

CITY OF FALCON HEIGHTS
Regular Meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission
City Hall
2077 West Larpentour Avenue

MINUTES
August 7, 2023 at 6:30 P.M.

A. CALL TO ORDER: 6:34 P.M.

B. ROLL CALL:

Jeff Yager X Mike Bradbury X Eric Brenton X
Paula Mielke X Tom Faust X Randi Lundell Mike Tracy X

COUNCIL LIAISON:

James Wassenberg X

STAFF PRESENT:

Kelly Nelson X

C. PRESENTATION:

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. June 5, 2023 - Parks and Recreation Commission and Community Engagement Commission -Joint Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Yager
motioned to approve the minutes;
Approved 5-0
(Mielke was not yet present)

E. AGENDA:

1. Recap Summer Programming; Discuss Fall Programming

Nelson updates commissioners on summer programming, sharing how a follow-up survey was emailed to parents to gather feedback. Staff notes that the majority responded that they were not willing to pay more in order to enhance the quality of the program. But, then when asked if they would register again, the majority said that they would not AND that they would look to a larger surrounding city such as Roseville or St. Paul instead, which do charge more.

Tracy says that he thinks sports participation is just down, in general. He feels we should stop trying to offer these programs.

Bradbury says that we've been watching our programs decrease for a while now and that he always goes back to the commission's duties; one of them is to assess the needs of the community when developing recreation plans.

Bradbury goes on to say that maybe we need to change along with the times and rather than offering the same programming that has to be planned so far in advance and needs staff hired for, we use our facilities in different ways. There are a lot of kids in the community that are interested in activities but not traditional programs.

Nelson said it's been interesting and nice to see adult courses going so well and hopes to expand those types of offerings as well, such as possibly offering a future Introduction to Pickleball class.

Faust mentions seeing kids crossing outside of crosswalks to get to the basketball courts at Curtiss Field and thinks a basketball court would be nice to have at Amber if they would be willing to put up some hoops at the back part of the unused lot. He wonders if the city should approach them in some way.

Wassenberg says it would be a bit more involved because they'd have to put up fencing to contain the basketballs from traffic.

Nelson says she will continue conversations with Roseville and the St. Paul Blackhawks but that it may not be in time for fall programming.

Wassenberg says staff should prepare a few scenarios for Roseville to consider.

Commissioners encourage staff to keep the conversation going to determine our options for spring at least, since it looks like fall programming will probably not be offered.

2. Fall Event

Bradbury tells the commission that we're picking back up with the discussion as to whether or not we should have an event this fall. And, if so, to decide the date and location.

Mielke asks if the Community Engagement Commission would want to partner with us again.

Nelson says she's not sure if we should have a joint meeting with CEC to help choose the date. Or, if we would just invite CEC to a future joint meeting to determine their involvement and how they can help enhance the event.

Wassenberg says that an event that lends itself to community, communication and interaction should involve CEC, whereas a sports day with a 5K within the park may not require as much involvement from them.

Bradbury is still in favor of the fall event promoting The Grove. The pickleball lines have been painted on the court now. And, he adds that we had previously talked about it being more of a musical fall festival.

Brenton suggests we do a singer/songwriter so that it's really easy to put on and the setup is simple.

Nelson feels that The Grove does add a little bit of a challenge because there is not a lot of on-street parking and attendees may find themselves crossing Larpenteur to get there.

Mielke suggests a series of small events such as pickleball, Roseville's Puppet Wagon, etc. to bring people to The Grove park.

Bradbury says that our other city events are only two hours long. So, that may not be so disruptive to residents near The Grove. He reminds the commissioners that

Commissioner Tracy had previously shared an interest in hosting a 5K as a component as well.

Tracy explains how you could accomplish a short run with all age groups through the park and/or the nearby area without going on the streets and needing to involve traffic control from the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office. He thinks we could offer something very safe and very inclusive to non-runners alike.

Wassenberg agrees that laps within Community Park and off roadways would make it a lot simpler to staff and put on.

Brenton and Bradbury discuss the area that encompasses Community Park and the U of M fields adjacent to it, suggesting that area would make a nice lap area for a race.

Bradbury says that a fun run could be held in the area of Community Park but perhaps additional festivities could take place in The Grove. We could run a shuttle bus between the parks.

Brenton suggests having a food truck.

Bradbury asks when runners would typically run a 5K and whether a morning would be best.

Tracy said the heat wouldn't be as much of a factor if we had an event in early September.

Brenton wonders if we could have the event at the end of September or even October to allow more time to plan.

Yager shares that the Twin Cities Marathon is the first week in October.

Nelson says she'll research other fall events in the immediate area to avoid having our event on the same date/time.

Brenton suggests reaching out to local businesses like Good Acre to sponsor the fall event.

Bradbury suggests that maybe we don't have a fall event this year but spend the time preparing for next year; 30 days doesn't seem like enough time to plan and promote one! Similar to the park audits that the commissioners just completed, Bradbury suggests that the commissioners complete fall event audits, taking notes from other fall events and gathering ideas for our own event next fall. He mentions a fall feast that Good Acre has and wonders if we could partner with that or link in with Gibbs Farm or Bell Museum to make it into one bigger event.

Nelson mentions that we can also properly budget for the fall event next year, as opposed to finding the funds this year.

Commissioners will take notes of fall events during the month of September instead of having a commission meeting (Labor Day). Then, discuss their finding in October.

3. Park Audit Findings and Suggestions

Nelson thanks the commissioners for auditing the parks and says that each of them found something new that another person hadn't necessarily seen. The data was compiled and divided into two categories: one list includes simple improvements that can be made by Public Works and the other list includes items to consider purchasing/replacing in 2024.

Yager mentions that the playground edging is broken and sharp at The Grove and it was omitted from the list that Nelson had compiled.

Nelson will update the list to include Yager's suggestion and any others that were erroneously omitted.

Mielke asks if a pickleball net could be purchased under our current year's budget like basketball hoops and soccer nets.

Nelson says that a pickleball net would most likely have to be budgeted for in 2024, dependent on the quality of the net and its expense, as they can run anywhere from \$200 to more than \$2,000. Her thought was maybe to get through this winter and then find a net in the spring. This would also allow a bit of time to observe court usage.

Mielke asks if money could be budgeted for in 2024 to offer something at Curtiss Field for older kids / teens. She suggests doing a focus group with neighborhood kids to get their input and mentions Gaga Ball pits becoming popular.

Wassenberg said he sees Gaga pits on elementary school playgrounds or geared towards that age group.

Nelson asks if the balls for Gaga are specific to the sport or if residents would easily be able to supply their own to play.

Wassenberg doesn't think the ball is necessarily specific to the sport and it seems similar to a rubber kickball.

Bradbury says that he was just in Sweden and saw outdoor ping pong tables there that had curved edges. Kids were kicking soccer balls over the net. He wasn't sure if that was the intent of the tables or not, but saw them everywhere.

Brenton says that he thinks that's what those tables are intended for. They are lower to the ground than ping pong tables.

Bradbury says that Four Square is always popular at Spring Together. Maybe we look to add that. He adds that he loves when a park has a huge chess board, too.

Nelson asks if kids would play soccer at Curtiss if there were larger nets left out permanently there.

Bradbury thinks they would play soccer and that the kids shifted over to basketball because he hasn't been getting the soccer nets out lately.

Commissioners discuss soccer nets and conclude they will leave out the existing small nets to determine if they get much use and also hold up.

Yager suggests getting one of those spider web-like monkey bars/climbing areas like they have at the Bruce Russell park in Roseville.

Since the exact item has not been determined, Mielke asks if some money can be put into the budget for a TBD item in 2024.

4. Sleeping in Parks Discussion

(The commission reviewed current city responses from St. Paul and Minneapolis to support individuals experiencing homelessness and then discussed the City of Falcon Heights' current response).

Yager asks if there has been an incident that caused this to be brought up.

Mielke shares that she asked for it to be discussed because she was aware of an incident of someone sleeping at Curtiss Field one Saturday. It made her wonder how we would respond as a city; how would we approach it?

Nelson shares how the city responds currently and says that the city is asked weekly if there are any known unsheltered persons within the city by Housing Stability in Ramsey County. If there were, Housing Stability would then make contact and offer emergency shelter resources to them.

Bradbury asks if the city's current response is published anywhere and Nelson says that she just typed it up for the commission's discussion.

Bradbury suggests sharing the information in an upcoming newsletter, even if it's just a line to two to summarize.

Yager adds that the city's current response should be shared so that residents know that it's okay to call and let the city know about unsheltered individuals. We're here to help!

Nelson says she will include a summary in the weekly newsletter.

5. Tobacco and Cannabis-Free Parks

(An existing city ordinance and current city code bans tobacco smoking from with city parks. The commissioners felt that the ordinance and city code may contain outdated language and may also need to be updated now to include cannabis. A draft of an updated ordinance and proposed updates to city code to ban cannabis use in parks were both included in the agenda packet and reviewed by the commissioners).

Mielke suggests having updated and consistent signage in every park.

Tracy suggests keeping the new park signage very simple: no smoking of any kind!

Nelson shares that current signage at The Grove says, "Tobacco-Free Grounds. No tobacco use on this park property." The sign does not currently have the city logo on it.

Commissioner Yager motioned to approve the ordinance draft and proposed changes to City Code with the consideration of adding e-cigs under the Purpose section (Sec. 34-55) of the final updated version of City Code;
Approved 6-0

1. Grove and Curtiss Court Painting Update

Commissioners say the paint looks nice but haven't been by the parks again to see anyone enjoying the courts yet.

Nelson shares one other update about a grant she heard of one day before the application period closed. She submitted applications to receive a park bench at Curtiss Field and seven benches at Community Park. She has since heard that both grant applications were approved! City Council will now have the bench grant contract on their 8/9/23 agenda to give consent to. Nelson says the Ramsey County Be Active! Be Green! folks were great to work with on the grant application and approval process.

Mielke asks for an Ice Cream Social update.

Nelson reports that we had 650 ice cream treats to hand out this year (as opposed to 350 last year) and were only left with 30 treats!

Tracy says he did think it was much better attended than last year!

Mielke asks if we gathered any additional feedback during Ice Cream Social for the upcoming reconstruction at Community Park.

Nelson responds that we did get feedback but feels it will be even more impactful when we have a budget and more details to provide to the public.

Wassenberg shares one last update that the Ruggles Pathway pavers were installed last week and look great!

G. ADJOURNMENT: 8:29 PM

Commissioner Yager motioned to
adjourn;
Approved 6-0