Meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, November 13, 2024

Members Present: Commissioner Dave Anderson, Commissioner Mike Niziolek, Commissioner Joy Goodwin, Commissioner Greg Loidolt, Commissioner Hal Stewart, Commissioner Melissa Fermoyle

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Assistant City Administrator/Business Services Director Joe Stremcha, Farmer's Market/Special Events Coordinator Karen Wingard, Recreation Assistant Ali Wallace, 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 Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to approve the November 13, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Agenda. Motion carried 6-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

   4.1 10-09-2024 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes

   Moved by Commissioner Fermoyle and seconded by Commissioner Goodwin to approve the October 9, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes. Motion carried 6-0.

5. OPEN FORUM

6. ACTION ITEMS

   6.1 2025 Rental Fees

   Mr. Shelby presented his report. Secretary Larson provided a handout showing the shelter rental total comparisons between 2023 and 2024. Commissioner Goodwin asked if staff did comparison research with other cities and Mr. Shelby confirmed we did. Mr. Shelby shared that he believed last time the rates were raised was at the end of 2022.

   Moved by Commissioner Fermoyle and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to approve the recommendation to the City Council to set shelter/pavilion rental fees for 2025 as presented. Motion carried 6-0.

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

7.1 Maher Property

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Chair Anderson explained that anytime the Commission and City of Elk River consider adding park land to the system it is a process. He shared that the process should start with being brought before the commission and then be discussed in future meetings. He also brought up that it is hard to foresee opportunities of adding park land during master plan creation process since the potential park land may not be available at that time.

Chair Anderson pointed out that John Maher, the owner of the potential park property being discussed currently accessed his property via a gated off dirt path at the end of the cul de sac within Camp Cozy. He pointed out that the current owner is looking to sell the property so potentially move south.

Commissioner Fermoyle asked what would happen to the house. Chair Anderson said it would most likely be demolished. He shared that the house sits about thirty inches above the river and does not flood unless there is an ice damn. Commissioners Stewart and Loidolt said they have walked the property before. Commissioner Niziolek said that anytime there is riverfront property that becomes available it is very important for the commission to take a look at it. Commissioner Niziolek said that this property would provide good canoe access to the river.

Chair Anderson said he has canoed by the property many times and said it is very doable and there is even some little whitewater upstream. He said it would be a good area for a picnic spot with a potential reservable shelter. Commissioner Loidolt asked where the funds for this would come from. Mr. Stremcha said that the money could come from either park improvement or park dedication. Chair Anderson said the owner is talking about $80,000 and the demolition of the house would be an additional cost.

Commissioner Stewart asked when the sale would take place. Chair Anderson said the owner would prefer that the city purchase it so he would be willing to wait a bit. He is the unofficial park steward of Camp Cozy and has been mowing the trails on his own with his own trailer for years. Commissioner Goodwin pointed out that we will be losing a good amenity in what the owner provides.

Mr. Shelby asked if the commissioners would like staff to go to the Council to discuss adding this land to the master plan and then have further discussions of purchase. It was a consensus of the commission to recommend to the council to include this property in the master plan for possible purchase.

7.2 Nystrom Property

Mr. Shelby presented his report. The total property available is about 20 acres. Mr. Shelby reviewed the trails on the sides of the property via the trail master plan slide included in the packet. Chair Anderson said the current owners would be interested in having a portion of the property be used for potential future park use.

The property could potentially be sold as one piece or split into three. Chair Anderson said he and staff are looking for input from the commission on whether there would be any interest to purchase it. The City of Elk River could potentially purchase 3 to 5 acres instead of the whole piece. Commissioner Fermoyle asked if there is a current trail going through the property or just a potential trail connection. Chair Anderson shared that one potential use of the land would be to create a trail head for the great northern trail. Commissioner Loidolt suggested a potential disc golf course if they do the whole 20 acres. He shared that he feels they need more recreational areas in parks and not just park land. He feels it is important to consider the disc golfers requests that came forward with suggestions.

Chair Anderson said that the land still needs to be appraised. Mr. Stremcha said according to beacon the land was showing a value of around half a million. Commissioner Niziolek said that he does think they need a trail head, and that Meadowvale is not appropriate, so this could be an opportunity. He also thinks the Nystrom property has safer access to the GNT vs options south of County Rd. 1.

Mr. Stremcha asked for pros and cons of having the trailhead at the Nystrom property location it here vs. Woodland Trails Regional Park. Commissioner Niziolek said that most people want to start at the beginning of a trail which in this case would either be closer to downtown Elk River or Zimmerman vs. Woodland Trails.

Commissioner Niziolek shared that he thinks Woodland Trails Regional Park will continue to be a busy place and parking will reach capacity within the next 10 years. Chair Anderson said it is a complex discussion and there are pros and cons. Commissioner Goodwin said that she thinks that they should be clear and specific about why they would acquire the property it. i.e., if it was for disc golf or a trail head and what portion they would be looking at. She thinks that the price tag for the whole parcel is quite high to just make it a disc golf course. She said that she would be more interested in considering purchasing a smaller portion for a trailhead. Commissioner Goodwin would like to know more about what those details would look like such as how much land they would need and how much of the woods would have to be cleared.

Commissioner Loidolt said that they could do both at the same time. Commissioner Stewart asked if any of the commissioner have walked through the property. Chair Anderson said that the family would let them walk through the property if they wanted to.

Chair Anderson said it should be an action item in the future for this property to be potentially added to the master plan as well as the other property. He is a little concerned as to why they must be added to the master plan. Chair Anderson recommends that the entire commission go down to the two properties before any further recommendations. He also thinks they should bring the disc golfers to tour the Nystrom property.

Chair Anderson shared that he believes the Maher family would like the entire property to be sold at once. He would like to bring both topics back to a commission meeting as an action time before they make a recommendation to council. Commissioner Fermoyle asked if they have concerns about the Maher property selling first. Chair Anderson said he just spoke with the owner, and he said he would wait for now to see what the City of Elk River will decide.

Chair Anderson said that he believes it should be an action item in the future. Mr. Stremcha confirmed that following the tours it the topic would be brought back as an action item to the commission and then carry on to council for master plan amendment and potential purchase. He asked the commission if they would like to get together to take a tour before December or January. The Commissioners decided that December 8th at 1:00pm would work for the majority of them, meeting at the Nystrom property first and then the Maher property. The commissioners requested that staff could reach out to disc golf groups to invite them on the Nystrom property tour.

8. PRESENTATIONS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

8.1 Play My Way

Mr. Shelby Presented his report. Secretary Larson explained the engagement pieces and summarized the results in a measurable manner for the commission to use when planning playground replacements in the CIP budgeting process.

9. RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

9.1 Parks and Recreation Manager Update

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS

11. MOTION TO ADJOURN REGULAR MEETING

Moved by Commissioner Fermoyle and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to adjourn the special meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 7:43 pm. Motion carried 6-0.

12. WORK SESSION

12.1 2025 Capital Improvement

The Commission reconvened for the work session at 7:50pm. Mr. Stremcha explained that grants could affect the budget projections by reducing the amount funded by the City and push out projects to fit the timeline of a larger project.

Commissioner Stewart asked if there was anything listed that they had already approved. Mr. Stremcha used the PT Complex sponsorship money and welcome plaza discussion at the previous meeting as an example. Chair Anderson said it is confusing what money is coming in vs. what is going out.

Chair Anderson asked why a summary of 2024 wasn't included to show how the beginning budget for 2025 was determined. Mr. Stremcha said we do not have 2024 with us tonight but can bring to a future discussion. Chair Anderson said he would like to see that.

Commissioner Loidolt pointed out that the ending balance of this year is at the top of the column for 2025 on each page. Mr. Stremcha said based on the commissions feedback tonight the goal would be to determine which of these projects is still a priority for 2025 or if anything should be pushed back.

Commissioner Loidolt asked about the Jackson Street Water Tower Park and why that was a line item in the parks and recreation budget since the commission had not heard about it before. Mr. Shelby explained that the topic had just come to staff recently as a historical landmark and there are potential grants to offset costs. Mr. Stremcha explained that there is more information to come on that project.

Chair Anderson explained to the group the difference between the capital improvement fund and capital improvement projects. Mr. Stremcha explained that the question on the table for discussion is whether the items listed are still priorities or does the commission recommend, they be postponed to future budget years etc. One example of this would be the parks and recreation framework plan.

Mr. Stremcha continued to explain that on one page is park improvements fund revenue and expenses, and the second page is park dedication fund and expenses. Ideally the commission could rank the expenditures and if not a priority, postpone the other items to future years. They are not currently in order of priority. Commissioner Goodwin asked if the items listed are set in stone and Chair Anderson said they are not. The Commission can give recommendations to avoid going into a negative balance.

Chair Anderson confirmed that the liquor store transfer is the only additional income they will have going forward. Chair Anderson would like staff to give their own recommendations for expenditures ranked by priority then the commission could have a clearer discussion. Commissioner Niziolek said that Ridgewood East Park basketball court may not need to be replaced so soon since the school nearby has several courts. He also suggested that since the Lion John Weicht Park shelters are used the least out of the parks maybe their replacement could be delayed.

Chair Anderson brought up whether a master plan is needed and is concerned about the amount of money currently in the budget for it. Commissioner Niziolek agreed. Chair Anderson and Commissioner Loidolt said that they need Mr. Baas, the Park Maintenance Foreman to be present to confirm if items need to be replaced or not.

Commissioner Goodwin asked if these replacement projections are absolute. Mr. Stremcha said that not necessarily- projects could be stretched out if they are not failing quite yet. Chair Anderson said that typically this input would come from staff but right now that is not available with recent staff changes but he feels the commission can still make a recommendation based on what they know.

Commissioner Loidolt said that these are placeholders that have been put in the schedule based on maintenance schedules and previous conversations, but it does not necessarily need to be done. There are items can be reevaluated by staff and pushed out. Commissioner Goodwin said it would be helpful to have Mr. Baas present. Mr. Stremcha said that Mr. Baas would be the one to determine if maintenance things can be pushed out or not.

Commissioner Loidolt shared that he thinks the commission and staff could use the Play my Way data to help determine the priorities in a master framework plan. The commissioners agreed that the line items of $325,000 needs to be broken down into smaller categories so it is clear what the money would go for. Mr. Stremcha explained that with recent staff changes it has been hard to prepare the details.

Chair Anderson said they have never had a line item with such a high number without details of the cost. Chair Anderson would like to have seen these numbers sooner. Once staff have had a chance to look this over with Mr. Baas the commission would like to see what is in that $325,000 total to be able to make clear choices on what could be taken out.

Chair Anderson asked if any of the commissioners have any projects in mind that are not currently on the list that they would like to add. Mr. Stremcha asked if the current items listed are a priority to the commissioners and if their goal is to be revenue neutral. Commissioner Stewart asked what the park dedication estimates comes from. Mr. Stremcha said Zach Carlton with the City of Elk River Planning department can provide that information based on development projections i.e., Bradford Park and the Specht property that have recently been discussed. Chair Anderson asked for confirmation that park dedication is paid out at final plat not when homes are built. Mr. Stremcha confirmed.

The commission would like to see the details of the $325,000 broken down before they give recommendations. It would be foolish the put the budget a million dollars in the hole by 2028 otherwise they have to ask the council for more money and that would mean money would come out of taxpayer's pockets. The choice is to either fill the gap or do less. They must collectively decide what they are not going to do. Playgrounds could be its own work session project in 2025, the current playground schedule it not sustainable and there here are too many small playgrounds. Commissioner Loidolt asked Mr. Stremcha if the commissioner could ask City Council for an increase in funds from the liquor store profits. Mr. Stremcha shared that the city is considering more income through the liquor stores including cannabis sales that could increase the revenue.

Mr. Stremcha said the council is looking for recommendations for the first December meeting. It could be something as simple as to not spend more than a certain amount of dollars but the details of what the money/line-item details are spent on can be determined later.

Chair Anderson suggested holding a special meeting sometime between now and December 2nd meeting to make these decisions. Commissioner Fermoyle suggested to make a recommendation on dropping the $325, 000 to $125,000 to save $200,000. Chair Anderson said he feels that they would not be doing their job to do it that way.

Chair Anderson agreed with the following budget line items $6,250 would be good, $10,000 would be good, he needs more information about the $35,000, would like Mr. Baas input on the Ridgewood basketball court, $100,000 framework plan could be pushed out, he would like details of what the $325,000 in park projects are and then work to balance the budget. Commissioner Loidolt said that Council needs to understand that playgrounds will be not getting replaced based on the current budget with a goal to have a have a balanced budget.

Chair Anderson called a special meeting for Wednesday the 20th at 6:30pm to discuss the budget. Secretary Larson clarified that there would not be any data to provide ahead of time if the meeting is next wed. Commissioner Fermoyle said she cannot make the meeting next wed.

Commissioner Stewart asked about the Hillside parking lot budget line item. The Commissioners agreed that could be pushed out. Commissioner Niziolek suggested that we get out of the parking lot business and focus on recreation. Chair Anderson agree to keep pushing parking lots out as far as they can and let the City Council make those decision. Commissioner Niziolek mentioned that they have not discussed the Jackson Street Water Tower Park at all. Commissioner Stewart said that this would be an opportunity for a civic private partnership since it is downtown.

It was the consensus of the Commission hold a special meeting touring the following properties with permission of the landowners on Sunday, December 8, at 1:00pm at the Nystrom Property located at 19232 Proctor Rd. Elk River, MN 55330 and the Maher Property located near Camp Cozy Sec:31 Twp:33.0 Rg:26 Lot: Blk: Acres 2.67 W 1-2 OF NE 1-4 LYING S &W OF ELK RIVER EX N 950 FT.

13. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Goodwin to adjourn the meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 8:59pm. Motion carried 6-0.

Dave Anderson, Chair

Tina Allard, City Clerk