



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, May 8, 2024**

Members Present: Commissioner Dave Anderson, Commissioner Mike Niziolek, Commissioner Greg Loidolt, Commissioner Hal Stewart

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Assistant City Administrator/Business Services Director Joe Stremcha, Senior Administrative Assistant Dawn Larson

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the meeting was called to order at 06:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. CONSIDER AGENDA

Moved by Commissioner Greg Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Mike Niziolek to approve the agenda. Motion Carried 4-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

Moved by Commissioner Hal Stewart and seconded by Commissioner Mike Niziolek to approve the following consent items as outlined in their respective staff reports. Motion Carried 4-0.

4.1 April 10, 2024 Minutes

5. OPEN FORUM

No one appeared for Open Forum.

6. PRESENTATIONS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Healing is Possible 5K

Jonna Phillips, 519 Old Hwy 35 S Hudson, Wisconsin, is the Executive Director of a nonprofit called the Veteran Resilience Project. She is also a current serving military member. Mrs. Phillips shared that the organization provides free trauma therapy called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) to Minnesota Veterans, service members, and spouses. They have about 60 therapists serving people around the state. They have a board member and a couple of therapists that live in the Elk River area.

They are trying to get further out into rural areas, so they want to partner with different regions to do outreach. This is their first 5k fundraising walk. They will follow the pre-established route that City of Elk River staff provided that other 5ks have done such as the Thumbs Up 5k.

The Commission did not have any questions and agreed to allow the event to take place. Chair Anderson asked her to come back and give an update after the event.

Moved by Commissioner Greg Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Mike Niziolek to approve, by motion, the Healing is Possible 5K event at Orono Park on Saturday, October 26, 2024. Motion Carried 4-0.

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1 Hillside Beginner's Area Proposal

Derek Burchill, 14481 Iodine Street in Ramsey, is the MORC (Minnesota Off-Road Cyclists) trail steward for Hillside Park. MORC would like to put in a beginner's area at Hillside for younger and inexperienced riders to gain experience and confidence to feel out mountain biking before getting out on the trails in the woods.

Mr. Burchill shared that mountain biking can be intimidating if never done before. Beginner's areas are rare in Twin Cities areas so it would be nice to have one in the northern metro area. The area right off the parking lot near the picnic table and bench is grassy and not very viable for parking or adding onto an existing trail. Total trail mileage would be about a mile and the kids would be visible for the entire loop allowing parents to watch from their car or a bench.

The trail design includes an outer loop that is easier and an inner loop that would progress to more difficult. The trail would be built with volunteer labor and possibly some dirt and lumber from the City of Elk River. Mr. Stremcha asked for clarification for the Commission on the parking lot boundary and how the new trail would affect that. Mr. Churchill pointed out that the boulders along the side of the parking lot would be the boundary.

Chair Anderson expressed that he would like to see a budget for the project. He said the commissioners ideally plan things a year in advance. Mr. Stremcha said that a dollar amount could be put together within the next month for the project and that Mr. Churchill is collaborating with staff on the project.

Mr. Churchill said he would not need much from the city this year to get the initial trail in. Mr. Stremcha explained that a new paved parking lot is included in the 2025 capital outlay plan. Chair Anderson said he would like this trail plan laid over the parking lot plan for the next meeting.

The commission asked if Mr. Churchill believed the parking lot would need to be bigger. He said he did not think so and that right now as just a dirt circle it is rarely full. Mr. Stremcha said he believes it would be finished as a rectangle.

Mr. Churchill explained that he designed the trail to go around the kiosk. They discussed the trail going further into the forest, but Mr. Churchill said moving the existing trail in the woods is not a good option.

Chair Anderson asked if there is a current trail map. Mr. Churchill shared that the blue lined trail map

off Trailforks website is current but not the one on the kiosk. Mr. Stremcha said moving forward with the trail now would be a suitable time to update the trail maps on everything.

Chair Anderson asked if the plan is to bring this forward to next month's meeting as an action item and if so, Chair Anderson would like to visit the site and see it staked out. Mr. Churchill explained that he did have it painted out, but the rain washed it out, but he can get it marked out again.

He could design the course to just stay in the grassy area, but he would like to bring riders up into the woods a bit. Chair Anderson asked when the new trail could get up and running. Mr. Churchill said they could get it up and running with dirt work and rocks this year. If he could get a dump truck or two of black dirt work that would help, and all the extra things could wait.

Mr. Stremcha referenced the Hillside Park master plan amenities and how they would fit into this plan. Mr. Churchill said he had not seen the master plan before. Commissioner Niziolek said that it is imperative that Mr. Churchill review the master plan before they move forward. Chair Anderson questioned how the trail could hinder future development if it were built now.

Mr. Churchill will review the master plan so all these concerns can be addressed when it is presented as an action item at the next meeting. Mr. Stremcha shared that the master plan is available via the City of Elk River website and that there is just a wish list of amenities for the park based on user input. The commission would like the master plan link sent to them to review before the next meeting.

8.2 Sherburne County Collaboration: Great Northern Regional Trail

Gina Hugo, Sherburne County Parks Director, presented her report and slide show of the Great Northern Regional Trail Partnership and legacy grant funding proposal.

Mrs. Hugo explained that the GNT is a recreational resource shared between five agencies. The GNT corridor affects many stakeholders over a span of 30 miles from Elk River to Milaca. During the first year of the partnership, in 2020, a Memorandum of Understanding between an initial four agencies was set up to create the framework for the future. In 2023 the MOU was updated, and a master plan has been created. Now, in 2024 the focus is on the legacy grant proposal.

Mrs. Hugo explained that the current trail head begins in Elk River at County Rd 1. Commissioner Niziolek suggested shifting this spot to the access coming out of Meadowvale Rd. where most trail users park and hop onto the trail from there. Mrs. Hugo explained that there would be additional public engagement to gather input on these types of things. Chair Anderson suggested including the school district with the public engagement piece as well. Chair Anderson said that feature three would have concerns for ski trail groomers in the winter to have space to turn around and make that loop. Commissioner Niziolek pointed out there could be issues with power lines in that area as far as the structures are concerned and they may have to go further north or south.

Features three and four in Mrs. Hugos presentation would include limiter gates which would serve the importance of creating physical barriers to make cyclists to slow down before approaching roads and to keep motorized vehicles off the trail. Commissioner Niziolek asked about the proximity of the road to the limiter gates. Mrs. Hugo was not sure of the distance yet but that would be determined further into the design process. Commissioner Niziolek shared concerns about the grade separation between the trail and the road. Mrs. Hugo said that concern could be addressed.

Mrs. Hugo shared that feature five is an interpretive sign about the landfill and the last feature within

the City of Elk River boundaries. Its purpose is to inform users about the landfill as they ride past it. Mrs. Hugo reiterated the design process and public engagement will cover details as the project moves on and this is just a proposal. Mrs. Hugo then reviewed the portions of the trail that go into other cities and reviewed the City of Elk River's cost participation of features one through five. Payment would be paid to Sherburne County and occur at the end of construction in 2027.

Mrs. Hugo explained that the purpose for the presentation tonight is for the commission to consider the information and to provide a resolution of support for the grant proposal. Chair Anderson suggested that this item should come back as an action item for the June Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.

Mr. Stremcha asked if the trail head signage is the priority or if other shade structures such as one at Watson Street are more of a priority. Mr. Stremcha questioned if it is more beneficial to have different features than those already proposed and to examine the priorities for project funding. Chair Anderson asked how the timeline for the resolution and grants would be affected if the plan were changed and if the monetary amounts would change. Mrs. Hugo confirmed that any changes would affect the monetary amounts but that there is still time for changes to meet the grant deadline at the end of July.

Commissioner Niziolek suggested there should be a mini work session to consider things the commission could do to enhance this proposal. Councilmember Beyer agreed that they have the June and July meetings yet to meet the grant deadline and they should also include the two commissioners that are missing tonight in making these decisions.

Mrs. Hugo confirmed that if they had a work session in June costs could be estimated by July 31st but the latest they could create a resolution of support would be at the July meeting. Commissioner Niziolek asked if during the application of the grant they are bound to any rules and regulations. Mrs. Hugo said not compared to how it is used now. Commissioner Niziolek is concerned about E-bike usage and/or when the GNT is closed during Nordic skiing and the possibility that the Park Stewards would be forced to plow the trail preventing skiers. Mrs. Hugo said she can check on that. Mrs. Hugo said if the Commission can put together a list of their questions, she can ask the grant coordinator about this.

Chair Anderson expressed that he would like Mrs. Hugo to participate in the June work session. Mr. Stremcha asked Chair Anderson if there should be an agenda for the work session or if it should be a blank slate. Chair Anderson confirmed to keep the agenda a blank slate. Mrs. Hugo said she believed she would be able to attend.

Commissioner Niziolek asked about the landfill and if the City of Elk River has the potential for future ownership. Mr. Stremcha said that landfill could extend into Livonia township or close entirely and if it closes the city gains ownership.

8.3 Scout Island - Scout Service Project

Mr. Stremcha presented his report and slideshow. Commissioner Niziolek said it would be difficult to create a crossing to the peninsula. Mr. Stremcha clarified that the DNR will not allow the current feature to be improved or moved. If a trail is created on either side of the water, the DNR sees it as encouraging the public to attempt an unsafe access to the island.

Commissioner Niziolek said that the island is very cool and that a significant effort should be made to make a way to get to the island. Mr. Stremcha said that the only option would be to pivot and create a

path and bench on the same side and not cross over to the island. He clarified that as the situation stands right now, the answer is no to the project proposal. Chair Anderson said he has no idea when the culverts were put there. Commissioner Niziolek is asked if there is signage identifying the park boundary. Chair Anderson said he already has the signs for the park land boundaries, and they could go up at any time.

Chair Anderson said that this agenda discussion highlights the importance of this vetting process as frustrating as it may be. This project may need to be saved for another scout and Chair Anderson will have to produce a new project for the scout that was part of this proposal. It was clarified that no action is needed tonight, the item was just a discussion.

9. DIVISION MANAGER UPDATES

9.1 Assistant City Administrator Update - May 8, 2024

The staff report was presented.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS

11. MOTION TO ADJOURN REGULAR MEETING

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Niziolek to adjourn the regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 7:45 p.m. Motion carried 4-0.

12. WORK SESSION – UPPER TOWN CONFERENCE ROOM

The work session meeting of the Elk River Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order at 7:54pm by Chair Anderson.

12.1 Athletic Facilities Master Plan

The Commission reviewed the existing version of the potential athletic facilities master plan. Mr. Stremcha shared changes that had already been discussed at the previous meeting. Some of these changes included different viewing options such as berms at the PT Complex and the redesign of Oak Knoll with more of a pinwheel concept with parking on the outside. Mr. Stremcha explained that this meeting was to gather any additional change requests to send to HKGi before they create the final version.

Commissioner Niziolek says that he sees the trend drifting away from neighborhood fields vs. regional complexes. Mr. Stremcha explained this is happening similarly with park/playground locations and park amenities as well. Commissioner Niziolek said he does not think it is for the same reasons and that regional playgrounds are becoming popular due to lower usage in neighborhood ones but not the same with complexes. He shared that he thinks the athletic complexes are not providing the neighborhood feeling and usage and driving economy when they are so far out.

Commissioner Loidolt said that satellite fields like Oak Knoll were hard to staff when he used to schedule them. He thinks that fields are better when they are regionalized because they are compact with everything needed in one place and kids of different ages can all play together.

Mr. Stremcha shared that the Blaine complex location experienced buildup around the location due to the usage. He shared that in our case the HWY 10 corridor just needs to be built up in general and that would support users of the PT Complex. Mr. Stremcha appreciates the work that HKGi has done so far, and it is time to move forward with a plan. He pointed out that the master plan is a conceptional

plan to be used as a guide, creating a framework focusing on priorities until it is built and budgeted for, nothing is set in stone. Changes could be made as each phase is done if necessary.

Commissioner Niziolek asked how the school district figures into the plan regarding Oak Knoll. Mr. Stremcha shared that the plan is for the Tech Center and Ivan Sands school to be demolished by 2026. The school district is already on board with this plan. The current phasing set up in the athletic fields master plan fits all the needs of each current complex, any interested parties and project plans.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if the compost site by Public Works will remain in the same location. He shared concerns about the smell that he feels should be addressed. Mr. Stremcha confirmed that the compost site will remain in the same location.

Commissioner Loidolt asked about creating screening or a sound block of some kind along the train tracks. Commissioner Niziolek suggested that they collaborate with the school district to start planting trees along the train tracks as soon as possible so they have time to start growing.

Chair Anderson said that for 50 million dollars we would be better off starting with a new piece of land and starting from scratch. Chair Anderson shared concerns about how close the fields are to each other at Oak knoll already and that it is being redesigned to be put back together just as tight. Chair Anderson shared concerns that for 50 million dollars if the goal is to build better quality, the fields are still spread out and all the amenities appear jammed together.

Chair Anderson mentioned that there was some discussion in the past about adding a miracle field, but they decided not to do it. He questioned if that is something the commission would be interested in doing now. Mr. Stremcha said he does not think it hurts to include it even if it moves the timeline out since all the projects would be subject to funding anyway. This project would be funded by bonds and potentially a local option sales tax.

Commissioner Niziolek mentioned that the two ball fields at Lion John Weicht Park would still be sitting in the middle of nowhere while the other fields are all out everywhere else. Commissioner Niziolek asked why the City of Elk River cannot create a mini version of the City of Blaine complex. He shared that the gravel pits could create a larger landscape to work with if it were possible to take those over.

Commissioner Loidolt said that the design for the fields in Oak Knoll is very comparable to the current pinwheel at PT Complex. He also shared that flying balls come flying from all directions and the only way to prevent getting hit is to raise the fences higher.

Commissioner Niziolek asked about the potential for using the space the compost site is on at Oak Knoll. Mr. Stremcha said it would also be just as easy to acquire the houses along Proctor for more room. He reiterated that these concepts are a moving target.

Commissioner Stewart asked if this proposal could be redone, and Mr. Stremcha explained that we are maxed out on the budget for this project. Chair Anderson shared that he feels the plan should start over with the current commissioners partially because no one that was on the original subcommittee for the project is still on the board.

Commissioner Niziolek pointed out that what youth are doing in 10 years could change. Mr. Stremcha said that is why the project is phased out. Things can be changed as the project moves forward. Mr.

Stremcha said it is good to have a concept, but we still need to fund all of this, and that could take 20 years.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if staff had the trending numbers for field projection. Mr. Stremcha confirmed that about a year ago HKGi presented the trending numbers and that trends can continue to change all the way up until the buildout of each phase.

Chair Anderson asked about seating at the PT Complex. Mr. Stremcha reminded the commission that at the last meeting it was brought up to add berms around the fields for viewing. Chair Anderson asked why they would not want to add bleachers. Mr. Stremcha said the idea was to create a blanketed feel and less cost and that we could leave space for bleachers. Mr. Stremcha said another option would be to berm one side and put bleachers on the other. Also, if the intention is to have yard chairs, then it would be best not to have berms.

Chair Anderson said that he would feel more comfortable with a “conceptional plan” vs. a master plan. Mr. Stremcha reiterated that at the end of the day the commission can change things in a master plan all the way up until the time amenities and features are built out. A master plan or concept plan is what staff, professional consultants and the commission have planned out, but those items can change as projects come up in the timeline.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if there was a budget plan for the athletic fields master plan. Mr. Stremcha confirmed that funding would come from bonding and park dedication cash for the beginning in 2026. Chair Anderson asked about dimensions on the fields due to concerns about seating and space for kids to walk in between the fields.

Commissioner Loidolt pointed out that currently the city does not have additional land anywhere to dedicate as a blank slate for fields and the youth in this community new updated fields now. He believes that the commission should act now and pivot if the city comes across more land later. Chair Anderson said that he wants to look at other options for land and not just jam stuff into the field areas that currently exist.

Commissioner Loidolt asked Mr. Stremcha if HKGi could give the Commission the scale of measurements for the distance between fields. Chair Anderson would then like to go over the concepts with all seven commissioners.

Chair Anderson would like to see the version of Oak Knoll and potentially vote on this in July. Chair Anderson asked if Warren Ellingworth, the Parks and Recreation Sports Coordinator, could be to at the next work session for the Athletic Facilities Master Plan discussion. Chair Anderson would also like the HKGi dimensions for the concepts and then commissioners would walk it out before the meeting. Commissioner Niziolek said he thinks that there should be two separate work sessions for this project.

13. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Greg Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Hal Stewart to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 09:04 PM

Minutes prepared by Dawn Larson.



Dave Anderson, Chair



Tina Allard, City Clerk