

## **MINUTES**

### **City of Lake Elmo Park Commission Monday, November 18, 2013**

**Members Present:** Chairperson Weis, Hartley, Silvernale, Ames, Frick, Nelson, Hietpas (6:39), Zeno (6:39), Steele: (6:58)

**Members Absent:**

**Others Present:** Administrator Zuleger, SPW Bouthilet, Council Member Reeves, Taxpayer Relations & Communications Coordinator MacLeod, Planning Commissioner Rolf Larson

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

#### **Approval of Agenda**

Ames asked to add Sunfish Lake Prairie Mowing under item 6D.

**M/S/P: Hartley/Ames: Agenda approved as amended. Approved 6-0**

#### **Approval of October 21, 2013 Minutes**

Under approval of agenda, item E, add baseball to the Mahtomedi conversation.

**M/S/P: Hartley/Ames: Minutes approved. Approved 6-0**

#### **Installation of New Park Commission Member – Mary Frick**

Weis introduced new park commission member Mary Frick. Frick shared reasons for interest in joining the commission. She expressed that she is an avid user of Sunfish Lake Park and one of her motivators is maintenance issues in the park. She feels now is her time to give back. She is thankful and eager for the opportunity to serve.

#### **Old Business**

##### **a. MPCA Tree Planting Update (Hietpas)**

Hietpas noted that there are no updates other than that she had received an email to signing contract with Conservation District. Hietpas wanted to ensure that signing the contract is acknowledging the cost for services if performed, or if signing would confirm commitment to all services listed.

##### **b. Trail Feasibility Study (Weis)**

Weis informed the commission that the council approved the “Not to exceed number” 4-1. He added that City Engineer Griffin is preparing to send RFP out.

#### **New Business**

##### **a. 2013 Park System Fall Audit Report (Hartley/MacLeod)**

A form was approved at the October meeting, which was used to conduct park audits. Hartley mentioned that her notations were written on the forms and that she hoped to have captured all comments. Notes were compiled into one document and provided to commissioners.

Ames asked Hartley to provide a brief overview of observations.

Hartley addressed each survey question and verbalized highlights of each section. Some of the primary observations included concerns with parking, lighting, visibility, accessibility, connectivity, landscaping and signage.

Hartley noted that Item 2.3 on the audit results was incorrect – that Tablyn should be marked ‘yes’ for having a trail or walkable area, and Pebble should be marked ‘no’.

Ames suggested that certain improvement items should be considered for Eagle projects – if the scope of work is appropriate. Hartley states that there is consistency with Eagle projects being included on the plan of work.

Zuleger mentioned that flooding issues in Lions Park will be addressed with the stormwater management plan that the city is working on with the county.

Hartley expressed that the commission wasn’t sure what the plan is for the Lions and VFW parks with the new village plan. Zuleger replied that the parks were guided as public facilities in the comp plan that was approved by Met Council about one hour prior to the commission meeting.

Ames asked to add the need for grading the VFW ball field to the list of observations.

In response to the Audit results, Bouthilet commented that trees along Highway 5 in Carriage Station were landscape partnership trees and that they don’t have an option to take those out. Hietpas responded said that the person planting them said that they were planted too close and should remove the ones that were crowded. Zuleger directed Hietpas to N. Johnson to acquire a contact.

Bouthilet mentioned that powder coating on equipment is not a viable option as it needs to be completed indoors in a heated environment, not in the field; it would be less expensive to replace the equipment.

Weis closed conversation by stating that he thinks the audit looks great and thinks it will be helpful going through the budget.

#### **M/S/P: Hartley/Ames: approve 2013 Park System fall audit. 7-0**

##### **b. Amended 2014 Park Commission Plan of Work (Zuleger)**

Zuleger reminded the commission that approval of the plan of work was set aside at Steele’s request, at the previous meeting, pending the results of the audit.

Zuleger passed out copies of the Parks budget, which included \$216,000 from the city budget (tax dollars), which would be used primarily for maintenance. This number increased from \$170,000 in 2013, and is roughly 10% of the City’s overall budget. The 2014 park budget also includes roughly \$900,000 in parkland dedication funds from developers. More parkland funds are expected in 2014 because of new plats. Parkland dedication fees are used for capital purchases and fixed assets.

Per the plan of work devised at the Park Retreat, the commission intends to allocate approximately \$300,000 of parkland dedication funds to projects in 2014.

Hartley noted that the budget for equipment costs has increased from the original plan of work (\$80 vs. \$65). Zuleger explained that Finance put in as placeholder and that the cost would look closer to the original plan after cost was distributed.

Steele suggested (based on audit findings) holding existing parks as priority, and put the majority of spending toward bringing them up-to-date, rather than invest a lot on building new parks.

Zuleger provided an update on Sanctuary Park. Getschel property will be coming in with a 40 home plat Gonyea Homes, the builder, is seeking guidance how to plan the park.

Hartley confirmed that a playground and a trail were top priority in Sanctuary Park. Ames suggested that it may be premature to do either one until they had a broader vision of the park with the inclusion of the Gonyea development. The commission decided to hold off on the park until 2015.

Frick asked if the commission had addressed needs in Sunfish Park. Weis clarified that the budget for work in Sunfish was included in the general park updates fund. He discussed the Sunfish Lake task force and noted that they were working on specific needs in the park. Ames added that the commission has put a lot of work and thought into Sunfish.

Steele suggested allocating \$120k toward spiffing up current parks and \$180K toward capital items. Ames asked which budget would fund current park improvements. Bouthilet responded that things like trees, grading benches etc. would come from the general maintenance budget and estimated those costs to be approximately \$5-10,000. He added that the extent of work would determine whether it's on CIP or maintenance budget.

Weis feels that they put something in Sanctuary but is concerned that it will not be a fit with future development. Zuleger said that they should have a better idea of Gonyea's contribution by January. Ames wants to make sure the new addition includes a trail that connects the two neighborhoods, and out of the neighborhood to 50<sup>th</sup>.

Zuleger asked the commission to clearly state their intentions for 2014. Ames suggested waiting to see what happens with other piece so they can plan around one contiguous park. Steele supported Ames decision with the leeway to add money in after January after seeing the actual plat. Hietpas added that they could possibly still get something done in 2014, by hiring a designer after the boundaries are drawn. Zuleger talked to park planner at met council that would be willing to help out at minimal cost.

Commissioners unanimously agree to wait to see the Landucci/Gonyea plan, with the understanding that they can add projects throughout the year as needed. The commission is anticipating acquiring approximately 7 acres (10% of land minus wetlands) to add to the park.

Steele clarifies that the commission will allocate \$80,000 for equipment and \$220 for improving current parks. He suggested devising a subcommittee to prioritize current park needs indicated on the audit. Zuleger suggested they form the committee soon so that they are ready to act when the snow is gone.

Reeves asked if the \$220k includes projects in Sunfish. Hartley responded that it does not include Sunfish as they are waiting for direction from task force. Steele suggests increasing the total budget to \$400,000 to include potential expenditures in Sunfish and Sanctuary. Zuleger reminds commissioners that they have \$900,000 to work with and advises they maintain \$100,000. Reeves suggested that a placeholder be made for Sunfish to mirror the council's idea that it is the crown jewel of the city.

Steele asked if there is a reason why the commission should add money now as opposed to deciding to add it in later. Zuleger answered that in the past they tried to tie the park CIP to the City CIP, but doesn't need to be that way. He said that the commission maintains the discretion to add money as it developer funds are a from a separate operating fund.

Larson stated that there has been no discussion on the possibility of finding grant money, and questioned if there are available grants that may apply. Zuleger answered that there may be some money available through the DNR and that they are currently seeking grant funds for are the LERT trail.

Zuleger noted that Hietpas had an interview with the Met Council and asked if she was appointed to the Park & Open Space Committee.

Hartley said that they are hoping a grant for the LERT may help achieve a warming house at Tablyn.

Ames asked if the allocation of funds without spending will have an impact on developers and council. Zuleger suggested that they present a plan to council before requesting fund approval.

Steele asked if \$220,000 in improvements in one year is doable. Bouthilet answered that the work would require more management than hands-on work, as a lot would be contract work. He didn't anticipate it being an issue.

Zuleger said he will amend the plan of work to include park specific items into the universal maintenance \$220k fund.

Reeves questioned the way the funding priorities are set up and anticipates question from council: if number one priority is on trails, why is the majority of budget dedicated to maintenance. Zuleger Trails and pathways are largely funded by grants. Hietpas pointed out that the plan of work mission statement is ongoing, that trail and path development is ongoing, not just priority for the next year.

#### **c. 2014 Budget Expenditure (Zuleger)**

Commission recommends expenditure of CIP funds for 2014: \$80,000 for equipment: mower and pickup \$220,000 for maintenance to existing parks- details to come later with the understanding that we may request additional funding for Sunfish and Sanctuary.

Ames added that \$220,000 informed by audit that has been completed and subsequent prioritization.

**M/S/P: Steele/Hartley: as amended 7-0**

#### **d. Sunfish Lake Park Ski Grooming (Zeno)**

Zeno asked about the ski grooming in Sunfish Lake Park, and how it is funded. He does not think grooming is sufficient based on his own experience, and comments from others. He also notes that the trails are often trampled by foot traffic. Zeno added that the commission made a recommendation last year that the trail be groomed a minimum of every two weeks or after snowfall exceeding 6". Bouthilet responded that it wasn't a money issue, but a matter of logistics. The city maintains a contract with Washington County; they groom their parks first.

Currently grooming is funded through the operational budget, 90% reimbursed through grant.

Bouthilet stated that they will start with Washington County this year, but are looking into other options, and using the County as back up. He mentioned that the City's goal is to get our own equipment/personnel to groom the day after, but they haven't been able to justify piece of equipment that's only used a few times each year. He added that there may be an affordable solution by using a utility vehicle.

Bouthilet said they were looking at Yellowstone Ginsu Groomer, a track groomer with roller, single track setter, which would do classic and skating side by side.

Ames asked if there was any logic to having the county continue to groom, with the City doing supplemental grooming. Bouthilet added that if the City were to get their own equipment, the only time we would need the County to go in and pack is if we had a deep snow.

The county is looking into new grooming equipment. This year they will be putting \$40,000 tires on a John Deere tractor.

Ames suggested separating trail users as a solution for competing uses; dedicating certain trails to skiing and certain trails to hiking was one potential solution. Zeno mentioned that people tend to stay off ski tracks if they have their own area to walk. Zeno added that it was a shame that park that good for x-county skiing, has been used as a training park is languishing. Frick shared that she advocates for dual use of single trails, which would attract more people.

Hartley suggested that the task force look into widening trails for dual use. Zeno felt the trails worked as they were, and widening was unnecessary. Zeno added that non-ski trails (deer trails) are often used and more exciting for activities like snowshoeing. Ames suggested bringing this topic to work group, and that there are areas outside of the existing trail network that could be utilized.

Bouthilet mentioned that snowshoers have expressed that they often prefer using deer trails and would be willing to help designate/clear trails

Frick appointed to task force by Weis to join members Nelson, Steele, Hietpas and Ames. Zeno would be willing to advise on trails.

Weis asked about accessories in the budget. Zuleger stated that accessories were spread across other departments; that the pick-up, and utility vehicles will be used in other departments.

#### **d. Prairie Mowing (Ames)**

Ames said that the commission had talked about having trail loop at Sunfish with a high point at vista with views. Ames asked if it would be appropriate to have more trail in prairie restoration area? Frick said that they would be flatter trails that would attract entry level skiers.

Bouthilet said that they could create trails with groomer once snow is down. To make the loop more identifiable for the following year, he suggested mowing it in summer.

### **Weis acknowledges visitors from government class at High School**

#### **Staff Report and Updates**

##### **a. Sanctuary Design Update (Zuleger)**

Zuleger talked to someone at Met Council who would be able to help place material. He also mentioned the opportunity to collaborate with Winona State students (senior park and rec program project). Hietpas thought using student work might be useful for any of the parks that they like to make updates to. Commissioners asked Zuleger to look into the student option.

##### **b. Sunfish Lake Park Fall Maintenance (Bouthilet)**

1. Deer Hunt went smoothly. 8 hunters shot 9 deer (5 bucks, 4 does). In park reserve 36 first weekend, 10 the second weekend. Total between two parks was 26 bucks and 31 does. Frick asked how many deer they thought were in the park. She asked if DNR recommends that the City conduct a deer hunt? Zuleger responded that the City actually places a request with the DNR, who does the count, and then the city works under the county. Most deer coming out of private lands. Frick expressed concern about reducing the deer where not a problem and not reducing enough where it is a problem. Zuleger responded that there are a lot of deer in the Jesuit area but are unable to hunt at that area. Zeno questioned if surrounding deer will fill in gap where they were thinned.
2. Gate/Drive – Staff started moving millings into the park and expected to start crossover the following day. The parking lot was about half done. Weis asked for an estimated completion date. Bouthilet said that they were on target to finish the day before Thanksgiving. Frick requested clarification on the parking lot. Bouthilet said they will roll, pack now and restore next spring. Ames asked if there was access to more road millings in future. Bouthilet responded that they had extra from Pebble parking lot that were used.

#### **Council Update**

##### **a. Acceptance of Mission Statement (Reeves)**

Reeves reiterated that Council did approve mission statement that park commission adopted. Positive comments from council on the work the Park Commission. Trail feasibility funds passed 4-1.

Weis asked Zuleger for an update on with Washington County trail funding. Zuleger responded that upon completion of the feasibility study, they will submit formal grant application to the Washington County park commission. He added that in order to go to the Met Council Park and Open Space Commission, they need to go through county first. It is also to Zuleger's understanding that there will be trail and pathway money in governor's bonding bill which will be allocated to DNR or to Met Council in this area.

Former Mayor Johnston currently serves as chair on Met Council Park and Open Space Commission; Hietpas has also recently applied to serve on the Commission.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:21 PM**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Alyssa MacLeod, Recording Secretary