

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 11, 2025

The March meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at Mendota Heights City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve.

1. Call to Order – Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call – The following Commissioners were present: Chair Jaffrey Blanks, Commissioners: Michelle Muller, Jo Schifsky, Daniel Van Lith, and Michael Toth; absent: Commissioner Jennifer Weichert, and Dan Sherer. Student Representative present: Evengeline Fuentes. Staff present: Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence, Recreation Program Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt, Recreation Facilities Coordinator Trey Carlson, Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek, and Assistant City Engineer Lucas Ritchie.

2.a Election of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence opened the floor for nominations for the position of Chair.

Motion Muller/second Schifsky to elect Jaffrey Blanks as Chairperson of the Parks and Recreation Commission. AYES 5: NAYS 0

Chair Blanks opened the floor for nominations for the position of Vice-Chairperson.

Motion Blanks/second Muller to elect Jo Schifsky as Vice-Chairperson of the Parks and Recreation Commission. AYES 5: NAYS 0

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2.b Introduction of New Commissioner

Chair Blanks welcomed Commissioner Van Lith.

2.c Introduction of Recreation Facilities Coordinator

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence introduced Recreation Facilities Coordinator Trey Carlson.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion Muller/second Schifsky to approve the agenda. AYES 5: NAYS 0

5.a Approval of Minutes from December 10, 2024, Regular Meeting

Motion Schifsky/second Muller to approve the minutes of the December 10, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting. AYES 5: NAYS 0

5.b Approval of Minutes from January 14, 2025, Regular Meeting

Motion Schifsky/second Muller to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission Work Session. AYES 5: NAYS 0

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

None.

7. Acknowledgement of Reports

Chair Blanks read the titles of the five updates (Par 3, Park Improvement, Recreation, Park System Master Plan, and Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan Updates) and polled the Commissioners for questions.

7.a Par 3 Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that they are actively preparing to open the course when the weather allows. She provided an update on the status of capital improvement projects for the course. She noted that the final reports for 2024 were provided to the Commissioners tonight. She stated that 2024 saw a record number of rounds and the course fully sustained itself in 2024.

Commissioner Schifsky asked the type of user that is renting the facility in regard to “rental fees?”

Ms. Lawrence clarified that is the expenditure to rent the golf carts and portable bathrooms.

Commissioner Toth referenced the decision for the City to purchase the property and the questions residents had about whether the course would be profitable. He commented that the golf course is doing well for the City and its residents and looked forward to the future.

Ms. Lawrence noted that when she joined the City in 2017 the course had 7,000 rounds of golf that year, which has tripled. She appreciated the support from the community in sticking with it to allow the course to get to the point where it can support itself.

7.b Recreation Update

Recreation Program Coordinator Eisfeldt provided an overview of the warming house season and winter skating season. She thanked the warming house staff and rink flooders for making the season a success. She highlighted upcoming events, activities, and programming opportunities.

Commissioner Schifsky thanked staff for the incorporation of the sensory hour, which makes the Touch a Truck event more accessible to the whole community.

Ms. Lawrence noted the high increase in participation from the previous year for the event and commended Recreation Program Coordinator Eisfeldt for her efforts in programming and events.

Commissioner Muller commented that Winter Fest was very well attended and well done.

Chair Blanks echoed the comments about the sensory hour noting that it pulled people from outside of the community as well, noting that some people drove 45 minutes to participate in that event.

7.c Park Improvement Project Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence noted the items that were approved in the budget for 2025. She provided an update on the playground Request for Proposals (RFP) process with the City Council, noting that the RFPs are due back to the City

this Friday and reviewed the timeline. She provided an update on the other planned park projects and their anticipated timelines.

Commissioner Muller asked how Valley Park was chosen for ballfield improvements.

Ms. Lawrence commented that the Two Rivers Athletic Association (TRAA) was solicited for input and that was their desire.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if there is any concern with the other construction project happening in that area.

Ms. Lawrence replied that access to the parking lot for a day or two is needed for the ballfield and therefore there is no concern with the other work.

7.d Park System Master Plan Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that the 95 percent plan is due tomorrow. She stated that internal staff will then review that plan, which will then be released for a two-week period to allow review by the Commission and Council. She stated that a two-week period will then open for the public to view the document, and a presentation will follow at a City Council meeting. She stated that the budget does not allow for two presentations from the consultant and therefore the Commission is invited to attend the Council meeting where it is presented. She noted that once the plan is adopted, they will hold a workshop to discuss implementation of the plan.

Student Representative Fuentes asked how public comment will be gathered on the plan.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the plan will be available on the website for people to download and view. She noted that they will also publicize the plan on other City platforms and social media. She welcomed any additional ideas.

Commissioner Muller asked for more details on the public comment.

Ms. Lawrence commented that they will open the public comment period and if the comments significantly differ from the public comment that has already been received, then staff would need to address that. She stated that the public comment will be used to guide implementation and will hopefully show that they are on the right path. She stated that residents will be encouraged to provide comments via email or phone calls and that will be included in the presentation of the plan.

8. New Business

8.a Ivy Hills Basketball Court Recommendation

Assistant City Engineer Lucas Ritchie provided background information noting that the Commission previously discussed this at its July 9, 2024, meeting. He reviewed historical feedback related to drainage concerns and the location of the court in relation to the mature trees. He reviewed the concept layout, the activity that has occurred thus far, and the proposed improvements. He stated that notices were sent to properties within 350 feet of the park property noting that generally there was support for expansion of the court size, and noted that there were some concerns with drainage, additional lighting, and potential noise with increased use. He stated that there are no additional lights planned. He reviewed alternatives that could be considered and the available funding. He reviewed the proposed schedule and next steps.

Commissioner Muller asked the number of full basketball courts currently. It was confirmed that the current full courts are located at Marie Park, Hagstrom King, and Mendakota Park. She asked if they were adjustable hoops at all parks and was informed, they were not.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek replied that they had some problems with the adjustable hoops and determined those were not a successful addition to the parks.

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that two emails were received prior to the meeting and have been provided to the Commission.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if there is an option to change the orientation of the court from east/west to north/south.

Mr. Ritchie replied that would not be an option without additional reclaim material being brought onsite. He stated that they did not have as much reclaim material as they anticipated from the road project to use in this project while still accomplishing the drainage improvements.

Commissioner Van Lith referenced the option to make a half-court with the other half painted for other activities such as four square. He asked if there would be an option for a full court that still incorporates the other activity painting.

Mr. Ritchie replied that would be an option. He did not anticipate that the cost to paint on four square or hopscotch would add much to the project cost.

Commissioner Muller asked if four square and hopscotch were painted on at Valley.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that was done at Valley and could be done here as well.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that she would support that.

Chair Blanks agreed it could increase usage. He asked for more details on the drainage improvements for the court.

Mr. Ritchie provided information on the grading and drainage improvements that were already done and how the pad would be constructed to aid in drainage. He stated that a rain garden could be installed at a future time, but would not be done as part of this project.

Commissioner Schifsky asked what is going to happen with the existing basketball court.

Mr. Ritchie replied that the existing basketball court was buried as part of the grading and drainage improvements that were completed.

Commissioner Toth asked why it was buried and not removed.

Mr. Ritchie explained that area was so saturated to begin with that if they started to dig and remove that surface, they were unsure what problems would arise, and the area would become less stable.

Commissioner Toth asked what would happen with the freeze and thaw cycles with the pad buried below.

Mr. Ritchie replied that the previous court had already settled prior to being buried and therefore is not anticipated that there would be a failure caused from that.

Chair Blanks noted that approximately \$18,000 would come from the special parks fund and stated that it was his understanding that there would not be a cost for the reclaim material as there was a savings to the contractor received by being able to use that storage space and not having to dispose of the reclaim.

Mr. Ritchie replied that the exchange was for the reclaim material itself, which would have had a cost of \$50,000 to \$100,000 for the City to obtain that fill material from another source. He stated that the grading and compaction of that material was also covered by the contractor.

Mr. Ruzek replied that the contractor also included the restoration. He noted that the City expenses were always identified to be the new court surface and storm sewer.

Commissioner Van Lith referenced the protected tree and asked if the east/west orientation would have less tree impact.

Mr. Ritchie confirmed that the proposed orientation would impact fewer trees.

Chair Blanks invited members of the public to provide input.

Joe Walsh, 1086 Sylvandale, stated that he is familiar with having the court behind his deck. He commented that from experience there are a lot of kids throwing basketballs from half-court and missing, which causes the ball to run down the ditch and into his yard. He asked if a small chain link fence could be placed ten or 15 feet behind the court to stop the balls from running into his yard. He asked if some trees, shrubs, or bushes could be added between his yard and the court to dampen the noise that travels as he imagined that a full court would be used more than the half court.

Charlie Bands, 1100 Sylvandale, stated that he does not object to the basketball concept. He was happy that there was no additional lighting proposed and asked if there could be assurance that would not be added in the future.

Chair Blanks commented that there are no plans for lights will be added, but he cannot guarantee what would happen in the future of the park.

Mr. Bands suggested that a condition be added to the resolution that additional lighting would not be added. He commented that this area has always been wet and was unsure how this would last because of the drainage issues.

Joe Fitzgerald, 1054 Butler, asked if the basketball court is guaranteed to be constructed.

Commissioner Muller commented that they are making the decision tonight.

Ms. Lawrence commented that the intention is to replace the old basketball court with a new basketball court. She stated that they are discussing what that will look like.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked the goal for the total amount of traffic in the park. He noted that one of the tennis courts has been converted to a volleyball court, which has increased usage of the park.

He noted that the basketball court will also bring people, and the park is already full when there are softball games. He stated that he would like to see something in that area but did not think a full court would be needed as he worried about the amount of traffic that would bring to the park which is already well utilized.

Amy Gerard, 574 Butler Avenue, asked how the basketball court would be used. She commented that they already have trouble with vehicles speeding down Butler. She wondered why the area is already all built up if this is just a proposal.

Commissioner Muller commented that the drainage improvements have already been completed.

Rose Agnew, 671 Woodridge Drive, stated that she is very concerned with the drainage. She stated that she has been walking the area and was nervous about the water going over the trail. She commented that the basketball court is great and liked the idea of a half-court with the other side being used for other purposes. She asked that no lights be added.

Mr. Ritchie stated that the previous location of the court was probably not the best location for the court and there is more sufficient space for people to get the ball before it rolls into the ditch. He stated that they could look to add a fence line before the ditch, noting that staff could look into that potential cost and advised that could also be added in the future. He stated that he would be open to adding trees within the park, but that cost was not included in the project budget. He commented that staff could work with the Natural Resources Coordinator to look for locations where trees could be planted to dampen the noise level. He stated that additional improvements are not anticipated to the storm sewer above what has already been completed. He noted that the additional topsoil and turf would assist with runoff and if the rain garden is added that would also mitigate the potential for overflow to go over the trail. He stated that there is a chance the water could overflow during a heavy rain event.

Ms. Lawrence stated that lighting is not being recommended at this time. She stated that when lights are proposed to be added to a park, residents around the park are notified and there is an opportunity for public comment. She commented that while there are no lights proposed at this time, the current City Council cannot ban a future City Council from adding lights to the park. She commented that there is not a goal for the number of visitors to the park. She stated that this park has been underutilized because of the previous drainage issues for the court. She stated that the court would be available to the public but would not be planned for programming by the City.

Mr. Ruzek stated that last summer this project was discussed, and authorization was provided by the Commission and City Council to take the existing basketball court offline and add the fill with the direction for a new court to be added. He stated that data collection could occur related to the traffic complaint on Butler. He recognized that is a dead-end road and that 30 miles per hour can seem fast when you are standing in your yard. He stated that this is considered a neighborhood park that is designed to serve the half-mile radius around it. He noted that there are basketball courts in most parks and therefore this would not be a community draw but could draw some additional residents.

Commissioner Toth asked for a definition of the reclaim material.

Mr. Ritchie replied that is recycled pavement and explained the process that is followed to reclaim the pavement and underlying class five material.

Commissioner Toth commented that the reclaim material placed on top of the existing court will hold water and did not understand the theory of the engineering.

Mr. Ritchie replied that part of the underlying issue was that the court was meant to hold water with the mounds around it, which did not allow for water to flow off the court. He stated that this new design sheds water away from the court area and suspected that the groundwater level would be ten to 30 feet below the current surface area.

Mr. Ruzek stated that the statement was made that the reclaim material is a negative material that would have voids, but that is incorrect, and provided more details.

Commissioner Toth asked if the creek would handle the water runoff from that site.

Mr. Ritchie stated that the creek has handled the water from this site in the past and these improvements could even lessen the drainage because it is being routed back to the east to the storm sewer and then south and through. He stated that the water level in the creek would not change.

Mr. Fitzgerald asked the process that would be followed to determine what this will look like.

Ms. Lawrence stated that this is an opportunity for the public to provide comments and the Parks and Recreation Commission will discuss and make its recommendation to the Council. She stated that staff will then present this recommendation to the City Council at the April 1st meeting.

Commissioner Muller asked when this was completed and whether time would be needed to let it settle.

Mr. Ritchie replied that the fill was being brought in throughout the summer and final grading and compaction occurred in late September. He stated that work completed by a contractor includes a one-year warranty and if there is a failure in concrete work, that would occur during the freeze/thaw cycle and therefore that would be covered in the warranty.

Commissioner Muller asked if the court should not be poured until September.

Mr. Ritchie explained that the contract has a completion date of June 31st. He noted that a new contractor could be brought in but that would absolve the existing contractor from any future obligations in this area. He was unsure if the cost would change if a new contractor would be brought in but believed that this would be the most cost-effective option as there would not be a mobilization charge incurred.

Mr. Ruzek replied that the freeze/ thaw would provide any settlements. He stated that generally, concrete can be placed on less suitable soils and therefore did not have any concerns moving ahead as planned as they have already gone through the winter.

Mr. Walsh commented that the old half-court was much closer to the trees and was an absolute mess and therefore likes that the court has been pulled away from the trees.

Mr. Ritchie confirmed that they did move the placement away from the trees to avoid the foliage falling onto the court.

Chair Blanks commented that he would support the full court and liked the idea of having more surface area to add the additional painting for other activities.

Student Representative Fuentes also agreed with the additional painting to allow more meaningful use in addition to basketball. She asked if the full court would provide an advantage for drainage, as it could direct more water.

Mr. Ritchie replied that it would be likely that a full court would provide more positive drainage to the east to the stormwater system. He noted that a half-court would require additional grading.

Commissioner Van Lith stated that he would also support the full court with additional painting.

Mr. Ruzek commented that the recommendation could include additional tree planting, noting that he could work with Mr. Walsh to determine if the trees should be placed nearer to the court or Mr. Walsh's yard. He commented that chain link fencing would have a cost of \$100 per foot and perhaps that be considered as a future improvement because that cost was not anticipated.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that perhaps bushes are used instead of a fence as that would still stop the ball from rolling and could assist in blocking sound.

Ms. Lawrence stated that perhaps there is direction for staff to work with the Natural Resources team related to additional trees and bushes.

Motion Blanks/second Schifsky to recommend approval of a full court basketball court with additional lines painted for other activities and direct staff to work with Natural Resources staff to add trees and/or bushes to mitigate sound and create an additional barrier, with no additional lights to be added. AYES 5: NAYS 0

Ms. Lawrence explained that the Commission is an advisory board, and staff will bring this recommendation forward to the City Council for formal action at the April 1st meeting. She stated that residents can reach out to her if they would like her to provide an update as this moves forward.

8.b Park Bench Donation Recommendation

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that staff received a park bench donation from Sam Hanson to be installed at Mendakota Park near the basketball court. She reviewed the proposed location for the bench and commented that staff agree that this would be a good location for a bench. She noted that final determination of the bench pad would be made this spring when they can ensure the root system of the tree would not be damaged. She reviewed the desired plaque language, which recognizes a well-known member of the community that they wish to memorialize. She stated that staff would plan to bring the recommendation of the Commission forward to the City Council at its meeting next week.

Motion Blanks/second Muller to recommend acceptance of the park bench donation as presented. AYES 5: NAYS 0

8.c 2025 Parks and Recreation Work Plan Approval

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that the Commission met in worksession in January to discuss the goals and priorities for 2025. She

stated that there was a lot of discussion and great ideas during that worksession, and staff attempted to put those details into the work plan. She noted that each item is tied to a Strategic Plan item and identifies the party responsible for the task as well as an associated timeline. She provided a brief review of the items included in the work plan. She welcomed any input or changes the group may have.

Commissioner Muller commented that the work plan looks great.

Motion Muller/second Blanks to adopt the 2025 Parks and Recreation Work Plan as presented.
AYES 5: NAYS 0

8.d Approval of Commission Bylaws

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that annually the Commission is asked to review the bylaws to determine if any changes are needed. She stated that staff do not have any recommended changes.

Motion Toth/second Schifsky to adopt the bylaws as presented. AYES 5: NAYS 0

8.e Assign Commissioner Parks

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that each year the Commission assigns parks to each Commissioner to visit, report any issues, and provide an update at each meeting.

The Commission decided on the following assignment of parks:

Commissioner Schifsky: Ivy Hills and Civic Center

Chair Blanks: Valley and Market Square

Commissioner Muller: Rogers Lake and Friendly Hills

Commissioner Van Lith: Victoria Highlands and Marie

Commissioner Toth: Valley View Heights and Wentworth

Commissioner Sherer: Hagstrom King and Mendakota

Commissioner Wichert: Kensington and the Dog Park

Student Representative Fuentes commented that she lives near Kensington and Hagstrom King and can also provide updates.

9. Unfinished Business

10. Staff Announcements

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence shared the following announcements:

- The 2024 Annual Report for Parks and Recreation was presented to the City Council at its last meeting
- Thanks to the Parks and Recreation team for another great year, recognizing the requirement of the team to work nights and weekends and their willingness to work a flexible schedule
- Currently hiring seasonal staff for the upcoming summer season, positions are posted on the website
- The April meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 9th at 6:30 p.m.

- The aerator at Rogers Lake will soon be turned off
- Other events can be found on the City's website

11. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Fuentes stated that Two Rivers High School has created a student leadership program. Recently the City of Eagan hosted a world café, noting that six students from Two Rivers attended the event. She commented that she also attended the Eagan City Council meeting to provide input on programming. She wondered if there would be value in having a teen committee for Mendota Heights.

Ms. Lawrence commented that the City would love to have a group of teens share input with Parks and Recreation staff on desired programming.

12. Commission Comments and Park Updates

Commissioner Toth

- The ice is breaking away from the shore at Rogers Lake and encouraged residents to stay off the ice
- Dog Park has been busy

Commissioner Van Lith

- No updates

Commissioner Muller

- The trails have been heavily used
- Is excited for her child to play lacrosse at the parks this summer

Chair Blanks

- Market Square has been great and encouraged residents to visit the shops
- Valley Park is wet and asked when the bridge would be installed

Mr. Ruzek replied that the existing bridge was removed from the site and may not be replaced until 2026. He noted that there is a short detour available.

Commissioner Schifsky

- Residents are excited for the pickleball courts to come back online at Wentworth

Ms. Lawrence commented that staff continue to watch the weather and believed that nets will be installed in the next few weeks.

13. Adjourn

Motion Muller/Second Schifsky to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 PM

AYES 5: NAYS 0

Minutes drafted by:
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