

FINAL
Lake Elmo Park Commission
Minutes of the Regular Meeting
April 20, 2009

Chairman Ames called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Larson, Ames, Blackford, Booher, Zeno

STAFF PRESENT: Project Assistant Kriegler,

Agenda

Agenda was approved as amended (M/S, Larson/Blackford, 5-0)

Add Stonegate trail improvement project to Trail Inventory item.

Minutes

February 18, 2009 minutes approved as amended. (M/S Booher / Zeno, 5-0)

DNR Grants

First paragraph: Change \$100,00 limit to \$100,000

Fourth paragraph: change “their” to “there”.

Minnesota Cross-Country Ski Trails Assistance Program

Expand on sentence “Pursuit of the CIP grant was desirable provided that the kiosk would be owned by and controlled by the city” to include and “would not include any attachment or entitlement from any outside source”. Also add to the motion that “Lake Elmo would retain full ownership.”

Consideration of Proposed Work Plan

Fourth paragraph: add period.

Review of park entrance sign design

First paragraph: add “sign” after Sunfish Lake Park.

Consideration of an “Expression of Interest” to the Minnesota DNR Metro Greenways Program for Sunfish Lake Park prairie restoration and the development of a natural resource management plan.

Carol Kriegler explained that the city has the opportunity to submit “Expressions of Interest” to the Minnesota DNR’s Metro Greenways program. The Minnesota DNR’s Metro Greenways program was established to protect, connect and restore natural areas in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The program provides grants through a competitive process to local units of government to protect, restore, and enhance high quality natural habitats as well as to develop natural resource-base plans, policies, and practices to conserve the region’s natural heritage. Sunfish Lake Park is within the

Metropolitan Conservation Corridors Area and is therefore eligible to participate in the program.

Metro Greenways restoration project grants provide funding for 50% of total project costs. The program also offers grants for the development of natural Resource Green Infrastructure Based Plans. Reimbursement for the conservation planning grants is 75%. Carol Kriegler and the City's Forester, Kathy Widin met with the Metro Greenways grants program administrator to gain further information regarding the grants eligibility requirements and priorities. Expressions of interest are due May 15, 2009. Once funding levels for the program have been established by the legislature, applicants will be asked to submit a complete grant application. It is anticipated that funds will be awarded in the summer of 2009 with the requirement that expenditures be complete by June 30 of 2011.

Carol Kriegler explained that she and Kathy Widin are encouraging the commission to consider submitting two "Expressions of Interest". One would be for the development of a Natural Resource Management grant for the entire Sunfish Lake Park while the second one would be for a restoration grant for Area 2 of the park. It was explained that at this point only an "Expression of Interest" would be submitted with no commitment by the city necessary at this point.

Chairman Ames requested that the commission review and consider each grant opportunity separately. The grant opportunities and associated goals and budgets were explained as follows:

1. Natural Resource Management Grant

Summary:

Sunfish Lake Park is an area with significant natural features, wetland, woodland, and grassland plant communities which have become degraded over time, primarily through colonization by invasive plants. Water quality, wildlife habitat and enjoyment of the park by users have been reduced as plant diversity and habitat quality have decreased. These native plant communities are still at a point where they can be improved with planned conservation management. Such management will result in improved wildlife habitat and water quality with the added benefit of improved aesthetics for park users.

Goal: To assess current status of park natural resources and prepare a long-term management plan to address ways to improve the plant communities so that they function to protect water quality and improve wildlife habitat.

Objectives:

1. Survey the existing plant communities to determine species composition and degree of disturbance/degradation
2. Survey presence of invasive plants and degree of invasiveness
3. Develop management protocols for invasive plants
4. Develop plans for re-planting and establishing native tree, shrub and ground-layer plant species

Partners: The City of Lake Elmo, Valley Branch Watershed District, Washington Conservation District, private ecological restoration firm

Project Costs: (cost estimate at this time)

Entity	Estim. Hours	Hourly Rate	Estim. Cost
K. Widin, Forestry Consultant	100	\$50./hr	\$5,000.
Plant Ecologist (private firm)	75	\$65./hr	\$4,875.
Wash. Conserv. Dist. (wetland specialist, staff)	20	\$60./hr	\$1,200.
Total estimated cost for mgt. plan			\$11,075. (grant request = \$8,306.25)

John Booher expressed that he was not supportive of all 20 acres of Area 2 of the park being restored to prairie and he wanted some of the area to be developed for picnic and family use. Kriegler responded that those sorts of issues will be addressed by the commission as they proceed with the development of a concept plan for Area 2. The commission may well develop a concept plan without all 20 acres being prairie. That is the role of the park commission to yet determine. Larson added that there will still be the opportunity to build trails and a modest structure within the 20 acre prairie.

Kriegler also reported that she had checked in with Sara Strommen of the Land Trust and that she was supportive of the city pursuing these grants while being in the process of developing a concept plan.

Discussion also took place recognizing that the development of a natural resource for Sunfish Lake Park is a recognized goal of the park commission and that to get this done for just over just a couple of thousand dollars would be a good opportunity. Confirmation was made that with the submission of an “Expression of Interest”, for the city to gain some financial assistance for the development of a natural resource plan for the park and that the commission would be in a position to further review the opportunity before submitting a formal grant application.

Blackford expressed concern over the potential use of chemicals at the site. Kriegler responded that she would recommend having a staff member from the Conservation District come out and explain the prairie restoration and natural resource management process and procedures.

Motion: The Park Commission supports a Metro Greenways Grant Program “Expression of Interest” for the development of a natural resource management plan for Sunfish Lake Park (Larson / Ames, 5-0).

2. Restoration (Improvement) Grant

Summary:

Area 2 of Sunfish Lake Park is a 20 acre parcel that has been in agriculture for a number of years. Most recently the area has been planted in corn. The very nearly finalized Conservation Easement for the park calls for this area of the park to eventually be restored to a plant community native to the area. An ecologist has recently identified small areas within the park as mesic prairie. Restoration of the area to a native plant community will result in improved wildlife habitat, increased plant diversity and improved aesthetics for park users and residents.

Kriegler explained that there are really 3 components to this Expression of Interest. They were explained as follows:

- To restore the area currently being cropped to prairie.
- To develop and implement a native planting at the parks entrance and along the drive into the park that would be somewhat organized and educational in nature.
- To develop and implement a plan for the parking area that would define the area and prohibit cars from entering other areas of the park and to develop and implement a plan for a filter strip and rain garden along the north side of the parking lot that would filter run-off and protect water quality of Sunfish Lake Park.

Kriegler also explained that there would be planning component to this grant that would allow us to solve some of the management problems in the park (cars driving on trails) in a thoughtful way that would be consistent with the conservation easement.

Partners: The City of Lake Elmo, Valley Branch Watershed District, Washington Conservation District, private ecological restoration firm, conservation groups.

Project Costs: (cost estimate at this time)

Improvement Activity	Entity	Cost
Prairie Restoration installation '09	Private firm	\$37,000
Prairie Management '10	Private firm	\$9,000
Prairie Management '11	Private firm	\$5,000
Entrance / driveway native planting, rain garden, parking area planning and design.	WCCD	\$1,200
Parking lot improvements, rain garden implementation	Private firm / conservation group	\$5,000-8,000
Entrance / drive native plantings		\$5,000

The total cost of the Sunfish Lake Park improvement projects is anticipated to be about \$65,200 through mid summer of 2011.

Carol Kriegler explained that in addition to the applying for funds to support the initial installation, the requested amount would also include costs for management of the prairie that would be occurring during the eligible grant period.

While only the prairie restoration portion of the project is technically eligible for grant funding, representatives of the DNR have indicated a willingness to accept expenditures related to the other improvements (entrance – driveway plantings, parking lot, rain garden), towards the 50% match on the prairie restoration costs. In addition, representatives of Valley Branch Watershed District have expressed a good possibility that any improvements related to protecting / improving water quality would be eligible for a community cost share grant of 50%. Therefore, it's possible that the city's share of the total improvement project could be less than 50% of the total project cost.

Ames asked for confirmation that there are 3 components to this grant and wanted to know how much flexibility the commission would have in moving forward. Kriegler responded that at this stage there would be a great deal of flexibility in shaping the plan. This is only an "Expression of Interest". Larson expressed the interest in having an ADA trail incorporated in the trail. Blackford questioned what sources were used in the development of the budget for the project. Kriegler responded that a quote was requested from Minnesota Native Landscapes and that staff at the WCCD was consulted.

Motion: The Park Commission supports submitting an "Expression of Interest" for the prairie restoration / improvement project for Area 2 of Sunfish Lake Park. (Blackford / Zeno, 5-0)

Consideration of a resolution in support of Sunfish Lake Park as a participant in the Minnesota DNR cross--county ski GIA program and a resolution in support of a Capital Improvement Project Grant Application to the cross-country ski GIA program for the construction of an information kiosk.

Kriegler explained that Sunfish Lake Park was at one time Minnesota DNR Grant-In-Aid Ski Trail. Apparently about 10 years ago, the city stopped being an active participant. Carol Kriegler has verified the city's status with the DNR and requested consideration of reinstatement. While the DNR is no longer taking on new participants, they have expressed a willingness to reinstate Sunfish Lake Park into the program. Mike Bouthilet added that administration of the program was not worth what the city received in financial compensation. Apparently the activities eligible for reimbursement have expanded. Only trail grooming was an eligible cost back then.

Grooming of Sunfish Park trails is contracted to Washington County. The county is an active participant in the GIA program with the Lake Elmo Park Reserve receiving a reimbursement of about \$8,000.00 annually for their trails. The county has agreed to assist in the record keeping of the trail grooming that occurs at Sunfish Lake Park.

The Parks Commission was asked to consider resolutions in support of Sunfish Lake Park as a participant in the Minnesota DNR cross--county ski GIA program and a resolution in support of a Capital Improvement Project Grant Application to the cross-country ski GIA program for the construction of an information kiosk.

The GIA program provides limited funds to trails owned and operated by both private trail organizations and local units of government. Trail administration, development, and maintenance costs are divided with the GIA program paying 65 percent of these costs and the local club or sponsor providing the remaining 35 percent. Winter trail grooming costs are divided with the GIA program paying 90 and the local sponsor paying 10 percent. Record keeping by the local sponsor is required by the local sponsor.

Reimbursable trail maintenance costs include:

Trail grooming (90%)

Parking lot maintenance

Parking lot and driveway snow plowing

Signs / trail map reproduction

Portable toilet rental

Trail mowing

Tree and brush removal

In addition, the program offers capital improvement grants that are reimbursable at 100%. The commission is being asked to consider a resolution in support of a Capital Improvement Project Application for the construction of an information kiosk to be located at the trailhead of Sunfish Lake Park. The proposed kiosk would provide a central location for the posting of general information to assist users in their ability to use the trail in a safe and enjoyable manner. Information that could be posted includes a trail map, rules and regulations, emergency and general contacts, and interpretive information. The kiosk would also be used to demonstrate the city's strong commitment to its recycling program. The use of recycled plastic lumber to construct the kiosk has the potential to reinforce the value in recycling. Cost of the kiosk is estimated at \$2,000.

Kriegler reported that Sue Dunn had called expressing the concern about the requirement for skiers to have a Minnesota Ski pass to ski at Sunfish. In response to this concern, Kriegler called the program director to learn what obligation the city would have in posting and enforcing the ski pass purchase. She learned that the city would be encouraged to encourage skiers to have a pass, but would not have any enforcement obligations. Members expressed the need to have the permits available for purchase at a convenient location. Blackford expressed that she wanted to make sure that there "were no strings" attached. Bouthilet expressed his recommendation for participation and suggested that the city could simply stop applying for funds and walk away from the program if it should not prove beneficial.

Motion: The Park Commission supports Sunfish Lake Park as a participant in the Minnesota DNR cross-country ski GIA program and a resolution in support of a Capital Improvement Project Grant Application to the cross-country ski GIA program for the construction of an information kiosk.

Discussion of native garden planting program for park sign locations

Kriegler outlined that many of the park sign locations lack landscaping. Other locations have a landscape bed, though they are in need of attention. The city's CIC (Community Improvement Commission) has in the past expressed an interest in improving the park sign location landscaping.

The city's SWPPP (Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program) stipulates that the city educate and encourage residents to landscape with native plants and install rain gardens, shoreline buffers, etc... This native garden planting program is consistent with the goals of the city's SWPPP.

The Park Commission was asked to explore and consider implementing a program of native garden installations / "adoptions" at any number of park sign locations. Goals of the program include:

- Beautification of the sign locations / landscape beds.
- To conduct a fun and educational event that would engage members of the community in a positive way.
- To educate the public as to the value of native gardens in our community and to lead by example.

Carol Kriegler and Rusty Schmidt (biologist and landscape architect) of the Washington County Conservation District have conducted an inventory of all the city's park sign locations. examples of native gardens that could be installed at small sign locations and larger sign locations were made available.

Costs for these gardens were reported as ranging in cost based on. Material costs for a small garden would be about \$500 with material costs for a large sign being about \$1,500.00. It is possible that 50% of the projects could be reimbursable through the Valley Branch Watershed District's cost share program. In kind services such as volunteer service and city staff time are eligible for the cost share program. The Washington County Conservation District has expressed a willingness to provide design services.

Kriegler asked that the Parks Commission consider moving forward with such a plan very conservatively - - that it is important for us to not bite off more than we can handle. She explained that there are some great opportunities for having the gardens installed quickly with outside volunteer help, but that the greater and more important task would be in ensuring that the gardens be maintained.

Members expressed a strong interest in the gardens and interest in having the city's CIC take this project on. Kriegler responded that their membership is very low. The Commission asked that staff begin exploring volunteer recruitment for the maintenance of the gardens and the moving forward based on the level of response. The suggestion was made that we have the chairperson of the CIC come discuss the possibility for their involvement.

Update on the city trail system improvements / trail segment inventory

John Booher expressed his desire in having the Stonegate trail improvement project move forward. He explained that he is proposing that 2 of the 3 identified segments be improved at an estimated cost of \$20,000 to \$30,000. There was some discussion about the fact that R.O.W. was turned back on the west end of Stonegate a couple of years ago out of request by neighbors who did not want to see the area open to thru traffic. Bouthilet acknowledged this and added that a thru-traffic trail could still be achieved by going thru the park.

Bouthilet reported that his staff had made good progress on the inventory. Ames suggested that completion of the inventory should continue and that the Stonegate trail improvement project can then be evaluated in that context.

Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan; Metropolitan Council's Response

Kriegler provided a brief overview of the suggested changes to the Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan as drafted by Planner Matzek. The suggestions were as follows:

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL COMMENT: The Metropolitan Council's approved master-plan boundaries for Lake Elmo Park Reserve include 8 "in-holding" parcels to be acquired by Washington County. These in-holding parcels should be shown on the 2030 Park System Plan Map as land proposed to be acquired for the park reserve.

CITY RESPONSE: The 2030 Park System Plan Map will be updated to identify the eight parcels as land proposed to be acquired for the park reserve. This will provide consistency in information for those interested in property near the regional park reserve.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL COMMENT: The 2030 Park System Plan Map shows a local Special Use Park Search Area on the southeastern shore of Lake Elmo. This local park search area appears to be within the boundaries of Lake Elmo Park Reserve. If that is the case, the land is already preserved as parkland and specifying a park search area would be duplicative.

CITY RESPONSE: In order to clarify that the city is interested in purchasing or receiving property on Lake Elmo if and when feasible, but is not focused on existing Washington County parkland or a specific property, staff is proposing to move the search area circle along the east side of the lake and to make the corresponding text changes. The existing text in the Park Plan (page 3-22) identifies that "A different location may be sought if the southeast location should prove to be infeasible or if a preferred alternative

is found.” To conform with the slight alteration of the search area, the word “southeast” will be changed to “eastern.” The intent of the search area is maintained.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL COMMENT: The Park Plan needs to include a discussion of the proposed Washington County Greenway Regional Trail in the text of the plan.

CITY RESPONSE: A short narrative will be added to the Lake Elmo Park Plan regarding the proposed county trail. “The Washington County Greenway Regional Trail is proposed to connect the City of Hastings to Cottage Grove Regional Park, Lake Elmo Park Reserve and Big Marine Park Reserve. Washington County will conduct a master planning process for this trail in the future.”

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL COMMENT: When the city submits the comprehensive plan update for official review, the update needs to include the Trail Guide Plan for review as well.

CITY RESPONSE: The Trail Guide Plan will be submitted.

Kriegler commented that these suggested changes have no practical change or impact on the City's park plan. Ames also expressed the commission's need / desire to learn about the potential development of the Green Corridor Trail.

Motion: Acceptance of suggested changes and that staff review and report back on the opportunity for the park commission to participate in the Green Corridor trail design through Lake Elmo (Larson / Ames, 5-0)

The meeting was adjourned 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Kriegler
Project Assistant