

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

DRAFT PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 14, 2023

The February meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, at Mendota Heights City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve.

1. Call to Order – Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call – The following Commissioners were present: Commissioners: Jaffrey Blanks, Tica Hanson, Stephanie Meyer, Michelle Muller, Jo Schifsky, Dan Sherer, and Michael Toth; absent: None. Student Representative: Meg Murphy. Staff present: Parks and Recreation Manager, Meredith Lawrence, and Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek.

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence introduced the new Commission members and each member of the Commission introduced themselves.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence asked for nominations for the position of Chairperson.

Motion Meyer/second Muller, to nominate Jaffrey Blanks as Chairperson.

Commissioner Blanks accepted the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

Chair Blanks asked for nominations for the position of Vice Chairperson.

Motion Blanks/second Meyer, to nominate Michelle Muller as Vice Chairperson.

Commissioner Muller accepted the nomination.

There were no other nominations.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

5. Approval of Agenda

Motion Meyer/second Sherer, to approve the agenda

AYES 7: NAYS 0

6.a Approval of Minutes from January 10, 2023 Regular Meeting

Motion Sherer/second Muller to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2023 Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

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

None.

8. Acknowledgement of Reports

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

8.a Par 3 Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence presented the preliminary fourth quarter financial report and provided a summary of the 2022 activity. She reviewed the positions that staff is soliciting for the course in preparation for the upcoming season. She stated that they will be ready to open the course when weather allows. She noted that she will present the annual report for the course at the March meeting. She stated that the equipment that had been delayed in 2022 should be received prior to the 2023 season.

Commissioner Toth commended staff for working diligently to keep expenses level from 2021 to 2022.

Ms. Lawrence provided additional details on the golf course fund and how funds are allocated with the goal for the golf course to be self-sufficient. She noted that the Council makes the decision on whether equipment and/or capital projects should be funded from the golf course fund or general fund.

8.b Recreation Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an update on upcoming recreation opportunities and summer programming. She also provided an overview of recent recreation events and activity. She reviewed the seasonal staff that the City is looking to hire related to parks and recreation. She noted that the new Recreation Coordinator will join the department in March.

Commissioner Muller stated that she is excited about the games and coffee program and asked how many residents have been attending.

Ms. Lawrence replied that about eight residents have been attending each event. She stated that they have been enjoying the event and will continue to offer it during the golf season as well.

Commissioner Muller stated that perhaps they could add donuts as well.

Commissioner Sherer asked if there is a reason the Wentworth ice performs more poorly than Marie.

Ms. Lawrence replied that in previous years the grass base has been a cause for poor ice conditions. She noted that is still the only rink that does not have an asphalt, acrylic base, which could be the reason. She stated that when she visited the rink the previous day there was exposed asphalt in multiple places. She stated that Marie and Friendly Hills are not much better at this point because of the weather.

Commissioner Sherer stated that perhaps staff could provide a review of the skating seasons compared to the past to determine the value of the rinks and related financial decisions.

Commissioner Toth asked if there was difficulty staffing the warming houses this year and whether the warming houses were not open because of lack of staff.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the maintenance staff was challenging as the part-time staff went back to college and full-time staff had to take over with flooding.

8.c Parks Improvement Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reported that the dugout fence work is planned to begin March 27th. She reviewed the projects that were included in the 2023 budget, noting that staff has been working on developing the plans for those projects and provided an overview of the projects and anticipated timelines.

Commissioner Meyer asked for clarification on the type of skate park, noting that she believed the subcommittee recommended concrete.

Ms. Lawrence stated that input has been received in support of both concrete and modular features. She stated that they reviewed options for both, and the Council had concerns with reducing the footprint of the park, as the cost for concrete features would be higher than the modular features. She noted that there are full concrete skate parks in neighboring communities and therefore the modular park would be unique to this area. She provided more details on the process and how it is different than a playground redesign process.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek stated that the consultant could generate design documents that could be bid upon, or the contract could be awarded to the consultant they have been working with if they feel that is the best option. He stated that the Council has directed staff to focus on the modular park option and the survey is asking for input on the features that would be desired within the park.

Commissioner Muller commented that they would seem to be locked in with American Ramp Company because they are the only company on the list that builds modular.

Mr. Ruzek commented that the main consultant is Bolton and Menk and American Ramp Company is more of a sub consultant.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he would guess that many other communities choose the concrete option because it is more durable.

Mr. Ruzek replied that the concrete does typically have less maintenance. He stated that American Ramp Company has stated that their ramps have a warranty of 20 years and provided more information on the surfacing options. He noted that using concrete would reduce the skate park to one third of the existing size.

Commissioner Muller commented that there would be opportunity to partner with other organizations in the community to fundraise. She expressed frustration that this decision to use modular would seem to box the City into using American Ramp Company as the other companies on the list only build concrete. She stated that the survey for the skate park is lengthy and believed that the same information could be gained without requiring input on all the features.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the more input they have on each response, the more information that the designers have to build a park that is desired by Mendota Heights residents.

Commissioner Meyer asked if the survey would be continued or revised if the desired level of input is not received.

Ms. Lawrence stated that 32 responses have been received thus far. She noted that the company has said that is a high level of responses for this type of survey and feel confident that they have received good feedback.

Commissioner Meyer asked if they could put a signs out with a QR code linking to the survey.

Ms. Lawrence noted that the Dirty Dota shared the survey link of their social media as the link was also shared on 12 different community group pages.

9. New Business

9.a Approval of Commission Bylaws

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that each year in February, the Commission reviews the rules of order. She stated that staff received direction this year to covert the rules of order into bylaws and provided an overview noting the change to attendance language.

Commissioner Meyer asked if there would be an allowance for hybrid meetings or virtual attendance. She used the scenario that someone may not be feeling well but feels forced to attend to avoid attendance ramifications.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the City currently does not have the technology to properly hold a hybrid meeting.

Motion Muller/second Toth to approve the Commission Bylaws.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

9.b Assign Commission Parks

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that each year the Commission assigns two parks to each Commission member. She reviewed the items that should be reported back to the Commission.

Chair Blanks stated that he would like to review the parks held in 2022 and determine if the Commissioners would like to retain those or relinquish those into the pool and the remainder can be assigned.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he would like to keep Hagstrom King and would be willing to put Market Square back into the pool. He commented that he would also like to take Civic Center.

Commissioner Muller commented that she would like to keep Rogers Lake and Kensington.

Commissioner Meyer stated that she would like to keep Marie and would be okay giving up Victoria Highlands if someone else were interested.

Chair Blanks commented that he would like to keep Valley and would be open to giving up Mendakota if someone else were interested.

The parks were assigned as follows:

- Commissioner Sherer: Hagstrom King and Civic Center
- Commissioner Muller: Rogers Lake and Kensington
- Commissioner Meyer: Marie and Valley View
- Chair Blanks: Valley and Market Square
- Commissioner Toth: Friendly Hills and Mendakota
- Commissioner Schifsky: Ivy Hills and Wentworth
- Commissioner Hanson: Victoria Highlands and Dog Park

9.c 2023 Summer Recreation Catalog

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an overview of the recreational catalog for programming, noting that online registration will open on February 28th at 9 a.m.

10. Unfinished Business

10.a Pickleball Light Program Review for 2023

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that the Commission is asked to review the recreational light program at Marie Park and make a recommendation for the upcoming year. She provided background information on the original request received to allow lighting of the pickleball courts to allow evening play, the pilot program that ran in 2021, and the lighting that was allowed for 2022 at Marie Park. She stated that a similar program was considered to bring lighting to Friendly Hills for the same purpose but did not move forward because of concern expressed by nearby residents. She noted that no complaints have been received related to the 2022 season at Marie Park. She stated that the Council requested that this item be reviewed annually. She estimated a cost of \$30 per month for the lighting. She noted that staff recommends continuation of the lighting at Marie Park as implemented in 2022.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if the lights would be better balanced for multi-use when LED lighting is installed.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the lighting has been converted at Friendly Hills and they did install shades to ensure the light does not bleed. She stated that they have had issues with the existing lighting at Marie and are looking forward to the LED conversion.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek noted that because Friendly Hills already has the LED lighting and Marie does not, it would be a good opportunity to compare the lighting at each park.

Commissioner Meyer asked for logistical information on the push button lighting at Marie.

Ms. Lawrence explained how the light works.

Motion Sherer/second Hanson to recommend continuation of the pickleball lighting program at Marie Park as it was during 2022.

Further discussion: Commissioner Toth stated that he would like more information and asked if this needs to be voted on tonight.

Ms. Lawrence replied that it could be delayed one month but staff would want to ensure sufficient time to implement the spring lighting.

Mr. Ruzek commented that once the ice is out, pickleball players will be asking for the nets to be installed.

Commissioner Toth commented that this issue is new to him, and he would like to fully understand concerns of the neighbors with lighting until 9 p.m. before making a vote.

Chair Blanks asked if staff has received complaints related to the lighting.

Ms. Lawrence replied that she has not received any complaints since this program began. She stated that if public engagement is desired, she would like input on the type of engagement that is wanted. She confirmed with Mr. Ruzek that once the ice is gone the pickleball players will want to play.

Commissioner Toth stated that he would want to reach out to the people he knows in that area to solicit feedback. He asked if the lighting could be reduced to 8 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that the Commission could make whatever recommendation it sees fit.

Chair Blanks stated that the City Administrator had authority in 2022 to cancel the program at anytime if she felt necessary.

Commissioner Toth stated that with that understanding he could support moving forward.

Commissioner Sherer provided some additional background information on how the 9 p.m. was established and noted that it seemed to be successful as no complaints were received.

Commissioner Hanson stated that she lives in that area and is part of the pickleball community. She stated that the neighbors support that the lighting is self-administered and therefore if no one is using the courts, the lights are not on. She commented that many pickleball players live directly adjacent and therefore do not complain. She stated that the neighbors enjoy seeing people using the park and being active. She noted that kids and seniors are playing pickleball together which is rare in a sport.

Commissioner Sherer asked if they have looked into having a switch for the basketball court separate from pickleball.

Mr. Ruzek commented that would be a substantial cost. He stated that if lighting is not desired for the basketball courts, the easiest solution would be to remove the bulbs.

Ms. Lawrence noted that the lighting for the basketball court is used in the winter for the pleasure rink.

Commissioner Meyer noted the popularity of pickleball in the community.

It was confirmed that the language would be included that would provide the City Administrator the authority to discontinue the program if issues arise.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

10.b Frozen Fun Fest Recap

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that the 2nd Annual Frozen Fun Fest was held this past weekend. She provided an overview of the different events that took place. She welcomed any input the Commission may have for 2024 implementation.

Commissioner Sherer asked if there is a way to make the medallion hunt easier for staff, perhaps partnering with a creative writing class.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she and the Police Chief enjoy writing the clues. She stated that helps to keep the clues confidential. She recognized the snafu that all the clues were released at the same time on day one.

Commissioner Hanson suggested a sledding competition at Sibley Hill.

Commissioner Muller asked for input on how the setting of Friendly Hills was compared to Mendakota.

Ms. Lawrence stated that it was estimated that over 400 people attended at Friendly Hills, much more than Mendakota but acknowledged that the warmer weather probably brought in more people. She stated that kids were sledding, ice skating, playing ball, etc. and therefore Friendly Hills seemed to work well.

Chair Blanks commented that it was well attended and agreed with the rotation of parks to feature different parks in the community. He stated that the only feedback he received was that residents would have liked more food trucks.

Commissioner Meyer commented that perhaps Wentworth could be considered as a location once the new warming house is constructed.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the biggest concern with Marie and Wentworth would be related to parking. She stated that she does like the idea of moving the activity to different parks and noted that they did see people walking to the event from the neighborhood.

Commissioner Blanks noted that he spoke with people that had not been to Friendly Hills before the event.

Commissioner Meyer commented that the promotion for Cupids Crawl was great and asked if it was successful.

Ms. Lawrence commented that it was the first time for Cupids Crawl and six businesses participated and got a fair amount of business from the event. She estimated 100 people participating. She stated that the puzzle competition was very successful with full registration, a wait list, and additional interest. She noted that they are looking for a location that would have more space to increase the size of the event next year.

11. Staff Announcements

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence shared the following announcements:

- Encouraged people to apply for the seasonal positions.

- The new Recreation Coordinator will begin March 13th.
- The new Recycling Coordinator started January 17th.
- Warming houses may have to be closed soon during to weather conditions
- The Council would like to host a bond payoff celebration event at the Par 3 in April and welcomed input from the Commission via email
- Other events can be found on the City's website

12. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Murphy commented that the recent winter events were successful which is great to see. She stated that she is also glad to see the skate park progress forward and hoped more people will engage in the survey to develop the plans. She noted that there is a lot of variety in the summer recreation catalog.

13. Commission Comments and Park Updates

Commissioner Meyer

- Marie continues to be popular
- Thanks to City staff for clear roads and trails
- Thanks to Ms. Lawrence for the hard work on Frozen Fun Fest

Commissioner Hanson

- Thanked City staff for the snow removal

Commissioner Schifsky

- Asked about the surface of the pickleball court at Marie; staff noted that has not been budgeted for 2023 but could potentially be included for 2024

Chair Blanks

- Valley is in great condition for walking
- Market Square is great and he recently had pizza there

Commissioner Toth

- It is great to be back on the Commission and he looks forward to the work ahead
- Will be out of town and unable to attend the March meeting

Commissioner Muller

- Thanked City staff for the parks continuing to be walkable in the winter
- Thanked Ms. Lawrence for her work on the Frozen Fun Fest events

Commissioner Sherer

- Welcomed the new Commission members
- Recognized former Commissioner Smith for bringing forward the concept for Frozen Fun Fest which continues to get better each year
- MHAA held a Board meeting the previous day and approved a name change to the Two Rivers Athletic Association to better align with the community served

14. Adjourn

Motion Meyer/Second Hanson to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 PM

AYES 7: NAYS 0

Minutes drafted by:
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