

CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS, DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA

PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING MINUTES

JULY 8, 2025

The July meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, July 8, 2025, 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: Michelle Muller, Jennifer Weichert, Jo Schifsky, Dan Sherer, Daniel Van Lith, and Michael Toth; absent: none. Student Representative: Evengeline Fuentes was absent. Staff present: Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence, Recreation Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt, Recreation Facilities Coordinator Trey Carlson, Summer Rec Intern Eydie Myers, and Public Works Director Ryan Ruzek.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

4. Approval of Agenda

Motion Sherer/second Toth to approve the agenda.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

5.a Approval of Minutes from May 13, 2025, Regular Meeting

Motion Schifsky/second Weichert to approve the minutes of the May 13, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting.

AYES 7: NAYS 0

5.b Approval of Minutes from June 10, 2025, Regular Meeting

Motion Weichert/second Toth to approve the minutes of the June 10, 2025, Parks and Recreation Commission Work Session.

AYES 7: 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, Park Improvement, Recreation, Park System Master Plan, and Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan Updates) and polled the Commissioners for questions.

7.a Park Improvement Project Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence briefly reviewed the report and provided updates on the progress of the 2025 projects.

Commissioner Toth asked if the layout of the Ivy Hills basketball court had been changed.

Ms. Lawrence replied that the decision was made to go east/west with the concrete pad. She noted that the process did include multiple layouts, but that direction was the ultimate recommendation of the Commission.

7.b Recreation Update

Recreation Program Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt commented that it has been a busy and successful summer, noting that she has welcomed the addition of the Recreation Facilities Coordinator and Summer Intern, as that allows her to focus on other tasks. She noted the rebranding of Parks Celebration to Heights Fest and highlighted some of the planned events. She provided an overview of programming participation for the year, along with the related costs. She highlighted new programming that was added this year, as well as upcoming events and activities.

Commissioner Weichert asked how the new programs are advertised outside of social media, as some seniors do not use social media.

Ms. Eisfeldt stated that programming is advertised on the City website and Facebook page and also included in the quarterly *Heights Highlights*. She commented that some events and new programs are also marketed on postcard mailings. She stated that Townsquare TV also records a segment with the City staff that advertises upcoming events and activities.

Commissioner Weichert commented that Market Square Park could use attention and should perhaps also advertise events.

Ms. Lawrence explained that Market Square is unique in that the City owns the property but does not maintain the property. She stated that she could speak with the property management team. She stated that Recreation Coordinator Willow Eisfeldt has done a great job diversifying the marketing tools used for events and activities.

Commissioner Muller noted that the *Friday News* also advertises events.

Commissioner Schifsky stated that she has also noticed sandwich boards advertising upcoming events and activities at the parks. She stated that she is very impressed with the programming and looks forward to some of the new offerings.

7.c Par 3 Update

Recreation Facilities Coordinator Trey Carlson provided an overview of the Par 3 Financial Report and season statistics. He stated that the online tee scheduling system continues to be used more and has also allows staff to be more attentive to in-person customers. He provided information on course conditions as well as upcoming tournaments and leagues.

Commissioner Weichert stated that she has received positive comments about the new booking software.

Commissioner Sherer asked how the software is paid for.

Ms. Lawrence explained that the software has a charge of \$320 per month, and the City is receiving a good return on the investment. She stated that there have been very few complaints about the process, and more residents are using the system.

Commissioner Sherer asked if the concessions have changed or if the increase in revenue is due to increased rounds.

Mr. Carlson replied that they have not changed anything with the exception of offering blue Gatorade, noting that is a highly desired product.

Commissioner Toth recognized the high levels of rain this year and asked if there would be additional herbicide or pesticide use because of the rain.

Mr. Carlson replied that they have been on a plan developed by a consultant, spraying every two weeks, and they have not had any issues. He did not foresee any additional costs for that purpose.

7.d Commission Work Plan Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence provided an update on the work plan progress.

Commissioner Sherer asked how the capital plan is being developed.

Ms. Lawrence stated that the department has an inventory of assets and explained how they are assessing the current value and estimated time of replacement. She explained how the information is then added into the system to build out the capital replacement plan. She commented that the information that staff is working on will help the Council to make the most educated decisions related to funding.

Commissioner Weichert asked if the changing demographics surrounding the parks are considered when they redo the parks. She recognized that they had considered ADA-compliant equipment and asked if they also considered what is appropriate for seniors.

Ms. Lawrence stated that demographics were a large part of the presentation on the Master Plan. She noted that there are a lot of things people want to see but could not be provided within the restraints of the current budget, and therefore, there will be a question as to whether residents are willing to pay more money for these updates.

7.e Park System Master Plan Update

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence stated that the consultant presented the Master Plan to the Council at the June 17th meeting, noting that the recording is available on the City website. She noted that the Council accepted the plan. Staff and the Council were happy with the product provided by the consultant. She stated that staff are now working on the phase one plan, which will then come forward to the Commission.

8. New Business

9. Old Business

9.a Ivy Hills Playground RFP Recommendation

Parks and Recreation/Assistant Public Works Director Meredith Lawrence provided background information on the process the Commission and subcommittee underwent to create an RFP for the playground replacement at Ivy Hills. She stated that the Council made changes to the RFP, and six proposals were received from five qualified vendors. The subcommittee narrowed the proposals, which then went through the community engagement process. The Commission reviewed the results of the community engagement and made a recommendation for the playground replacement at the May meeting. Staff presented the recommendation to the Council at its May meeting, and the Council ultimately rejected all proposals and changed the scope of the project. A new RFP was created based on the scope developed by the Council and is before the Commission tonight. She commented that they will be moving forward without

additional community engagement. She stated that because they are rebidding the project, installation will not occur this year and will instead occur in the spring of 2026.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if there is a reason they have never looked at artificial turf as a ground cover.

Ms. Lawrence commented that not all turf/grass is considered to be ADA compliant and noted that she has not seen a lot of turf used in playgrounds within the state.

Commissioner Shifsky commented that could be easier to maneuver than woodchips but not as expensive as poured-in-place surfacing.

Commissioner Weichert stated that Somerset Elementary is very close to the park and asked if the elements of that playground have been considered. She noted that playground is fairly ADA compliant, and perhaps accessibility to that playground is considered rather than trying to put everything into Ivy Hills.

Ms. Lawrence commented that she was involved in a small way with the playground process, and although the playground is available for the community to utilize, it is not accessible to the public when students are on-site. She stated it's considered to be a fully inclusive playground, where a large majority of the equipment is inclusive. She stated that Ivy Hills is not intended to be fully inclusive and is instead intended to have an inclusive feature.

Commissioner Weichert stated that perhaps the community could be made aware of when the school playground is accessible to the public.

Commissioner Muller commented that priority is given to students, and outside of school hours, the playground should be available for use.

Ms. Lawrence stated that she had a similar conversation with Mayor Levine a few weeks ago. She stated that the school playground is not a City playground and therefore the City would not be the party to promote when that equipment could be used. She recognized that it is a great amenity for the community, but the City would not be the responsible party to promote the equipment. She noted that perhaps the school would be interested in marketing that.

Commissioner Muller commented that the public is mindful that students have priority on the equipment use.

Commissioner Muller recognized that this expense was budgeted for 2025 but will now happen in 2026. She asked if that would impact the ability to do another project in 2026.

Ms. Lawrence stated that \$160,000 was allocated from fund balance for this project, and that would be carried over. She noted that \$20,000 was budgeted from the special parks fund, and because the Council increased the budget by \$20,000, she believed that would come from fund balance. She stated that the Commission did recommend another playground replacement for 2026, and staff will present a request for Valley Park in 2026. She noted that the Valley Park playground replacement would be partnered with the shelter replacement in hopes of receiving a DNR matching grant for the project. She stated that it may end up being a 2027 project, depending on when the grant award is known. She hoped that this project being delayed would not halt other projects.

Commissioner Schifsky commented that another playground was discussed for replacement in 2026 as well and asked if that could be moved forward if the Valley Park project were delayed to 2027.

Ms. Lawrence provided additional details on the constraints of time and staffing, noting that she would like to focus on the Valley Park projects for the upcoming year in hopes of securing the grant. She noted that staff are going to try to package together multiple projects within one park as they move forward in hopes of utilizing grant dollars.

Commissioner Schifsky asked if the Commission could partner with the Natural Resources Commission in the future to assist in those types of efforts.

Ms. Lawrence stated that staff are evaluating the process to ensure a smooth process can be developed and followed. She stated that staff meet monthly and are going to try to identify projects they could collaborate on, as there is a natural alliance between parks and open space.

Motion Schifsky/second Muller to approve the Ivy Hills RFP as presented. AYES 7: NAYS 0

10. Staff Announcements

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

- Staff are working to finalize the department budgets in anticipation of the coming budget discussions
- The August meeting will be on Wednesday, August 13th
- July is Parks and Recreation Month in Mendota Heights
- 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 has been busy with the great weather and with the baseball season
- Asked a question about the height of the swings
- The padding on the posts is deteriorating
- The fields at Mendakota have been good, with the last baseball/softball in-house tournament taking place this coming weekend
- This is his last meeting as he is resigning because of the demands of his professional and personal life
- He recognized all the projects that have taken place during the past six years

Ms. Lawrence commented that typically the height of the swings changes during the season as the woodchips are often pushed out of place. She noted that it is part of the staff inspection process at the parks. She believed that the padding was replaced within the last week.

Commissioner Weichert

- Enjoys the dog park and the community that is created by the users of the dog park

- Perhaps more benches could be added to the dog park
- Impressed by the users of Kensington and the great job people do picking up after themselves

Commissioner Schifsky

- The basketball court at Ivy Hills looks amazing, as it was recently poured
- Residents are excited about being able to use the new court
- The wildflowers around the pond look great
- Civic Center looks great, and people looked like they were having fun playing tonight
- Civic Center could use some mound and turf repairs

Commissioner Muller

- Her son has been fishing at Rogers Lake, and people of all ages enjoy fishing in the park
- The skate park has consistent use
- Friendly Hills has road construction, but the repaved paths are great
- Recognized the great work Commissioner Sherer has done on the Commission

Chair Blanks

- Valley Park looks amazing and is well-kept
- The Natural Resources Commission would like to collaborate at Valley Park
- Highlighted Music in the Park at Market Square
- Noted some missing chess pieces at Market Square

Ms. Lawrence stated that staff were made aware of missing pieces, and they did order replacements, which may have been installed.

Commissioner Toth

- Valley View residents appreciated the relocated restroom
- Wentworth was busy tonight and reported on different activities at the park being enjoyed by about 160 people
- Thanked Commissioner Sherer for his commitment and time over the past six years

Commissioner Van Lith

- His family enjoyed Victoria Highlands over the Fourth of July activities
- Marie Park continues to be well-used with pickleball

Chair Blanks thanked Commissioner Sherer for his contributions to the Commission.

13. Adjourn

Motion Sherer/Second Toth to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 PM

AYES 7: NAYS 0

Minutes drafted by:
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