

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

DRAFT PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 14, 2023

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

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

2. Roll Call – The following Commissioners were present: Chair Jaffrey Blanks, Commissioners: Tica Hanson (arrived at 7:50 p.m.), Stephanie Meyer, Michelle Muller, and Dan Sherer; absent: Commissioner Jo Schifsky, Michael Toth, and Student Representative; Meg Murphy. Staff present: Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence, Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek, Recreation Program Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt, and Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Approval of Agenda

Chair Blanks asked to move Item 9a. to occur prior to New Business.

Motion Meyer/second Muller to approve the agenda as amended.

AYES 4: NAYS 0

5.a Approval of Minutes from February 14, 2023 Regular Meeting

Motion Meyer/second Muller to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2023 Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting.

AYES 4: NAYS 0

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

None.

7. 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.

7.a Par 3 Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that they are in the process of hiring seasonal employees and reviewed the positions still needed. Applications and position descriptions are available on the City website or in person at City Hall. She noted that they have also begun prepping the clubhouse so they will be ready to open when the weather permits. She provided an update on the delivery of equipment. She also provided details on the second Junior Adult Golf Championship which is scheduled for April 15th at 9 a.m., registration is available on the website.

Chair Blanks asked if the golf championship has age restrictions.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the child must be under the age of 16.

Commissioner Meyer asked the prize for the championship.

Ms. Lawrence noted that is yet to be determined, noting the prizes that were provided to the winners last year.

Commissioner Sherer asked if the rates of pay are known for the seasonal positions.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the wage ranges are listed on the City website.

7.b Recreation Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an update on the Tour de Rec programing and the ice-skating season. She stated that registration for summer programing has opened noting that many of those programs have filled quickly. She noted upcoming spring break programing opportunities. She also reviewed seasonal positions they are looking to hire in preparation for summer programing. She noted that the Kids Garage Sale will be held on April 29th and registration is currently open. The Touch a Truck event will be held on May 13th. Performers have also been confirmed for the summer concert series at Market Square Park. She also introduced the new Recreation Program Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt.

Commissioner Meyer asked if staff has considered other locations for the Touch a Truck event.

Ms. Lawrence replied that event has to be held at Mendakota as that is the only City-owned facility that can accommodate that crowd of people. She stated that they have worked with MHAA to ensure there are no tournaments scheduled for that weekend.

Commissioner Meyer stated that perhaps in the future the City could work with a school to host the event in one of the school parking lots.

Ms. Lawrence stated that while they have considered that, the schools often have their own spring events. She stated that the benefit in a City-owned location is that staff can setup ahead of time for the event and there is also access to bathrooms. She stated that it is also a great opportunity to promote the City parks.

Commissioner Sherer referenced the summer programing and asked if there were statistics on the registration of residents versus non-residents.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she did not have that data but could provide that.

Commissioner Meyer agreed that would be good information to have once registration closes.

Chair Blanks asked if there was a reason revenue was down the first day of registration this year, whether it was due to less programs being offered or less interested residents.

Ms. Lawrence replied that she is not sure noting that prices for programing remained steady from the previous year. She stated that although some registration was not as active the first day, there has been continued interest and registration and she has not pulled the revenue data since that first day.

7.c Parks Improvement Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an update on the scheduling for park improvement projects. She also provided a budget update, progress on grant applications, and preparation for the scheduled 2023 projects. She also noted the Earth and Arbor Day event that will be hosted by the Natural Resources Commission.

Commissioner Sherer noted the intent to build a smaller warmer house for Wentworth Park and asked if the same design plans could be used from the Friendly Hills warming house.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that staff is working from those same plans.

Commissioner Sherer noted that the regular baseball season will begin April 17th. He referenced the Civic Center improvements and asked if there would be trees removed as a part of that project.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek replied that he was not aware of tree removal planned for Civic Center yet. He stated that there are some maples that may be removed, as they are beginning to encroach on the field, but that has not yet been decided. He stated that Victoria Curve will be improved and there may be some tree removal and other improvements along the third base line as a part of that project.

Commissioner Meyer asked for more details on the Arbor Day event.

Ms. Lawrence provided additional details on the event which will focus on cleaning up trash around the community and within the parks.

Commissioner Muller noted that the baseball teams did a great job cleaning up in the parks last year as well. She stated that she would be willing to reach out to determine if that could continue this year.

9. Unfinished Business

9.a Valley View Heights Playground Recommendation

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided background information on the playground, noting that the majority of the playground was reconstructed in 2006. She also provided more details on the need to replace the playground at this time. She reviewed the existing playground features and the conditions and features that were included in the RFP, which was created with assistance from the playground subcommittee. She stated that three proposals were received for this project and reviewed the details of each proposal. She stated that staff did solicit engagement and input from the community through a survey, open house, and invitation to this meeting. She stated that 136 residents completed the survey, with option one receiving 43 votes, option two receiving 87 votes, and option three receiving six votes. She noted that in the open house, option one received five votes, option two received one vote and option three received zero votes. She received the timeline for completion and noted that staff is requesting a recommendation tonight and reviewed the estimated timeline for the different vendors. She provided details on the budget impact of the project, noting that the 2023 budget included \$75,000 for this project. She noted that some funds can be used from the special park fund because of the increased size of the playground. She stated that there are residents present to speak tonight.

Chair Blanks invited residents to address the Commission.

David Ayers, 2121 Theresa St., stated that he moved to his home in 1986 and has seen the park develop since that time. He asked if the survey results were just from the neighborhood or city-wide.

Ms. Lawrence stated that they opened up the survey to all residents.

Mr. Ayers stated that this is a family-friendly neighborhood, and the park is heavily used by those families. He recognized the amenity that the park provides and thanked the City for considering this update. He stated that he and his wife favor options one and two. He stated that the slides and swings have the most use in the park and the baby swing is a great option as well. He commented that benches are also a welcome amenity for the parents and grandparents. He thanked the Commission for allowing the community to provide input that was well appreciated by the residents in the neighborhood.

Commissioner Meyer asked if the layouts for two of the proposals are exactly the same, with the exception of the shade inclusion.

Ms. Lawrence clarified that the shade element was a bid alternate and those two proposals were from the same vendor.

Commissioner Muller asked if there are other parks in the city that were constructed by Landscape Structures.

Ms. Lawrence did not have the names of the playgrounds with her but confirmed that the City has had good experiences with Landscape Structures. She confirmed that it is a reputable company and staff would not feel the need to do additional reference checks because of the previous work they have done.

Commissioner Sherer stated that the open house results are skewed as four of his children voted for option one.

Chair Banks noted the resident comment related to the desire for a baby swing and asked if that request could be made to the chosen vendor.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the recommendation of staff would be for the Commission to move forward with a recommendation based on the proposals submitted. She stated that everyone voted for a specific reason on the submitted options and she would not want to see something removed that residents may have based their vote upon. She stated that staff could work with the selected vendor to determine if additional swings could be added, recognizing that there would be additional cost.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he likes option two and perhaps there would be space for a baby swing to be added.

Ms. Lawrence provided additional details on the required fall zone for swings.

Commissioner Meyer asked if increasing the container size would result in a loss of shade provided by the trees.

Mr. Ruzek replied that the container shape that exists today was based on a tree that has since been removed and allows for that container to be expanded. He stated that three sides of the container do have trees that could be providing shade.

Commissioner Muller asked if the cost for the shade structure could be funded through the special parks fund.

Ms. Lawrence noted that the increased container size would justify use of the special parks fund for a portion of the project cost and confirmed that the shade structure could be similarly funded.

Commissioner Sherer noted in the last playground project there was a lot of discussion related to the edging/border type and noted that these proposals all seem to use timbers.

Mr. Ruzek believed it to be plastic recycled timber for the expanded portion of the container, as a portion of the existing container would remain in place.

Commissioner Sherer noted the slightly different schedule for each vendor.

Chair Blanks stated that he would prefer option two as that seemed to be most popular with the residents and would like to see if the baby swing could be added.

Ms. Lawrence asked if the shade alternate is desired.

Chair Blanks stated that he could go either way. He recognized the desire from residents for shade but noted that this park already has quite a bit of shade. He stated that he would lean towards including the shade alternate.

Commissioner Meyer noted that the alternate also provides shade over the play structures.

Commissioner Muller agreed with the addition of the shade structure. She stated that she likes the color scheme shown in the alternate.

Commissioner Meyer agreed with option two, with the alternate but did not have a preference on the color.

Commissioner Sherer asked if the residents present had a preference for the color.

Mr. Ayers replied that the residents present agree with Commissioner Muller on the more colorful scheme with red and blue. He commented that the trees are more towards the rear of the structure so the shade alternate will help to provide more shade on the playground.

Chair Blanks confirmed that the Commission would still move forward with concept two, whether or not the baby swing could be added, although the desire would be to add that feature.

The Commission recognized that there could be additional cost to adding the swing.

Mr. Ruzek stated that he would think they could perhaps add an additional bay of swings that would provide one baby swing and two additional regular swings. The Commission agreed with that direction.

Commissioner Sherer asked if all the proposals include the surface pads under the swings and whether that pad would be needed under the baby swing.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that pad is required under all swings, including a baby swing. She stated that perhaps the additional cost for the swings would be \$5,000 to \$7,000 as swings are one of the lower cost features.

Motion Meyer/second Muller to recommend to the City Council to select proposal two from Landscape Structures with the shade structure bid alternate included and colors as presented in that concept, directing staff to work with the contractor to determine if a baby swing could be added.

AYES 4: NAYS 0

The Commission thanked the residents for attending and sharing their input.

8. New Business

8.a Par 3 Bond Payment Acknowledgement Event Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided background on this item and provided an update on the planning thus far. She stated that they are planning to host a morning event, with festive, golf-themed food and drink items and provided a general overview of the event plans. She estimated the cost of the event to be \$1,200 which would be funded from the recreation event budget. She noted that this will go forward to the Council workshop on March 21st.

Commissioner Muller commented that this sounds great and would prefer the May 6th date as more people will come in warmer weather. She encouraged additional activities, guessing that those will be the most popular.

Ms. Lawrence stated that staff can look into other activities.

Chair Blanks agreed with the May 6th date. He commented that staff did a great job putting this together and staying under budget with such short notice.

8.b 2022 Parks and Recreation and Par 3 Annual Report

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reviewed the 2022 Parks and Recreation annual report. She provided details on field and facility usage, warming house/ice rink usage, recreation programs, recreation events, legacy events, park improvement projects, and strategic planning. She also highlighted upcoming plans for the 2023 season. She then reviewed the details of the Par 3 annual report including details on usage, finances, recreation programs, special events, 2022 projects, and 2022-end-of-season cash balance. She also reviewed the 2023 plans and awards that have been received. She thanked the Par 3 staff who provide a great experience at the course.

Commissioner Hanson arrived.

Commissioner Hanson complimented staff noting that many municipal golf courses are closing because they are not profitable. She asked if the youth lessons are programming that is provided through community education or through the City.

Ms. Lawrence thanked Commissioner Hanson for the compliments and confirmed that many municipal golf courses are closing. She stated that the Par 3 runs all of its own programming for both youth and adults. She noted that many high schools also use the course for their home course for matches and practicing.

Commissioner Hanson asked if the women's league would be continuing.

Ms. Lawrence confirmed that program is continuing and 110 women have already signed up.

Chair Blanks thanked Ms. Lawrence for the great reports.

8.c Website Update

Assistant City Administrator Kelly Torkelson stated that the Council had previously directed staff to update the website and the new website launched earlier this month. She stated that they worked to make the website more accessible for residents and other users to easily find the information they are looking for as well as ensuring the website is mobile friendly. She provided a tour of different features on the new website.

Commissioner Muller commented that she appreciated the photos of the parks and different areas of the community, and the website update was well done.

Ms. Torkelson stated that staff plans to continue to update the website with new photos seasonally.

Chair Blanks commented that he is excited with all the updates, and this is such an improvement from the previous website. He stated that he also likes the addition of the parks and locations, which easily provides residents with that information.

Commissioner Hanson asked if the consultant would be doing the ongoing updates or whether those would be done by staff.

Ms. Torkelson stated that staff will update the website on a regular basis, but if more structural changes were desired staff would work with the consultant.

Commissioner Hanson asked if the receptionist is well versed on the website and would be able to help a caller navigate the site.

Ms. Torkelson confirmed that the front desk staff is familiar with the website. She stated that staff also receives the analytics from the website and can use that data to make future improvements.

9. Unfinished Business (Continued)

9.b Parks and Recreation Strategic Planning Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reviewed the 2023 strategic planning calendar, noting updates that have been made and identifying upcoming meetings that have been added for the Commission to be involved in.

Commissioner Muller asked if the City is looking to get involved in the community center feasibility study being done by West St. Paul.

Ms. Lawrence stated that it is her understanding that the Parks System Master Plan for West St. Paul is very large and is currently being updated, with the feasibility study for a community center being done as part of that process. She stated that West St. Paul would be willing to share the results.

Commissioner Sherer asked if there have been any talks with the Y.

Ms. Lawrence stated it is her understanding that both communities and the Y have been included in the discussion. She noted that part of the feasibility study will be related to location.

10. Staff Announcements

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence shared the following announcements:

- Encouraged people to apply for the open positions posted on the City website
- Registration is open for spring and summer programming
- Other events can be found on the City's website

11. Student Representative Update

None.

12. Commission Comments and Park Updates

Commissioner Sherer

- Looking forward to the Valley View Heights playground and appreciated the input of residents

Commissioner Muller

- Welcomed the new staff member
- Impressed with the year in review
- The pond cleanout project has been interesting to watch at Rogers Lake

Chair Blanks

- Valley Park is great, but the paths are slippery at this time
- Market Square is vibrant and encouraged residents to support those local businesses

Commissioner Hanson

- Victoria Highlands and Marie are well used, even in the snow
- Dog Park is well used with dogs enjoying the space to run around while the owners enjoy socializing

Commissioner Meyer

- People have started to inquire about when pickleball season will start at Marie Park
- Welcome to the new staff member

13. Adjourn

Motion Blanks/Second Muller to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 PM

AYES 5: NAYS 0

Minutes drafted by:
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