



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, December 11, 2024**

Members Present: Commissioner Dave Anderson, Commissioner Mike Niziolek, Commissioner Jill Varty, Commissioner Joy Goodwin, Commissioner Greg Loidolt, Commissioner Hal Stewart

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Assistant City Administrator/Business Services Director Joe Stremcha, Parks and Recreation Manager Jeff Shelby, 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 Niziolek to approve the December 11, 2024, agenda. Motion carried 6-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

4.1 Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes 11-13-2024

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the November 11, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes. Motion carried 6-0.

4.2 Parks and Recreation Special Meeting Minutes 11-20-2024

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to approve the November 20, 2024, Parks and Recreation Commission Special Meeting Minutes with a change of the end time to 7:57pm. Motion carried 6-0.

5. OPEN FORUM

6. ACTION ITEMS

6.1 Park Dedication for Norrgard Wooded Acres

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Chair Anderson asked if anyone has gone out and looked to see if there is room for the trail. He said that it looks like there are some topography issues regarding room for the trail.

Mr. Shelby shared that the trail does run through the right of way, and he does not believe an easement

is necessary according to planning. Commissioner Niziolek asked what the right of way would be. Mr. Shelby said it would be along the west end of Jarvis. Commissioner Niziolek said it looks like precedence has been set in the development to the south and that they should maintain the same spacing of 100 feet.

Commissioner Niziolek said he is assuming it is 50 feet to the south and that they want to be consistent and maintain 50 feet in lot 1 or 2. Chair Anderson said they could ask for 30 but it could be up to 17 feet.

Mr. Shelby confirmed that it is 33 feet according to the plan. Chair Anderson asked if they should go with a 30-foot-wide easement in lieu of 50 feet from center of the roadway. Mr. Shelby said that is feedback that could be passed along to the planning department.

Mr. Shelby shared that staff are just looking for the park dedication to be cash in hand. Chair Anderson suggested that the commission make two separate motions- one for the cash and one for the easement.

Commissioner Goodwin said that it is a good idea to have clarity on it right now before the development is built out.

Moved by Commissioner Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Loidolt to recommend that park dedication for the Norrgard Wooded Acres be paid in cash, at the applicable rate at the time of recording, for two dwelling units. Motion carried 6-0

Moved by Commissioner Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to recommend a 30-foot-wide trail easement along the west side of Jarvis Street. Motion carried 6-0

6.2 PID 75-00128-4200

Mr. Shelby presented his report. This property has also been referred to as the Nystrom Property. Chair Anderson shared that the commissioners do not have to recommend anything by motion, they can just discuss the visit to the property this past Sunday. They got a nice tour from Eric Nystrom, discussed the wishes of the family which could include high density housing on the southern portion of the property, maintaining the existing single family and then if the City were interested in a portion of the northern portion for park related uses the family would be interested in having that happen.

Commissioner Goodwin said they have discussed long and hard about the trail head that is nonexistent currently. This property could be a strong possibility for that, and it is beautiful, near downtown and the access point is convenient. She added that it is important to consider safety when creating an access point for the Great Northern Trail head. She said this area is less busy than over by Meadowvale.

Commissioner Stewart shared his concerns that while it is wooded, rolling land the commissioners do not know if they are the only group that would be involved in the potential purchase of the property and that could change how it could be split. This could be one of the last large pieces of property close to downtown.

Commissioner Varty said that not knowing what the cost of the property is makes it hard to decide. She does not feel like a decision can be made without more information. Commissioner Loidolt said the main drive of his interest in the property was the potential to purchase the whole 20 acres. He said that now that the owner is potentially only interested in selling the city seven acres it changes what the

property could be used for such as disc golf. It could be expensive if the City were to buy the whole property but without the price there is not a way to know.

Commissioner Niziolek said that he is going to talk about the bigger picture. He said that currently there is no shoulder on Proctor Rd from the Cherrywood Hills exit down to the Nystrom Property. He shared that this causes safety concerns. There is a trail connected to Proctor Rd that is not safe and he thinks that it will have to be moved so it connects to the intersection. He sees the trail as having to connect from Proctor through the Nystrom property to the driveway that connects across from the Salk entrance. He said there are also a lot of people parking on Proctor it that are attending the ball games at the fields. He said it is important to look at making this piece of property a destination trailhead for the Great Northern Trail. There are a lot of questions and possibilities but also a lot of things to look at and figure out.

Chair Anderson said that the trail master plan does show a trail plan on the east side property, west side of Proctor Rd when the property develops. That would take care of the conflict between parking on the road and bikers. It also takes care of providing a safer crossing.

Chair Anderson said it sounded like the family was interested in high density housing on the southern side of the property which would rule out a disc golf course. Topography wise it is a bulldozer job. He says it should hold interest as a trail head in our community, but he does not feel that a decision must be made this evening, especially without knowing the price. He thinks that this topic should come back at a future meeting when they have more information. Councilmember Beyer said he can appreciate what Commissioner Niziolek said as far as his concerns about the trail safety on Proctor Rd.

Councilmember Beyer watched the November meeting while he was traveling. When he went to the last council meeting, he mentioned this property and said they had questions about the price of the property that should be figured out before any action is taken and before it would be recommended to be added to the master plan. He feels acting tonight is premature without more information.

Chair Anderson asked if the commission was okay with leaving this item for more discussion. Commissioner Niziolek said that maintaining the lower part of the proposed trail plan on the lower part of the Nystrom property will be hard to maintain and keep safe if it follows the road. He thinks it should cut across from City Rd I to Proctor Rd going across the lower tip of the Nystrom Property and then along the road. He recommends that they include a red line loop through the lower portion of the Nystrom property that connects from Cty Rd I to Proctor. He also said that at some point they need to identify where a great northern trail head will be in Elk River and work towards that.

Chair Anderson said that would be an amendment to the master trail plan which could be done at a future meeting.

It was the consensus to wait to move on this item after future discussion.

6.3 PID 75-00131-2100

Mr. Shelby presented his report. This property has also been referred to as the Maher property.

Commissioner Loidolt shared that he has been to the property, and he sees it as a nice property, but he does not have an opinion either way.

Commissioner. Niziolek said he thinks the property would be a great addition to Camp Cozy Park and

that the property will continue to grow with usage over the next decade or two. He believes adding this property as an access point to the Elk River would enhance the park property. It would be great to have an Elk River access on the west side of town so you could canoe all the way down to Orono Park and back. There are several pieces of park property along that waterway. He sees it as an incredibly good potential recreation area in Elk River along our waterways.

He also had concerns about the floodplain on the property. Chair Anderson said that it has already been decided that nothing can be built there in the future.

Commissioner Varty thought the site was a terrific addition to the existing park. She said that right now the park is a personal park to the people who use it. She thinks this would increase the usage of the area.

Commissioner Stewart said he agreed with Commissioner Varty. He has never seen anyone else at the park when he has been there over the past couple of years. He said he thinks more people will use the park if this amenity was added.

Commissioner Goodwin shared that she imagines more families using this park with this addition. She said it would add a lot of benefit by connecting the park to the river. She also asked the commission what their framework for the next decade is. She asked how these properties fit into the legacy of parks in the future for the City of Elk River.

Chair Anderson said that this piece of property offers something that we do not have yet. He thinks this would be the best place to have a picnic by the water. This would be a quiet place to picnic, sit, kayak, or canoe. He intended to call Mr. Maher today to confirm the price, but he ran out of time. Without the answer of cost, he would be reluctant to move this forward. Mr. Stremcha stated that during the tour Mr. Maher did make a statement about \$80,000 being the price tag for this property.

Councilmember Beyer said that as a council member this is a piece of property that makes sense, and he could support it. He said they would also have to look at funding and where that would come from. He would however like to have that in a package before taking any action.

Mr. Stremcha did say that there was \$100,000 approved by the City Council in the 2025 CIP budget for the acquisition and development of the parcel. Chair Anderson said that this is one of those rare opportunities that has come along. Chair Anderson shared that Mr. Maher mentioned at the tour that he would like the city to have the property. Chair Anderson said that they could even look at where they want the parking to be, moving it further in or out depending upon how they want to program the space.

Commissioner Goodwin asked what it meant if they were ready to move this one along. Chair Anderson explained what the current recommended motion is. Chair Anderson said he is trying to clarify where this fits into the current master plan. He said it fits in Chapter 5 and on page 60. Mr. Stremcha pointed out that it starts on page 29.

Mr. Stremcha said under number one under the area where it states “improve riverfront connectivity” a bullet could be added to identify this piece of property for meeting that goal, and it would be advantageous to add this property specifically.

Commissioner Loidolt said that the first bullet point really covers that already. Councilmember Beyer

said that is how he reads it as well.

Chair Anderson said they would be recommending this property for acquisition. They could even do it now. Commissioner Loidolt said that he feels they have enough support as of tonight.

Councilmember Beyer said he is concerned about the hidden costs. He would want to see all the costs before he could stand behind it and vote for it.

Mr. Stremcha said the city should make an offer on the property and then the owner can make a counteroffer, they can negotiate. He shared that the city should make a letter of interest to reach out to the property owner and see where it goes from there.

Commissioner Niziolek suggested recommending that staff begin the process over the next month or two to produce a firm price for the property and demo of the existing building.

Mr. Stremcha said the City Council would go into a closed session after the commission recommendation and then the city would produce a letter of intent with the goal of all the costs to stay within the \$100,000 budget.

Councilmember Beyer is concerned that the current action item on the agenda is not something he supports so they would have to make a different motion if they are doing something different.

Staff and commissioners agreed that the motion could be changed to the following below.

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Commissioner Goodwin to approve a recommendation to the City Council to pursue PID 75-00131-2100, also known as the Maher property, for future purchase. Motion carried 6-0

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

7.1 Horse Ordinance

Mr. Shelby presented his report. Chair Anderson has had several incidents with horses specifically at Woodland Trails Regional Park. Mr. Shelby shared that he did not find current ordinances in surrounding areas that fit our situation so they would be starting from nothing. Commissioner Varty said she has seen a person walk a horse down the County Rd 1 trail on a leash. Mr. Shelby said there are not any current ordinances preventing this.

Chair Anderson said he does not see creating a horse ordinance as dissimilar from the trail closing ordinance that was written in spring 2024. Chair Anderson said he did not know that we did not have an ordinance keeping horses off the trail. Commissioner Stewart said that the cities of Coon Rapids, Brooklyn Park and St. Cloud have horse ordinances.

Commissioner Goodwin asked what kind of a horse community Elk River has. Commissioner Niziolek said there are many equestrians near the Girl Scout Camp in the northeast area of Elk River.

Chair Anderson shared that over the summer there were horses on the trails scaring people because the trails are incompatible between horses and pedestrians. Chair Anderson asked if it is as simple as drafting an ordinance that says horses are not allowed in Elk River City parks or on city trails. He suggested there could be an exception for public events in the parks. Mr. Stremcha said that staff could

draft it for the next meeting, but they would need to know the size and scope of what the commission wants and then at the January meeting it could be an action item.

Commissioner Loidolt said he is more afraid of dogs than horses and he is not in favor of banning horses. He said that he liked the ordinance that Commissioner Stewart read from the St. Cloud ordinance. Chair Anderson said that the horses are doing damage to the trails. Commissioner Loidolt does not like that this is a blanket ordinance and there are not enough horses using the trails to warrant that. Chair Anderson asked what the commission thinks.

Commissioner Goodwin said she is curious about what people will think if they cannot have their horses anywhere. Commissioner Varty asked if there is a way to put a horse trail next to a regular trail. Chair Anderson said no. Commissioner Niziolek said if there is excessive equestrian use on the Woodland Trails green trails it makes them unusable. He said they made the rule about no horses to stop that, and they should just designate the ordinance to be specific to the green trails to protect them. Commissioner Loidolt asked about having trails for the horses. Commissioner Niziolek said an ordinance for the green trails is something they should pursue. Commissioner Stewart asked if the current master plan has any plan to accommodate trails for horses. Commissioner Varty said she agrees with Commissioner Niziolek who said that keeping them off the green trails would be a good idea. Councilmember Beyer asked if people are trailering horses in. Commissioner Varty said she thinks there are people that live nearby that ride their horses to the park.

Commissioner Varty asked if they should let it sit and if they get a rush of complaints, they will discuss this again. The other commissioners agreed.

8. RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

8.1 Parks and Recreation Manager Update

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councilmember Beyer will be leaving us after this meeting. Councilmember Cory Grupa will be our next Council Liaison starting January 1st, 2024.

10. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Goodwin and seconded by Commissioner Niziolek to adjourn the regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 7:55pm. Motion carried 6-0.



Dave Anderson, Chair



Tina Allard, City Clerk