

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES

JANUARY 10, 2023

The January meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, January 10, 2023, at Mendota Heights City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve.

1. Call to Order – Chair Bob Klepperich called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call – The following Commissioners were present: Chair Bob Klepperich, Commissioners: Jaffrey Blanks, Patrick Cotter, Stephanie Meyer, Michelle Muller, Dan Sherer and Amy Smith; absent: none. Student Representative: Meg Murphy. Staff present: Parks and Recreation Manager, Meredith Lawrence.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion Blanks/second Meyer to approve the agenda

AYES 7: NAYS 0

5.a Approval of Minutes from December 13, 2022 Regular Meeting

Motion Cotter/second Smith to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2022 Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

6. Citizen Comment Period (for items not on the agenda)

None.

7. Acknowledgement of Reports

Chair Klepperich read the titles of the three updates (Par 3, Recreation, and Park Improvement Updates) and polled the Commissioners for questions.

7.a Par 3 Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reported that the course has been closed since November. She stated that the November Par 3 Report was included in the packet and provided a brief review. She stated that while revenue should be complete for 2022, there could be a few more expenditures showing in the December report. She stated that staff is in the process of finalizing the leagues and summer programming for the course for 2023. She reviewed the capital improvement projects planned for 2023 at the course and clubhouse and stated that those projects will be funded directly from the golf course fund. She stated that two pieces of equipment ordered for 2022 have been received and the other two pieces of equipment should be received soon.

Commissioner Muller asked the estimated cost of the 2023 projects.

Ms. Lawrence provided some estimates for the different items that have been ordered, as well as estimates for other projects that have not yet been ordered or bid.

7.b Recreation Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence highlighted upcoming events, activities, and programming opportunities.

Commissioner Smith asked how the adaptive bowling has been promoted.

Ms. Lawrence replied that activity has not been heavily promoted, noting the recent staffing changes.

Commissioner Smith commented that she would be happy to help with reaching out to special education teachers.

Commissioner Blanks asked the age range for the gymnastics program.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the age range is from three to 12 and is full.

Commissioner Sherer asked for details on the art camps that were canceled.

Ms. Lawrence replied that there were going to be two art camps, but the necessary registration was not met. She believed that the program could be marketed earlier in the future. She stated that because she has been looped back into registration recently, she has been involved in discussions to improve marketing.

7.c Parks Improvement Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that the dugout and fencing project is on the contractor's schedule to be completed in the winter or early spring. She advised that the projects approved in the 2023 budget were listed in the packet and provided a brief update on the estimated times when those projects could potentially be completed.

Commissioner Cotter asked for details on the Wentworth tennis courts, as he believed the City received a previous grant for that project.

Ms. Lawrence stated that an application has not been submitted for that project but noted that the Marie Park tennis courts did receive funding from that grant program in 2019. She stated that this project at Wentworth would be a full reconstruction of the court with new fencing.

Commissioner Cotter asked how the group did for 2022 compared to what had been budgeted.

Ms. Lawrence provided a brief summary of the different projects for 2022 and how those compared to the budgeted amounts. She recognized that it was a different year for projects as some did not move forward and some of the projects that occurred were not necessarily planned. She commented that she was confident with the prices received compared to the prices other cities paid for projects and the costs in the market.

Commissioner Sherer asked for details on when certain projects would be bid.

Ms. Lawrence noted that at this time staff is focusing on preparing the projects that will require more public engagement (playground replacement and skate park) and will bid the other improvement projects closer to spring. She stated that she has spoken with the contractors that have previously bid those projects and they were confident they would have availability. She noted that once staffing is back to full strength, they would have more time to devote to all aspects.

Commissioner Sherer referenced the change that was made to include the canopy as a bid alternate and asked if any specifications were listed in terms of size.

Ms. Lawrence replied that there were no specifications as the size could vary based on the size of the playground submitted, as the canopy was intended to be over the deck area.

Motion Blanks/second Smith to acknowledge the staff reports.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

8. New Business

8.a Approval of Revisions to the Picnic Shelter Policy

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided background information on the number of picnic shelters available and the existing process for reservations, noting the increasing desire for people to rent the picnic shelters. She stated that staff continues to review the policy each year to suggest amendments to make the process smoother and easier for users and staff. She stated that staff recommends that the dates for the submission of tournaments and picnic shelter requests be aligned to ensure that the capacity at Mendakota Park is not exceeded. She stated that a copy of the existing policy with the suggested revisions was included in the packet for review.

Chair Klepperich suggested replacing “due on” with “will be accepted beginning”.

Ms. Lawrence stated that staff does suggest that applications be submitted by the deadline and noted that applications are still accepted after that date.

Commissioner Cotter stated that he does not believe the language reads as intended. He suggested using “shall commence” rather than “will be due on”.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the suggested language within the policy as presented matches the language within the field and facility policy. She stated that while she would not recommend changing the language within the field and facility use policy, she would agree with the language correction suggested by Commissioner Cotter for the picnic shelter reservation policy.

Commissioner Meyer noted that the Commission agrees with the change as suggested by Commissioner Cotter.

Commissioner Sherer asked if a priority group submitted a request prior to February 1st would be guaranteed their reservation.

Ms. Lawrence replied that there are not user groups for picnic shelters. She stated that this policy is different than the field and facility use policy and the intention would be to align the deadlines for the two submissions.

Commissioner Sherer asked how staff would determine priority for rentals received on the same day for the same time period from three different residents.

Ms. Lawrence stated that people will bring in requests prior to the deadline, which are timestamped upon receipt, but staff will not review the requests until the deadline.

Commissioner Meyer stated that perhaps the policy could also state that the application will be available one month prior.

Commissioner Sherer asked how the language compares to the canoe rack rentals.

Ms. Lawrence replied that language matches the language of the field and facility use policy.

Commissioner Cotter provided suggested language.

Ms. Lawrence stated that they could add language that states permits received after the deadline will be reviewed and considered on a first come, first serve basis. She noted that some residents will submit their application the first day, while some will call the day before their requested date. She explained that the intent is to address capacity and prevent a situation where there is a tournament occurring at the park and a reservation was already approved for an event at a shelter. She noted that the different shelters have different capacity and amenities and therefore it is not as simple as relocating a shelter reservation.

Commissioner Muller asked how often this conflict has occurred in recent years.

Ms. Lawrence replied that they have not kicked anyone out, but they are seeing that there are issues with capacity at Mendakota when there is a tournament and therefore staff is trying to get ahead of that situation.

Commissioner Smith suggested making these revisions for this year and reviewing it after the season to see how well it worked.

Commissioner Sherer asked how often requests are received early, using the example of a February request for an August shelter rental.

Commissioner Meyer suggested changing the language, noting that applications will be available and could be dropped off but would not be reviewed until the deadlines.

Commissioner Cotter provided grammatical suggestions.

Commissioner Meyer did not believe the grammatical changes were needed.

Ms. Lawrence provided suggested language to use. She stated that she wants to ensure the policy is clear.

Motion Cotter/second Blanks to recommend approval of the revisions to the picnic shelter reservation policy as discussed.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

8.b Approve Memorial Bench

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided background information on the memorial park bench donation program. She reported that two park bench donations have been received to be installed near the Country Day School and Ivy Hills Park as shown on the map provided to be in memory of Tyler Newman. She reviewed the proposed language for the plaques. She stated that staff is grateful for the donations and agrees with the proposed locations.

Chair Klepperich appreciated the donation from the family for the benches.

Commissioner Meyer asked if staff has reached out to the school to ask if they agree with the location.

Ms. Lawrence replied that she is not aware of staff reaching out to the school for this purpose.

Commissioner Meyer stated that she did not think the school would object but believed it would be a good faith effort to reach out and advise them of the placement.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she could reach out to the school before the Council meeting.

Motion Blanks/second Muller to recommend approval of the park bench donations as proposed.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

Commissioner Sherer offered condolences to the family and noted that this is a great way to honor his memory.

9. Unfinished Business

9.a Review Draft 2023 Work Plan

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that a worksession was held in December to discuss the 2023 goals and priorities. She stated that she used that discussion, as well as the strategic planning document, to develop the draft work plan. She noted that the intent would be to have the items in the work plan accomplished during 2023. She reviewed the details of the draft work plan with the Commission.

Chair Klepperich noted that action is not needed on this item tonight and this was meant to be a review and opportunity to provide input. He noted that the Commission did accomplish the items within the 2022 work plan as well.

Ms. Lawrence noted that if there are no changes suggested, the plan could be adopted tonight as well.

Commissioner Cotter stated that he likes numbers one and two and believed that they are related in both sponsorship and engagement. He stated that perhaps the financial consultant could provide input on sponsorship by businesses at the municipal fields. He noted that those sponsorships could help to fund field maintenance and advertise local businesses.

Ms. Lawrence stated that staff views sponsorships in two different ways, such as program or event sponsorships and tangible asset sponsorship. She stated that staff is more interested in the parameters from the City perspective. She stated that they would gauge whether the Council would support banner type sponsorship in parks and if there was support, they would then discuss the type of advertising that would be allowed in parks.

Commissioner Cotter agreed that it would be helpful to answer those questions as it could be a win/win to generate revenue for park maintenance and advertise local businesses.

Commissioner Meyer referenced the goal to increase senior programming. She asked if it would be helpful to reach out to Mendota and Lilydale on potential senior programming as well. She referenced the item relating to QR codes on park signage and asked if that should be more specific.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that staff could reach out to surrounding communities related to senior programming and promotion. She stated that she would look to the Commission related to the goals of the QR codes and whether that is related to specific projects or parks feedback as a whole. She stated that she would want to see a plan for the feedback received. She noted that she can bring that item back for a future agenda item and continued discussion.

Chair Klepperich stated that he brought this concept forward and explained that he saw a QR code in a park in another community asking for input on the desires for the park in the next five years. He stated that it seemed like a great opportunity to gather more engagement.

Commissioner Muller noted that the park signs include a number for the parks department and therefore in the transition to a more digital time, the QR code could be helpful in gaining input from the public.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the only signage in the parks that have phone numbers are for the skating rinks in the case there are problems with the lights. She stated that there are stickers on the playground that provide a phone number for emergencies. She stated that it would make sense to place those signs in high traffic areas and that could be part of the future discussion.

Chair Klepperich encouraged to keep this item simple and agreed that the details could be worked out at a future meeting. He acknowledged the work of Ms. Lawrence to create these documents and expressed thanks. He also thanked the Commission for the input provided at the worksession.

Commissioner Muller referenced the item related to working with West Saint Paul to determine whether a joint facility would be feasible and asked for more details.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the city of West Saint Paul is in the process of updating its parks system master plan and is conducting a feasibility study for a community center. She noted that this would be a good opportunity to determine if it would be feasible for that to be a joint facility.

Motion Blanks/second Smith to adopt the 2023 work plan and strategic planning calendar.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

9.b Event Update – Frozen Fun Fest 2023

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an update on the details of the 2023 Frozen Fun Fest which will occur February 10th through February 12th.

Chair Klepperich acknowledged the work of Ms. Lawrence in taking over this event with the loss of a staff member from the team.

10. Staff Announcements

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence shared the following announcements:

- Ice rinks have been busy since opening on December 28th. Additional warming house staff will be needed for February.
- Complaints have been received on the quality of the ice due to the weather. She commented that the parks crew that flood the rinks also plow, and plowing roads will always remain higher priority over rink flooding. She appreciated patience in establishing ice quality.

- Seasonal jobs for summer will be posted in the next two weeks on the City website.
- Expressed thanks to Commissioners Smith and Cotter and Chair Klepperich for their dedication to the Commission. She noted that this is their last meeting, and it has been an honor to work with all three members.
- Other events can be found on the City's website

11. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Murphy commented on the upcoming events and programming for youth which is great to see.

12. Commission Comments and Park Updates

Commissioner Smith

- Staff did a great job with snow removal from the Friendly Hills rink and there has been a lot of sledding activity
- Thanked Ms. Lawrence for all that she has learned from her in her time on the Commission
- Appreciated the ability to work with the other members in her time on the Commission

Commissioner Cotter

- Excited about the Blade to the Blue event that will be held at Wentworth and can feature some of the updates to the park
- Thanked Ms. Lawrence for her comments and passion. He recognized the hard work that she does and excellent job she does navigating all aspects.
- Thankful to serve with the other members of the Commission and noted that it has been an honor to serve

Commissioner Blanks

- Have been skating at Wentworth Park recently with his kids
- Will miss the three members leaving along with the diversity that their opinions provide

Commissioner Muller

- Rogers Lake continues to be beautiful
- Her children have been enjoying the skating rinks and sledding hill at Friendly Hills
- Will also miss the members of the Commission that will be leaving as well as the leadership provided by Chair Klepperich

Commissioner Meyer

- Marie Park continues to be busy with winter activity
- Thanked staff for their preparation for the winter season and snow clearing
- Expressed thanks for the leadership provided by Chair Klepperich and looked forward to seeing the departing members in the community

Commissioner Sherer

- Has not noticed much activity at Hagstrom King or Market Square in the winter months
- Commented that indoor space is needed during these winter months and looked forward to collaboration with West Saint Paul on that potential
- Thanked the departing Commission members and appreciated the input they provided from different perspectives

Chair Klepperich

- Snow has been removed from the basketball court at Valley View and trails are open at Ivy Hills
- Read a statement expressing his sentiments from his time on the Commission, thanking his family, City staff, and the other members of the Commission he has worked with in his time on the Commission

13. Adjourn

Motion Blanks/Second Muller to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 PM

AYES 7: NAYS 0

Minutes drafted by:
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