

b. Easton Village Re-Design (Tom Walters, Zuleger)

Tom Walters with Easton Village addressed the council. The Easton Village concept plan was presented to the Park Commission at the last meeting and expressed concerns about walkability, connectivity, and access to Reid Park. Walters presented an updated plan based on feedback received. The concept was redesigned to include fewer cul-de-sacs and modifications to the pocket park (moving it further north and increasing the size).

The new design presents access into Reid from two points. Walters added that they envision that the park would be added on to the north. Ames questioned the topography on park in lower left. Walters confirmed that it is hilly, but would be able to add a trail. Ames expressed consideration for potential uses.

Steele questioned what feedback Walters would like from the commission. Walters confirmed that he was just following up

Zeno asked what the effect would be if Manning were to be turned into four-lane with a median. Walters assured that there would still be room for trail and that the issue has already been discussed with the county.

Motion indicating the park commission supports the concept plan as it relates to park access/trails/land

M/S/P: Ames/Weis: Approved 7-0

New Business

a. Old Village “Village Green” Concept (Weis/Zuleger)

Weis shared that at the joint workshop with the Council it was discussed that the park commission be in line with city’s future plan for village green. The commission didn’t feel that they were clear what the plan was.

Hietpas emphasized that it’s important to know the greater vision to be able to plan and account for larger park areas. Frick stated that at the workshop Smith encouraged the commissioners to review the Village Green plan.

Zuleger discussed the council’s plan for the Village green and where it would be located. Currently it is loosely guided in the comp plan (included in the plan but does not have a designated place). The stakeholders in the downtown area would like to see it located closer to Lake Elmo Avenue rather than where it is guided (east of downtown), to keep downtown walkable and close to downtown businesses.

Ames expressed that during his time serving on the park commission he has seen multiple versions of the old village plan. Ames requested to see the most current plan. Zuleger located one and displayed it on screen.

Zuleger shared that the next council workshop would focus on downtown development, which would include market analysis. A Buxton analysis indicated that there wasn’t much available for retail.

Steele expressed that he liked the idea of moving the village green closer to downtown. He suggested that with the development of senior housing in the area that perhaps some retail/food in the area would be desirable. Zuleger responded that they small retail including a hardware store, market, coffee shop, etc., and would be located near where the current ball fields are. The downtown area is zoned as mixed use, allowing houses, commerce, public facilities, multi-family housing, etc.

Ames stated that he agrees with the village green being close to downtown, but that without a plan for a ball field he feels reluctant to give up current ball park land. Frick added that she is most confused about the plan for a sports complex and is concerned about the demand for the complex. Frick thought that current demand would warrant a need, but wasn’t sure about the future. Zuleger expressed that many communities are moving to open fields with portable backstops.

Zuleger pointed out where the current green was planned, including ball fields, which were located near the wetlands. Zuleger discussed the vision of the green, and referenced Wausau’s 400 block as an example. Steele suggested that if they add a green that they don’t skimp.

Ames asked that the park commission continue to be informed about the plan for the Old Village. Zuleger invited commissioners to attend the March Council Workshop.

Steele confirmed that there are two different issues: where to place the park, and how to design it. Steele suggested that the commission be active in designing what goes into the Village Green and expressed that he would like them to be a part of that. Zuleger confirmed that it is their purview.

Zeno suggested that in order to add input to the development of the village green they need to be kept current on what is happening. Zuleger provided commission with an update on the process of the approval of the Old Village concept plan with Met Council.

Zuleger asked the commission how communication can become improved. They discussed the option of cross sending agendas. Weis clarified that if the council packets include anything related to parks that a copy should be forwarded to the commission. Larson suggested adding a password protected area on the website with folders and resources including park related items.

Lions and VFW in the No Net Lost. Ames asked if the park areas could ever be changed without the commission's knowledge.

Zuleger added that they are catching up on the county transportation plan. He added that the huge issue for downtown is parking.

b. Monthly Action Item: Placement of Equipment in Priority Park (Weis/Hartley)

Weis has started a "monthly action item," meaning each month they pick a project to get started on. Weis asked for the commissioners to suggest items to include.

This month he thought they could talk about refurbishing one item in a playground. Zuleger shared that Hartley's preference was Pebble; Commission agrees. Hietpas asked if it were refurbished or replaced. Zuleger said that it would most likely be replaced. Hietpas asked how to make sure that happens.

Weis suggested that Bouthilet come to the next meeting with five different options with pricing. Frick suggested providing with more direction. Bouthilet stated that there was a wide variety of options available and suggested going in a new direction and trying some new ideas. Hietpas asked if new park plans could use a consistent color scheme that possibly coordinates with the new signs. She suggested that earth tones would go well with the theming. Ames requested a range of options and prices. He suggested that a play structure could drive traffic to a park.

Steele suggested designating park expenditures all at once rather than piecemeal. The commission decided to focus on designating budget at the March meeting.

Hietpas suggested that telling Bouthilet to come with a few different items, they need to provide a budget and how it fits; suggests refining needs/desires first.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Alyssa MacLeod, Recording Secretary