

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES JUNE 13, 2023

The June meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, June 13, 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, Michelle Muller, Jo Schifsky, Dan Sherer, and Michael Toth; absent: Commissioner Stephanie Meyer and Student Representative Meg Murphy. Staff present: Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence, Parks and Recreation Intern Darby Keech, and Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion Sherer/second Muller, to approve the agenda

AYES 6: NAYS 0

5.a Approval of Minutes from April 11, 2023 Regular Meeting

Motion Schifsky/second Muller to approve the minutes of the April 11, 2023 Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting.

AYES 6: NAYS 0

5.b Approval of Minutes from May 9, 2023 Work Session Meeting

Motion Schifsky/second Muller to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2023 Parks and Recreation Commission Work Session Meeting.

AYES 6: 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 reviewed the April financial update for the course. She noted that in looking at the data, May of 2023 was above the performance of May of 2022. She reviewed the year-to-date round report and provided an update on the receipt of equipment that had been previously ordered noting that they are still waiting for two pieces of equipment ordered in 2021. She also reviewed recently completed projects and improvements planned for this year at the course and reviewed the course report. She noted that the City Council also reinstated the senior golf pass for this year.

Commissioner Sherer asked for details on the maintenance fence recommended by OSHA.

Ms. Lawrence stated that each year there is a safety inspection and noted that there is an abrupt drop off near the maintenance building and therefore a safety fence was installed to prevent a fall and injury.

Commissioner Hanson asked for details on the senior golf pass as she was not familiar.

Ms. Lawrence provided details on the pass. She noted that there was not much utilization of the pass in recent years, with five being the highest number of passes sold. She stated that seven passes have been purchased this year.

Commissioner Muller commented that it was great to see two additional passes sold this year.

7.b Recreation Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided a recreation update highlighting recent and upcoming recreation programming and activities.

7.c Parks Improvement Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reported that the 2022 dugout/fence work project has been completed and provided an update on the progress of the 2023 budgeted projects.

Commissioner Sherer asked if there have been multiple bids for the concrete or whether it has been limited because of the tight schedule.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek replied that the project was sent to seven contractors and five provided bids, but the project is currently out for public bid in attempt to gain better pricing.

Commissioner Sherer commented that the new dugout covers have received positive feedback.

8. New Business

8.a Introduction of Parks and Recreation Intern, Darby Keech

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence introduced the new Parks and Recreation Intern, Darby Keech. She reviewed some of the duties Ms. Keech would be handling this summer.

The Commission welcomed Ms. Keech.

8.b Park Bench Donation Recommendation

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that the Commission is asked to review a park bench donation. She provided an overview of the park bench donation policy and advised that the City received a park bench donation to be installed at Ivy Hills Park near the pond and reviewed the proposed plaque language. She commented that staff is excited about the donation and recommends that the Commission accept the donation.

Motion Schifsky/second Hanson to accept the park bench donation.

AYES 6: NAYS 0

8.c Park QR Code Signage Approval

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reviewed the strategic priority of the Commission to add QR codes to signage for public engagement. She noted that the group discussed this at the April meeting and again at the May workshop to work out some of the

details. She stated that based on the feedback from those meetings, staff was able to create a model sign and provided that example. She reviewed the proposed sign size and noted that it was recommended to have one sign in each park. She stated that staff could then work with the Commissioner assigned to each park to determine the best location for each park. She noted that the estimated cost for the sign and installation would be a total of \$280. She noted that while the project was not included in the budget, staff feels there is sufficient funding to move forward if that is the direction of the Commission.

Commissioner Schifsky asked the type of material that would be used.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the signs would be of the same material as a stop sign.

Commissioner Toth asked if something has been missed in the design of the sign, perhaps a trail, stream, or more color.

Ms. Lawrence stated that decision is of the Commission noting that staff came up with this design based on the input of the Commission. She stated that if additional tweaks are needed, it would most likely have to wait until the August meeting to come back with an updated draft.

Commissioner Muller commented that people in the parks know that they are in Mendota Heights. She noted that perhaps the Mendota Heights font could be increased in size. She stated that perhaps the trees could also be smaller which would make them an accent to the QR code, as the code should be the focus.

Commissioner Schifsky agreed that the QR code should be larger and perhaps in the center with the trees behind that.

Commissioner Hanson stated that she would like to see more graphics whether that be a trail, bicycle, or other park feature.

Ms. Lawrence cautioned against adding too much to the sign as the direction was for a 12 by 12 sign and for the same sign to be used in each park.

Commissioner Toth referenced the Mendota Heights logo that is on the letterhead and stated that perhaps that be placed on the sign.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that she would like the letterhead logo on the top with the QR code in the center to keep it simple.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she would like clear direction in order to bring back a concept in August, which would mean the signs would be printed in September and then installed most likely in October.

Commissioner Muller stated that perhaps staff could make three options and the Commission could vote on those outside of a meeting to move forward more quickly.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she would be happy to bring back three options but would prefer to do that in an open meeting.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he likes the concept of the QR code being the focal point and then perhaps adopting some of the elements from the new website, placing them in the corners and the QR code in the center.

Chair Blanks commented that it would have been ideal for this information to be shared at the workshop in order to move forward today.

Commissioner Muller commented that the function is spot on as discussed at the workshop.

Commissioner Hanson commented that she liked the idea of taking some of the graphics from the website and placing them in the corners.

Commissioner Muller suggested one option be centering the QR code, with or without the trees in the background, and then using the Mendota Heights letterhead logo. She noted that she does not have an issue with the size of the QR code and just wants to see it centered.

Ms. Lawrence noted that nothing can go behind the QR code, or the code will not work for scanning.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that the logo does have trees so perhaps that would be sufficient.

The Commission also provided input on the icons from the website that are preferred, should they be incorporated into the design. The Commission confirmed the proposed size of 12 by 12.

Commissioner Toth noted that Rogers Lake has Rogers Lake and the skate park and wondered if there should be two signs.

Ms. Lawrence noted that many parks are similar in nature to that. She stated that the Commission could choose to have two signs within the parks if desired. She stated that location information should be readily available for discussion when this is brought back.

Commissioner Muller commented that she would think to place the signs near an amenity such as the playground or park shelter.

Chair Blanks asked that the Commission think of placement for the sign at their parks.

Commissioner Muller commented that perhaps a square would not be an ideal layout and she would be open to a rectangle if the staff member designing the sign thinks that would look better.

8.d Amendment to the Parks and Recreation Scholarship Program

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence stated that there is a scholarship program for parks and recreation programming that was adopted in 2018 and reviewed those qualifications, documentation requirements, assistance available, and eligible programs. She reviewed the program usage in 2018 and 2019, noting that the City has not received any applications since that time. She stated that staff is suggesting changes to the program and reviewed the proposed amendments. She also reviewed the US Department of Housing/Urban Development Income Limits and how that would be recommended to apply to assistance along with additional options for supporting documentation.

Commissioner Hanson commented that there are people that live in the community but may not have children that attend the schools in this community. She stated that perhaps notice should be sent to the churches advising of this program in addition to the schools.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he supports the program but noted that this seems onerous for the small cost of programing. He stated that people will be asked to submit documentation for the income levels.

Ms. Lawrence noted that proof of residency would be required along with one other form. She stated that if the Commission does not want to require income information, that could be a recommendation.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he would support starting with \$1,000 for the pilot and seeing how that goes. He noted that people are often reluctant to admit they need the help and therefore scholarships are often not utilized, especially when documentation is required. He stated that he would prefer to make the information known and allow people to request help without requiring the supporting documentation.

Commissioner Muller asked why that documentation would be needed to prove residency and why a utility bill or another bill showing the address could not be sufficient.

Ms. Lawrence stated that those documents would prove need, but again noted that the Commission could make the recommendation to not require proof of need. She stated that these are taxpayer dollars and therefore they want to be mindful that there is a need.

Commissioner Sherer commented that City staff would also need to spend time reviewing the documentation. He stated that perhaps people could simply check a box for income level without requiring documentation.

Commissioner Hanson suggested placing a limit on the maximum a family could receive.

Chair Blanks replied that he would prefer to give the assistance to those who need it and if additional funds are needed, they could review that request and make an adjustment.

Commissioner Schifsky commented that this has been well thought out and seems simple for users to apply.

Ms. Lawrence replied that staff is also comfortable as drafted and does not feel this would be an onerous process for the applicant or staff.

Commissioner Muller asked why a W-2 could not be provided.

Ms. Lawrence noted that would have more private information than needed and therefore she was hesitant to include that as an option. She noted that the documentation would not become public information and therefore if someone were willing to provide that form, they could do so.

Commissioner Schifsky asked for clarification on the foster child option and whether there would be income limits.

Ms. Lawrence replied that income limits would not apply to those categories (foster child, veteran).

Commissioner Schifsky referenced the foster child option and stated that if the foster parent applied, she would like that child to receive full coverage at 100 percent.

Commissioner Sherer commented that it would seem like requiring the documentation would be burdensome for a single parent that is having a hard year.

Commissioner Hanson stated that perhaps there is a box where staff discretion could be used to review the application.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he does not believe people will take advantage of this program.

Chair Blanks noted that if the program is being abused, the parameters could be changed.

Ms. Lawrence asked if the Commission wants to require the documentation so that she can communicate that to the Council. She stated that there could be a top range stating that applicants must fall within the HUD range. She noted that while most cities require documentation, Mendota Heights does not have to.

Chair Blanks recognized that the City Council will make the final determination. He recognized that there will always be outliers such as a Veteran with a high income or a foster family that has a lot of money. He commented that he would like to make the program as accessible as possible. He stated that he likes the idea of allowing a W-2.

Commissioner Sherer used the example of the City of Saint Paul, which used COVID funds to make sports participation available at no cost, noting that their numbers exploded. He recognized that may not occur in this situation.

Commissioner Muller commented on a soccer camp that was easy to participate in and resulted in a large crowd of people showing up for that activity. She commented that this looks complicated as she was unsure if both forms of documentation are required or just one.

Ms. Lawrence walked the Commission through the application process and what would be needed in terms of documentation. She noted that the documentation required are the same that would be required by the City of Eagan and the City of West Saint Paul.

Commissioner Muller commented that a resident could meet the income requirements without having participation in one of the other programs.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the W-2 could be used if the Commission would prefer to allow that. She commented that the more specific the information is, the easier the application process is for applicants. She stated that she would like to bring this to the Council at the next meeting to allow the amendments to apply for summer programming.

Chair Blanks stated that he likes the amendments as presented.

Commissioner Muller stated that she likes the additional flexibility for people to provide their income information.

Commissioner Sherer noted that there are also parents that are not smart with their money which makes it not possible for children to participate. He stated that he supports making it as easy as possible in order to get more kids active.

Chair Blanks reviewed the proposed amendments suggested by the Commission in addition to those presented by staff and confirmed unanimous consensus of the Commission to recommend approval of the amendments to the City's Parks and Recreation Scholarship Program.

9. Unfinished Business

9.a 2024 Budget – Parks Capital Improvement Project Recommendations

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence reviewed the guiding principles and goals that help to guide the capital improvement project recommendations. She reviewed the budget timeline which began at the May workshop. She provided an overview of the draft 2024 budget improvement package (BIP) summary including a summary of the discussed parks capital projects. She stated that each Commissioner provided a list of priorities for the park projects and displayed those results which staff had tabulated into a prioritized list. She noted that many departments have a master plan, which parks do not, and provided the estimated cost, should that choose to be included in the proposed budget recommendations. She stated that the Commission is asked to make a recommendation on the BIP.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he was not able to attend the workshop. He stated that a few projects strike him more as maintenance such as the Marie Parks tennis/pickleball court. He asked how often that project would need to be redone. He noted that it seems other facilities do not receive that regular attention. He stated that he seems to be in the minority for the Mendakota fiber project as that seems more security related.

Commissioner Muller commented that she thought that project would provide access for the Associations at the concession stand without assistance from staff.

Commissioner Sherer believed that issue had been resolved.

Ms. Lawrence commented that the fiber project has been discussed for multiple reasons. She noted that internet service at the park would be helpful, and the irrigation system could be linked for remote access. She stated that they have also discussed the availability of Wi-Fi in the parks. She commented that they would also install door access key cards for both staff and the user groups. She stated that the bathrooms would also be linked to timers for opening and closing rather than having the Police lock and unlock the bathrooms. She stated that a camera system would also be installed as there have been security concerns. She commented that the Council will need to discuss the funding for the project. She commented that she will be looking to bring fiber to the golf course next year. She believed the pickleball courts resurfacing was scheduled for every five years because of the wear from ice and use.

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek commented that he hoped that this was initial shrinkage from the last filling and hoped that this would extend the lifespan to the typical tennis court lifespan.

Commissioner Hanson commented that Marie Park is a gem in the community that is heavily used by the community every night of the week. She commented that the future is coming, and she would not want to see the community left behind, therefore she will support the fiber project.

Commissioner Sherer stated that he is usually busy doing other things in the park rather than being on his phone. He stated that he believes that there are things that could be taken better care of in terms of infrastructure such as trails, fencing, nets, etc. He commented that he would prefer to see those things addressed rather than adding new things.

Commissioner Muller commented that she placed Wentworth last as she would prefer to maintain the existing courts before adding new courts.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if a new surface should be considered for pickleball so that they are not constantly repairing that.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the court was repaved in 2019 and the acrylic surface is the typical surfacing. She asked that the Commission keep the equity lens in the forefront in providing recreation opportunities to residents of all ages and interests. She commented that they will continue to see a lot of maintenance projects as budget requests for the next few years because of the deferred maintenance. She acknowledged the balance between maintenance of the existing infrastructure and the addition of new parks amenities.

Commissioner Toth asked why the surface at Marie Park has failed in three years.

Mr. Ruzek replied that there was some shrinkage and perhaps the storm event played a part in that. He stated that they would not be scraping or removing, just filling the sand filler on the top layer, noting that the underlying asphalt is still in great shape.

Commissioner Toth asked and received confirmation that the asphalt and subsurface levels have not failed.

Commissioner Schifsky commented on the wide range of ages and ability that play pickleball. She commented that the courts at Marie are packed. She stated that the Friendly Hills courts are not heavily used because of the orientation, as one user will face the sun. She commented that if courts were in every park, they would be used. She asked for more details on the master plan and what would be involved in that process.

Ms. Lawrence explained that the master plan would be long and in depth, reviewing each park and what is being used, along with the needs and wants of the community. She confirmed that there would be recommendations on what amenities should remain or be added, or how space could be better used. She noted that there would be a lot of community engagement involved in that process.

Chair Blanks commented that if the same funding were allocated from the previous year, these projects could be included along with the master plan and the Council would make the decision.

Commissioner Muller asked if the special parks fund could be used for a master plan.

Ms. Lawrence was unsure and noted that she would need to consult with legal counsel.

Commissioner Sherer commented on the rate of inflation and how the balance of the special parks fund will continue to give less in terms of what can be accomplished as inflation continues to rise. He stated that he would advocate for using the money to get the most value they can.

Commissioner Muller stated that there has been discussion on whether there is a need for three hockey rinks and perhaps the Wentworth rink is taken offline for hockey and transformed into permanent pickleball courts.

Ms. Lawrence stated that they just signed the contract for a warming house at Wentworth, so then they would need to consider what the warming house would be used for, or whether it would be necessary if they were not going to have hockey there. She stated that for pickleball they do like to engage the neighbors before adding courts. She commented that the Wentworth hockey rink has been the most used rink even with a poor condition warming house. She stated that if the Commission wants to look to reduce a hockey rink, she would recommend engagement for that as well.

Chair Blanks suggested they table the consideration of removing an amenity as they would need to have engagement for that. He suggested that this move forward to a vote as he believed that the list was already prioritized based off the input of each Commissioner that filled out the form. He stated that he would also like to add the master plan, hoping that the special parks fund could be used for that purpose.

Commissioner Hanson stated that she does have an idea, but she will hold that to 2025.

Commissioner Schifsky referenced Ivy Falls Park, noting that the basketball court needs repair and asked if that could be used for pickleball in the future.

Ms. Lawrence commented that the decision was made to not continue to flood that area in 2019. She stated that there had been discussion of expanding the basketball court to a full sized court. She noted the proximity to the townhomes and stated that if a pickleball court were desired she again would recommend public engagement.

Commissioner Muller commented that the list would move forward with Wentworth with an acrylic surface, which is not proving to hold up with the flooding as the courts are dual purpose.

Chair Blanks noted that staff has stated that other City's courts are being done every five years, so that repair is in line.

Ms. Lawrence commented that if they would like to consider dedicated pickleball courts, they would need to do more study and engagement.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that there are some new surfacing materials being considered and tested.

Ms. Lawrence noted that they could continue to check into that in the future as part of a larger discussion.

Commissioner Toth recognized that pickleball is a trend at this time but acknowledged that it could be possible that decreases in the future and therefore he would not want to overbuild for that sport. He believed that the master plan should be higher on the list. He stated that many of the trails were constructed at the same time and there should be a plan to address the ongoing maintenance that will be needed.

Mr. Ruzek replied that the City has been rebuilding and overlaying trails over time.

The consensus of the Commission was to include the master plan as number one on the priority list, shifting the remainder down.

Upon a unanimous vote the Commission recommended the 2024 budget improvement package as presented, placing a park system master plan at the top of the list. AYES 6: NAYS 0

9.b Parks and Recreation Strategic Planning Update

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence provided an update on the parks and recreation strategic planning progress.

10. Staff Announcements

Parks and Recreation Manager Meredith Lawrence shared the following announcements:

- Other events can be found on the City's website

11. Student Representative Update

None.

12. Commission Comments and Park Updates

Commissioner Sherer

- Hagstrom King continues to be heavily used
- The new fencing looks great at Civic Center

Commissioner Toth

- Noted that the same color bag is used in both trash and recycling which could make it difficult for staff to tell apart after picked up

Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek provided additional details noting that the bags are not recyclable and therefore the material is taken out of the bags upon collection.

Commissioner Muller

- The parks look great and people are active in the parks

Chair Blanks

- Encouraged everyone to come listen to music the following night at Market Square
- Staff is doing an awesome job maintaining the parks

Commissioner Schifsky

- Wentworth and Ivy Hills look great
- There are young children that have moved into the area for Ivy Falls

Commissioner Hanson

- Marie and Victoria Highlands are in great condition, especially for the heavy use
- Congratulated Ms. Lawrence for her great organization and leadership
- Also thanked Mr. Ruzek and welcomed the new intern

13. Adjourn

Upon a unanimous vote, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM

AYES 6: NAYS 0
Minutes drafted by:
Amanda Staple
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