

MINUTES

City of Lake Elmo Park Commission Monday, August 19, 2013

Members Present: Chairperson Weis, Steele, Hartley, Ames, Hieptas, Blackford

Members Absent: Zeno (Excused), Silvernale (Excused)

Others Present: Administrator Zuleger, SPW Bouthilet, Mayor Pearson, Councilmember Reeves, Taxpayer Relations & Communications Coordinator MacLeod; Todd Erickson, Folz, Freeman, Erickson

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Weis at 7:03 PM.

Approval of Agenda

M/S/P: Hieptas, Hartley: Agenda approved after adding a trail subcommittee report and the MPCA property on Jamaca to agenda. Approved 6-0

Dialogue w/ Mayor Mike Pearson & Council Member Reeves on Council – Commission Synergies:

Mayor Pearson introduced Council member Reeves as the new liaison to the Park Commission. Pearson discussed the Council retreat and how we can improve processes including how the park commission runs. One item that was discussed was to interview park commission members so the council can get to know the members of the commission better, and the commission and council can work better together. Pearson asked for comments.

Ames has seen intermittent collaboration between the commission and council. He discussed the trail planning in the past 9 years that has not been implemented and that there is a balance in the account. He believes there is a misalignment in objectives and would like to see it improved.

Ames mentioned Parks trail recommendations for the Demontreville Road improvements. Blackford remembers councilmember Smith stating that she could not support spending tax dollars for this trail improvement. She was one of the members who testified to council. Blackford suggested the possibility that part of the lack of implementation could be due to the turnover of staff. Pearson mentioned that the issues related to staff turnover is over. Pearson acknowledged the trail plan – estimated at \$24 million and that there has been a consistent goal. Pearson brought up what he thought was an over focus on one park, Sunfish Lake Park. Blackford stated that she hoped she conveyed with accuracy that the commission did not cause the issues that resulted in a large amount of time devoted to Sunfish Lake Park.

Hartley stated that she has been on the commission for three years and that the commission has struggled to move things forward. She said she is thankful for Zuleger and Bouthilet making it possible to move forward.

Hartley and Weis discussed grant writing through the trail subcommittee (composed of Weis, Hartley, Zeno, and Jennifer Pelletier). Ames states that he would like to see some help with grant writing regarding the trails, and Weis pointed out that there are several staff members with grant writing experience. Steele reiterates that Zuleger will help move things forward, and suggests that meeting once per month is a stumbling block. Steele reinforces that the agenda is not driven by the commission – dictated by the administrator. Items just pop up and aren't discussed fully. Steele optimistic that we will be able to push forward – feels that the issues with the commission are process issues.

Pearson is not ready to acknowledge that it's a process based problem. Asks if Sunfish Lake issue was a staff driven process. Steele replied that the minutes will reflect that there was no continuity or closure to the issues. Ames opinion is that the water tower and landfill project detracted from the issues in Sunfish.

Bouthilet mentioned that a trail plan is needed for future development. He points out that connecting existing properties would be a challenge and that there is difficulty putting in a new trail that the City doesn't own (will need to obtain right of way). Steele adds that the lack of a plan has also been a challenge with the downtown area because it was one of the key connecting points.

Ames says we need alignment around how the council views the commission's mission, which should be to protect and preserve park land, promote and facilitate proper use of park land, and to develop in the city. He suggests that friction may be caused by a disconnect in understanding. Pearson talked about recreation and the idea that Sunfish Lake Park could be a premier park for mountain biking. Pearson questions what would be the problem with mountain biking. Hartley responded that trust says that we cannot have formalized activity in the park like that. Pearson mentions that SAHS has come before the City asking to use Sunfish for mountain biking. Blackford reminds him that SAHS does utilize the park for cross-country training and skiing. Pearson asks about opposition of mountain biking use. Weis suggested that the first objective was to find if it was allowable by trust and they found out it wasn't; and therefore the initiative was abandoned. Blackford and Steele bring up the extensive history of the park and that literature regarding damage caused by mountain biking in parks (due to erosion); he added that there are costly re-construction options that would help protect against erosion. Steele also expressed that the other part of the literature is that there are safety issues and conflicts between multiple uses from bikers and non-bikers. The national trend is going away from biking where hiking is present to avoid that.

Hieptas thinks there is a big disconnect between council and commission. One reason for disconnect is the elimination of a forester. Commission has suggested the re-instatement of Kathy Widen. Has been presented to council but hasn't heard anything else. Hieptas expresses her disappointment of a question on the park survey being changed by council without consulting the commission. Blackford mentioned that council asked commission to put the lakes question on the survey. Ames adds that the lake question was changed to be self-serving. Steele mentions that the draft approved by commission was neutral, and inquires to Pearson why the question was reworded. Pearson mentions that the lakes aren't the park commission's purview and that he requested the question in January before the lakes issue arose. Hieptas suggested that the council should have consulted the commission before modifying the survey. Pearson said they were simply trying to keep the survey moving, as it took a lot of time just to get it out. Pearson pointed out that commissioners are volunteers and that he values their service. He added that by door knocking you will hear people talking about the issues. Steele mentions that he appreciates Pearson attending and appreciates his honesty. Pearson mentioned that he spent a Saturday in Sunfish and did not see very many people utilizing the park. Steele points out that there are no metrics on park usage, and that you can't evaluate attendance on one day.

Blackford responded to Pearson stating that the commission did do door knocking regarding the mountain biking and they received hundreds of signatures from residents who were against it. Zuleger iterates that the point to take home is that we need continuity between council and commission. He added that the Council does approve their agenda and they are trying to rebuild continuity and the process. Zuleger is committed to park commission this year, as he worked extensively with planning commission last year. Zuleger expressed his commitment as staff to handle administrative tasks, ensured that issues going to council will make it to council; and will be commission driven. Zuleger mentioned the final word on the park commission being that members of council unanimously affirmed that they want a better relationship with the park commission.

Reeves reaffirmed what Zuleger said at the council retreat; and took away from the meeting an affirmation of the council's importance of this city government working well. Reeves stated that this doesn't always mean agreeing, but means that you need to respectfully disagree but keep things moving. Reeves stated that because there is a lot of change taking place, there is a need to have all parts including the council, commissions and staff all parts working like well-oiled machine. Reeves emphasized that there is a need for over-communication. Reeves stated that he is appreciative of the service of all commissioners and asked for the commission help to define the liaison role. In a few years hopes to have people look back and see what all was accomplished.

Old Business

a. Hammes Development Review (Zuleger)

Dean introduced Todd Erickson of FFE (Folz, Freeman, Erickson) to discuss an amended development plan for the Hammes Development. The commission had asked for more park land to be created in a particular area of the plan to provide synergy with Goose Lake Park.

Todd Erickson, Engineer partner if Folz, Freeman, Erickson, took the podium. Erickson states that the Central park area of the Hammes area is going more toward Woodbury style urbanization plan and that it will draw young parents with younger kids. Erickson adds that each trail off of cul de sacs in development would have direct access to the park without having to go on street. Park is for the residents of this development. Ames asked how large the park space would be. Erickson responded that it would be approximately a 13,500 sq. ft lot for park (145' deep x 80' wide). Erickson also mentioned that there would be over 6,000 feet of trail, including connections to Lennar and Lake Elmo Park Reserve.

Bouthilet mentioned the development would need to connect with the Stonegate trail on the north eastern side of the development. Have one east west. Ames stated that the residents of Stonegate would like to have a paved trail but are resisting to connection into their neighborhood. He continued that the commission is in favor of paving trail if it connects to city/public trails. Bouthilet stated that now would be a good time to pave the trail, but the residents don't have as strong as an interest to pave it.

Hartley asked how wide trails are that are being put in. 5' foot wide trail, paved. Steele talked about creating one more substantial space instead of smaller "pocket parks", which could be accomplished by removing the pentagon-shaped lot. Erickson responded that removing the lot would result in disturbing the natural wetlands that they are interested in preserving. Erickson continued that keeping the park in a more centralized location will attract more people as well.

Zuleger pointed out the park and green space in Section 34, including how they connect to provide an extended view of the park space in the area. Ames inquired if there is a park dedication impact to the park and if the trail be developer built? Zuleger confirmed that it would be developer built.

Zuleger pointed out that development will be short on REC units due to a low demand for multi-family housing units. Hietpas questioned how the City plans on making up for the shortage of REC Units. Zuleger responded that they will be renegotiating with MET Council on September 13, 2013 and asking for a reduction in REC units, extended by 10 years.

Weis asked for more comments. Blackford asked whether trails will be dedicated. Zuleger mentions that they will be city trails. Weis comments that he likes the plan, but was wondering if they can create a park space larger than ¼ acre. Erickson responded that with the amount of money going into the park (\$40k), it will be a nice park. Weis asked about parking and Steele asked if there would be room for picnic shelter? Erickson clarified that the money allocated to developing the park, would support various amenities. Blackford asked for a park that is comparable to ¼ acre. A resident (Delapp) responded that park would be same as council chambers twice as wide, 5 x as long. DeLapp expressed his opinion that presented park improvements are great – a fine effort to address concerns.

Hieptas asked what the timeline would be for construction. Zuleger replied that the contract is being drawn up, which would include both national and custom builders.

M/S/P: Hieptas/Ames: to approve Hammes plan. Approved 6-0

Weis brought up a need to discuss Item A1, the creation of a subcommittee for development review. Weis mentioned that City Planner Johnson was working on examples and that there was a need for volunteers to form the subcommittee, with hopes to have information to review by the September 2013 meeting. Steele, Hartley and Blackford volunteered for committee. Zuleger included that Johnson would be the staff liaison for the group.

b. Sanctuary Park Update (Bouthilet)

Bouthilet stated that they hadn't followed up with the Sanctuary Park update. Bouthilet reiterated that where they left off was Silvernale looking to establish a trail route through Sanctuary and Bouthilet's suggestion was to order a survey. Steele asked how much the survey would cost. Bouthilet estimated the cost would fit into the park budget.

M/S/P: Weis/Hartley: To approve survey request in Sanctuary. Approved 6-0

c. Tapestry Access to Sunfish Lake (Hartley)

Hartley mentioned that there is a resident in Tapestry that doesn't like people parking cars and using walking trails or trying to access Sunfish Lake Park and has been distributing no parking signs on people's cars. Hartley brought up concern related to access and asked how a gate on Hwy 5 would take care of other access to park. She asked what kind of solutions would be feasible to address the issue. Blackford suggested putting up more signage. Ames said that he thinks signage won't deter people that are entering with motorbikes. Bouthilet talked about gate options (two gates or one single gate with a split). He said that since the parking lot will eventually be paved a single driveway is recommended.

Weis asked if a formal motion on Sunfish access is required. Hartley says no action needed at this time just wants to let the commission know that tapestry thinks it is an issue. Zuleger reminded the commission that the trails in Tapestry, Whistling Valley and Hamlet were not properly deeded.

Zuleger adds that the gate issue is a law enforcement issue. Issue with Sunfish Lake Park is because it is isolated/hidden resulting in some more unfortunate law enforcement issues. Zuleger expressed that providing a gate at Sunfish would help law enforcement to prevent those incidents from happening. Weis says it is clear that we want a gate and that the commission should make a decision on the number of driveways. Bouthilet detailed that the gate would be automatic. Ames question whether the entrance could be moved to the width of one driveway without significant grading? Bouthilet responded that they could not. Steele suggested a subcommittee on safety to audit parks and return to commission with solutions. Bouthilet discussed some options for safety including the addition of cameras.

Weis asks Bouthilet for recommendation of associated cost for gates/drive available for next meeting. Bouthilet said that his first suggestion would be to make a single gate with a split drive. He suggested putting money in CIP for gravel/paving in the future. Bouthilet said could get figures on gate, and estimate on gravel, prepared for the September meeting.

d. Forestry Budget Request Update (Zuleger)

Zuleger stated the council met the previous week to discuss two discretionary items: YSB, and the forestry budget request. He iterated that the council requested an assessment of how to utilize the forester and how they might help with development review. Zuleger stated that private tree matters would not be covered under the MN League liability. Zuleger cited a trend of communities leaning toward hiring an urban arborist in lieu of a forester position. Zuleger asked for a summary in a week to present to council in the next budget session.

Hartley suggested that the urban arborist responsibilities should include going into parks and assess the health of current forest, trees, shrubs, assess dangerous trees that need to be removed, perform proper pruning and removal of dangerous trees, recommend in city ROW proper tree selections to provide variety and maintain health of those trees, and Identifying invasive species such as buckthorn, get groups to come in and help with eradication. Hieptas added that someone would be helpful in Jamaca storm pond project. Zuleger mentioned that the city conservatively lost over 700 trees in storm, including 100 trees of good diameter in Sunfish Lake. Zuleger informed the commission that he would be suggesting the acquisition of a heavy duty four-wheeler to Park commission at next meeting.

Blackford proposed that a contractor may be interested in paying to remove the lumber, if the damage was condensed enough. Hartley expressed that she is surprised the city hasn't hired anyone to do some of the stuff. Ames commended PW department for their hard work. Weis questioned whether land trust has rules in place for removing damaged trees.

Approval of July 15, 2013 Minutes

Blackford found typo in minutes. Steele suggested correction to item F.

M/S/P: Steele/Hieptas: To approve the minutes of 10-15-2012 as amended. Approved 5-0, Ames abstained.

Park Commission Updates

a. Lake Elmo Days (Zuleger)

Zuleger provided the commission with details about the upcoming Lake Elmo Days festival (which would take place on the first weekend after Labor Day). Zuleger expressed the need for volunteers and encouraged commissioners to attend.

b. Park Maintainer Hiring

Bouthilet provided the commission with an update that they had extended an offer to Thomas Kepp. Kepp has a degree in Park and Leisure with resource management emphasis. Kepp completed his internship for Audubon society and most recently was working for St. Francis parks department. Bouthilet stated that the candidate is young but has the knowledge/education and is confident he will grow into the position. The candidate currently has CDL, water and wastewater operations license as well. He will be sent to obtain his certified playground inspector, tree inspector licenses.

Park Survey Results (Zuleger)

Zuleger introduced the park survey results stating that we received roughly 13% return (mailed to 3,203 homes, 432 returned). Zuleger noted that the results were heavily loaded by an older demographic. He added the commission could possibly collaborate with NextGen group to try to obtain a larger sample from a younger demographic. Bouthilet mentioned that the trend that parks are not used on weekends is not just our community. Ames added that it might be attributed to the demographic as an older demographic not as dedicated to park use as a younger demographic. Steele asked to confirm that the demographic skew of the survey is representative of the population at a whole. Zuleger confirmed. Ames noted that the skew is not necessarily indicative of future demographic.

Ames suggests that use the chart for current park use when doing CIP and to not discount the mid-level bars on the graph, which would also indicate desired amenities. Steele suggested being careful to the current park use responses, about how they currently use parks as opposed to how they want to use parks.

Ames says that the current park use statistics are interesting but the future responses are going to provide more direction. Blackford asks if the maintenance issues are indicated more specifically anywhere on the survey. MacLeod responds there was another box with a space to write in answers and that she can get a list, which includes buckthorn, trash, poor restroom maintenance. Zuleger say MPCA (???) says lack of restrooms will drive down usage in younger families. Blackford mentions that the question about safety concerns asks what WOULD make you feel unsafe but doesn't necessarily indicate those problems currently exist. Zuleger mentioned that increased lighting and greater park use would drive gangs away. Ames stated that in a previous slide, users weren't citing safety issues as a big concern, keeping them from using the parks. Ames pointed out that he found that the desire for a dog park was interesting in terms of what the city does and does not have. Steele noted that it's interesting that from a community that places a lot of emphasis on baseball fields, the survey indicates that basketball courts and baseball facilities aren't necessarily high on the list of needs. Ames points out that the question reads what do we want more of, and people may already believe that we have enough of those amenities. Future park needs indicate that the need for trails for nature observation fits nicely with the City's dedication to open space. Zuleger added that the national trend for parks is open park space and moving away from organized sports. Hieptas mentioned that the indication for more open space for organized play doesn't fit the trend because it falls with the younger demographics. Ames pointed out that one can't put too much emphasis on the age groups because they become thin when split out especially in the younger demographic.

Zuleger suggested skipping the lake questions. Blackford asked if the answers to the lake questions will be used at all by council. Zuleger said that he had worked on an intake survey at the lakes that was compiled for DNR that provides more accurate information on actual lake use. Zuleger mentioned that the indication of swimming use seems high based on what he observed, and that he believes fishing and water skiing are proportional to what he observed. Blackford stated that there are some strong indicators from the lakes question. Zuleger said he will not comment on the council's thoughts. Hieptas pointed out that the use of the term 'wake use' for the City lake use responses is inaccurate based on the question, and continued to point out that the survey results indicated that low-wake activities are popular on city lakes. Zuleger says that the commission's concerns will be noted, and that the lake use questions will be considered invalid and will not be used by council for any decisions on lake policy. Zuleger added that he didn't think the responses on lake use would affect the DNR's decision either way.

Bouthilet commented (in response to the trail use question) that people want trails just not by their homes. Zuleger commented that the desire for multi-use trails indicates that trails would be wider. Zuleger mentioned that trail connection to the Gateway is highly desired and also ranked high on a survey conducted in Oakdale. Zuleger mentioned that signage keeps showing up on the survey and that the City might look into implementing some way-finding signs, and do some education on park amenities in an upcoming newsletter.

Schedule Commission Retreat

Zuleger suggested that the commission set a time for 4 to 6 hours to discuss the survey results and decide where they would like to dedicate the park dollars. He added that the library board went through and benefitted from a similar process. Zuleger suggested comparing the data from the new park survey to data that was collected from a previous survey. Zuleger mentioned that questions are being raised by developers wondering how we are spending the park land dedication fees. Zuleger warned that there have been court cases before when park land dedication fees have not been spent. Hartley agreed that a retreat is a good idea. Weis asked for a time preference on when to hold the retreat. It was decided by all that a weekend day would work best.

Trail Subcommittee Update

Weis stated that the committee had met twice and that thus far they have analyzed three different trails and how they marry up with grants. Hartley commented that DNR and Washington County regulations say that trails need to be 10' wide, and suggests revisiting the trail plan to ensure the trails qualify.

MPCA Property on Jamaca

Hieptas suggested deciding how to utilize the money that was allotted to do some landscaping on Jamaca. When last at Pebble Park Hieptas and Bouthilet met to talk. Bouthilet had folder from Kathy Widen outlying tree species and cost. Hieptas informed the commission that to complete all items suggested by the forester would be above budget (believed to be \$20K). Hieptas suggested paring down and planting fewer trees or planting smaller trees which would be work-arounds to fit the budget. Hieptas continued that the next step would be to pick what areas would like to work on and then need to submit to MCC. Blackford asked who takes care of the trees after MCC is finished with their work. Steele questioned the maintenance of larger trees. Bouthilet offered opinion that the bigger the tree the better as larger trees have a lower mortality rate. The commission discussed voting. Zuleger expressed concern about voting on fiscal matters without public notice, as this was an added agenda item. Weis suggested shelving until September's meeting; Hieptas responded that they weren't able to postpone the vote, because of the MCC deadline.

M/S/P: Steele/Ames To approve grant application for design not to exceed \$21,600. Approved 6-0

Meeting adjourned at 10:12 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Alyssa MacLeod, Recording Secretary