



MAYOR & COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

DATE: 10/01/2013

REGULAR

ITEM #: 16

AGENDA ITEM: Approve Name Change to Sunfish Lake Park to Sunfish Lake Nature Preserve

SUBMITTED BY: Dean Zuleger, Administrator

THROUGH: City of Lake Elmo Park Commission

REVIEWED BY: Dean Zuleger, City Administrator

SUGGESTED ORDER OF BUSINESS:

- Introduction of Item City Administrator
- Report/Presentation.....City Administrator
- Questions from Council to Staff Mayor Facilitates
- Call for Motion Mayor & City Council
- Discussion Mayor & City Council
- Action on Motion..... Mayor Facilitates

SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUESTED:

To formally change the name of Sunfish Lake Park to the Sunfish Lake Nature Preserve per Park Commission request. The recommended motion for this action is as follows:

“Move to approve Resolution No. 2013-87, Approving the Park Commission’s motion to change the name of Sunfish Lake Nature Park to more adequately reflect the conservation easement, current use, and future needs of Lake Elmo residents.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Sunfish Lake Park is arguably Lake Elmo’s flagship open space. Its history is storied and full of dedicated volunteerism including the original donation of the land. The park is 256 acres in size and is designated as protected property under a conservation easement with the MN Land Trust entered into in June of 2009 (see attached). The use of Sunfish Lake Park is highly regulated under the terms of the easement and allows only limited activities.

Specifically, under Section 3.4 of the easement entitled Recreational and Educational Uses the easement reads:

“The Protected Property may be used for hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, nature observation or study, and other non-intensive recreational and educational programs or activities that have no more than minimal impact on the Conservation Values of the Protected Property.”

Staff investigation into the use of the park for activities such as rinks, fields, mountain biking, and other “typical” activities would be prohibited without a change or release from the easement.

In the summer of 2013, the City of Lake Elmo Park Commission passed a motion to change the name of Sunfish Lake Park to the Sunfish Lake Nature Preserve to more accurately reflect the character and the use of the 256 acres. On September 26, 2013 the City of Lake Elmo Park Commission reiterated their desire to have the name changed and has forwarded this motion to the City Council for ratification.

By definition a nature preserve is a piece of land protected and managed to protect its flora and fauna, sometimes called a nature reserve. A park is defined by an implicit use for recreation and active enjoyment. Based on the conservation easement and certain invested activities such as the prairie restoration it appears that the 256 acres of land is more adequately defined by the name change.

As part of the discussion of whether a name change was appropriate, an economic review was completed looking at whether the term park or nature preserve has a significant impact on property values. While not specific to park type, studies do show that open space does raise the value of property adjacent and adds to a quality of life.

As for public input, the 2013 Park Survey shows a high level of taxpayer interest in activities most closely associated with protected nature of Sunfish Lake Park – which was the most used park per the survey. After “Proximity to Home,” “Hiking Trails” were the most important factor for park use for those answering the survey, with “Wooded Lands” third. “Nature Observation” also scored relatively high in the survey.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff is currently working with the Park Commission in an effort to improve park utilization creating a hierarchy as follows:

1. Regional Park / Preserve – Sunfish Lake
2. Community Parks – Tablyn, Pebble, VFW/Lions, Reid, Demontreville
3. Neighborhood Parks

With the limitation of use caused by the conservation easement and the taxpayer needs / wants as reflected by the survey, it does not appear to staff that changing the name has any significant consequence. Rather, if the Council wishes to expand the activities of Sunfish Lake Park, either part or parcel, the first step would be to seek removal or withdrawal from the easement with the MN Land Trust. The staff is inclined to support the Park Commission’s action. The recommended motion for this action is as follows:

“Move to approve Resolution No. 2013-87, Approving the Park Commission’s motion to change the name of Sunfish Lake Nature Park to more adequately reflect the conservation easement, current use, and future needs of Lake Elmo residents.”