



**Meeting of the Parks and Recreation
Commission
Held at the Elk River City Hall
Wednesday, February 12, 2025**

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

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Assistant City Administrator/Business Services Director Joe Stremcha, Parks and Recreation Manager Jeff Shelby, and 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 Fermoye and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the February 12, 2025, agenda. Motion carried 7-0.

4. CONSIDER MINUTES

4.1 01-08-2025 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes

5. OPEN FORUM

6. PRESENTATIONS, AWARDS, AND RECOGNITION

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 Free Grace Easter Event

Karli Phelps with Free Grace United Church presented her slideshow for the Easter egg hunt proposal for Lion John Weicht Park. It would be a bilingual event with their Spanish speaking congregation.

The main event would take place at their building, but the eggs would be hidden along the trail in the park. The eggs would be plastic and not have candy in them. Participants would be able to turn in the eggs for prizes at Free Grace United.

The Church would provide signage by the Boys and Girls Club entrance to the park as well as the entrance on their side off School Street. The event would be two to three hours and participants would park at the Church location and walk to the park for the egg hunt portion.

They do have a backup plan for the weather. The Church had a hay wagon ride event in the park last fall and it went well.

Moved by Commissioner Fermoye and seconded by Commissioner Varty to approve the Free Grace United Easter Egg Hunt at Lion John Weicht Park on Saturday, April 12, 2025. Motion carried 7-0

7.2 Athletic Fields Framework Plan

Kevin Clarke with HKGi presented his slideshow showing the changes requested by the Commission from previous meetings.

He explained that a framework plan will require additional design refinements as the projects are built out over time and things change. One of the goals of this plan was to move specific sport types into central locations versus being spread out amongst different complexes. Elements of consideration included grouping facilities, improving the quality of facilities, and looking at how maintenance and programming would fit into the complexes.

Mr. Clarke explained the tournament capacity included the details in the graph in the slideshow.

There are some wetland delineations that still need to be finalized. Those must be done within 5 years so it would be good to wait on those until closer to construction.

Oak knoll would have a goal of having all ages able to play at the same time.

He reviewed the DAAC changes from a 4-way pinwheel to a two field and another programmable field space for Parks and Recreation. Overall, the complex would become an extension of Orono Park.

He then reviewed the PT Complex changes primarily with the lower south side of the complex being developed. He stressed that there were foul ball concerns by the commission and those details have been addressed in the design. Funding for the projects would come from various methods including partnerships, grants, relationships with the school district.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if an agreement has been signed with ISD 728 as far as Oak Knoll. Mr. Stremcha said no but they are in good faith and waiting for the plan from the City before they would commit and make their plans known.

Commissioner Niziolek said that he is nervous to decide without having a commitment from the school district. Mr. Stremcha said once the Commission makes their recommendation the City Council and Independent School District 728 would discuss future options.

Commissioner Loidolt said he likes the ideas, but the Oak Knoll project has a lot of amenities in the plans. He is concerned about foul balls and parking etc. in such a small space. He wants to make sure that HKGI is doing their due diligence to make sure this would work. Mr. Clarke said that the foul ball issues are factored into the plan.

Commissioner Loidolt said that he is placing his trust into the designers that they are making the right choices to keep fans safe from foul balls. Otherwise, he is happy with the plan. He said that they just need find the money and finalize the agreement with ISD 728.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if the Commission would see a financial plan of how the plan would be achieved and if so, how soon. Mr. Stremcha said that the idea is to bring the plan to the City Council to incorporate it into the CIP and budget plans followed by additional discussions for ideas of how to fund the other larger portions of the project.

Chair Anderson said that the plan would be easier to support if they had a plan to pay as they go. He is not in favor of borrowing money and cannot see this project happening with the current budget in place. Mr. Stremcha confirmed that right now there is not currently a funding stream through Parks and Recreation that is sufficient.

Mr. Stremcha said that they would not be able to bond for this project like the FT Center. These are more like bite size bonds i.e.; an option would be doing a 10-million-dollar referendum once the FT Center is done. Another option would be to build up the parks fund and then pay for portions as they go. He also said that a sales tax referendum around 2030 could be an option to discuss.

Chair Anderson is concerned about the high amount of money being discussed. He is cautious because he has seen the rise and fall of the park fund by building it up and then having regret for spending so much so quickly.

Mr. Clarke shared that the prices in the slideshow are 2025 numbers. Mr. Stremcha reiterated to the commission that this is more of a 20-year plan.

Commissioner Goodwin said that she is concerned about doing a referendum since the last one has left a salty taste in people's mouths. She said that she likes the plans, but she is not sure about saying yes when they do not have a funding plan at this time.

Commissioner Stewart is concerned about how close together the fields and amenities are to each other. He agrees with the other Commissioners that it is hard to recommend the plan without having a funding source.

Commissioner Varty stated that she agrees with Commissioners Goodwin and Stewart. Mr. Stremcha said that he wanted to be clear that this is just a recommendation for the plan, and implementation wouldn't occur until funding became available and then it would be discussed before phase I could begin. Each phase would also go through its own architectural plan, site plan review, etc. and things could change.

Commissioner Loidolt reiterated that tonight they are just approving the plan and he wants to get it moving before they fall further behind.

Chair Anderson said that he agrees with Commissioner Loidolt about needing the plan but reiterated that they do not have a funding source to make it go.

Councilmember Cory Grupa asked if the phases presented in the plan are in the order, they want to complete the project. Mr. Stremcha said that some of the phases could be moved around, if necessary, based on funding opportunities as they arise. They also may have to adjust things as they go through construction due to issues that may arise that were unforeseen.

Chair Anderson said that he can vote for the plan if they have a funding source and have the money in

the bank before they start. Commissioner Loidolt asked if the expectation is that Parks and Recreation would pay for this or not. Mr. Stremcha said it would be a heavy council retreat topic in the spring.

Commissioner Niziolek asked if there is school property and building that will be part of the discussion with Hales field. Mr. Stremcha said that the building would be demolished and be part of the land swap agreement similar to Lion John Weicht Park.

Commissioner Niziolek said he sees an urgency right now for Oak Knoll, but Mr. Stremcha explained that the PT Complex must have the extra fields added so that the fields at Oak Knoll must be able to be taken offline during construction.

Chair Anderson explained again that he cannot approve the plan without having a funding source. Mr. Stremcha explained that this plan is like the Parks and Recreation Parks Master plan and the Trails Plan. Funding was not figured out when the plan was made. It was visionary in 2015 and then came to fruition as the timeline moved along and funding became available.

Moved by Commissioner Loidolt and seconded by Chair Anderson to recommend the Athletic Fields Framework Plan to the City Council for adoption. Motion carried 7-0.

7.3 Specht Family Farm Residential Development Park Dedication

Mr. Shelby presented his report and reviewed four additional slides, three from Capstone Homes and one from the City Planning department. He then read the three staff recommended action options in the handout for the meeting.

Matt Barker and Stephen Bona from Capstone were in attendance for questions.

Chair Anderson said he would like to hear from the applicant.

Mr. Barker shared that he has walked the property over the past couple of weeks with the different commissioners and thanked the commissioners for their time. He reiterated that there about 42 acres set aside for park dedication that they presented at the last Commission meeting. This amount of acreage is about 20% of the total development. He then reiterated that Capstone is also adding 15 acres with the landscape berm along the highway that is not included in the park dedication.

Mr. Barker stated that the commercial portion of the map are not part of this discussion. Commissioner Niziolek is asked if there will be sperate park dedication for the commercial portion. Mr. Stremcha and Mr. Shelby confirmed that the commercial park dedication will come in front of the commission later.

Commissioner Goodwin asked for an explanation of why the wetlands would not be accepted and Chair Anderson said the commission has not typically accepted wetlands.

Mr. Barker said that they have not seen the recommendations presented tonight prior to the meeting. Chair Anderson said that the options presented as a handout tonight are all options for the Commission to consider.

Mr. Barker said that he does not see the Capstone Park dedication proposal on the recommendations in the three options on the handout. They had not planned on anything other than land as park dedication. Chair Anderson explained again that the Commission can make the recommendations as they see fit.

Chair Anderson said this is a unique piece of property being by the Mississippi River with unique topography. He has been down on the property and walked it several times. He said as a Commission they will talk about each of the proposed elements and then make their recommendation.

Chair Anderson said that the 14.51 acres of greenway is not worthy of park dedication, and he does not see it as usable. It is storm water retention, and he would recommend not giving any park dedication for it.

Commission Goodwin asked about the trail portion of that piece that would meet up with the other trails. Chair Anderson said that an easement takes care of the trail connection if it is in storm water areas as they usually end up owned and maintained by the city as well.

Chair Anderson explained that trails are the last part of the recommendation. The first part is identifying land for dedication and then cash.

Commissioner Niziolek said that he does not see a nice place for a picnic or playground in this area in the 14.51-acre greenway. He sees it as the backyard of people's homes with a trail, stormwater ponds and landscaping. He feels like they could serve the community better if they had a different space. The other Commissioners all agreed.

Mr. Bona from Capstone said that they have removed a lot of lots to create the linear trail but if they cannot get the park dedication for the 14.51-acre greenway, they would remove this and remove the trail as planned to gain the lots back. They thought it was a feature of the Mississippi River Trail the trail down to the river. They would move storm water basins into the back yards.

Chair Anderson then moved on to discussing the 28.07-acre parcel in the low land area by the Mississippi. Commissioner Loidolt said he did not get to walk the property, so he must go with the recommendations of the other Commissioners. Commissioner Niziolek said that this property is in the flood plain so they cannot build a structure there. He said there are portions of the land that are not but based upon past practice they have not accepted wetland flood plain for park dedication, but he said that they should consider taking the portion above the 10-year flood plain as park dedication because he does see the value of the land being by the Mississippi River. Staff is not sure how much acreage that would be.

Mr. Barker said that they do have the areas split out showing that the non-wetland area in their plan which would be 16 acres. Commissioner Niziolek clarified that wetland and land above the 10-year water mark are different. Mr. Stremcha said that staff can calculate the acreage above the 10-year water mark for park dedication credit.

Commissioner Goodwin said that Commissioner Niziolek's compromise sounds good. Commissioner Varty said she is not sure how accepting a dry area in the middle of a wetland can be accepted. Chair Anderson said houses cannot be built down there, so it does not have a lot of their typical park amenity options. He said it looks like it might be about ten acres.

Councilmember Grupa asked for clarification as to whether they would accept anything down along the river and Chair Anderson said no. Capstone staff confirmed that they could make that private area.

Commissioner Goodwin asked the other Commissioners where they would put the other amenities for

the development if they would not build them down by the river. She said that this is right on the river, and it is beautiful land. She stated concern for where the amenities are going to go for the other people on the other side of the neighborhood. She also has concerns about taking on the responsibility and maintenance of more playground equipment.

Chair Anderson said that this neighborhood needs to be like Trott Brook Park. It should be a showcase park in a showcase neighborhood. Chair Anderson described the ideal location for a park, such as the Burr Oak area, is right up on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. It should be a 7-acre rectangular high ground park with five hundred feet of frontage on the western boundary of the park on the bluff line going through Yale all the way to Xavier St. on the map. Mr. Stremcha drew a layout on the map provided to give an idea of the size and location.

Commissioner Niziolek said that it would not having a parking lot. It would be roadside parking like Trott Brook. He thinks it would be fabulous for our city and the kids. He also thinks that the trail would also be very important running through the neighborhood so the people can get to the park and down to the river.

Commissioner Niziolek said the trail would ideally be eighty feet from the backyard of the homes and go all the way up and through to the Oliver Kelley Farm. The ultimate trail alignment would look like what is presented tonight. He also clarified that it would be ideal to have a road on either side of the park and have roadside parking versus a parking lot. It would be like Trott Brook Park. Having the park up top would provide a safer environment for kids to play in compared to a lower area by the river.

Councilmember Grupa asked the Commission what land they wanted to delegate for park dedication. Chair Anderson said the primary piece is the seven-acre park on the top, park dedication for lower space in the amount of land above the 10-year high water mark minus the wetlands, and the remainder in cash at the applicational rate at the time of platting and the trail should be installed by the developer with trail access easements across any trails not located on public property. Mr. Shelby said planning would be able to determine the amount of land in the lower space minus the wetlands.

Councilmember Grupa questioned if the developer makes the final park location decision. Mr. Stremcha said City Council and the developer make the final decision.

Mr. Bona shared that they appreciate the comments from the Commission, but he feels like it needs to be more of a two-way street about the parks. He said that the things the commission is describing may not be financially able to work for them as the developer. He is concerned that they put a year into this plan, and this is the first time they are hearing about this. He said if they recommend, and they cannot financially do it then it could be waste of time.

Chair Anderson pointed out that he had sent notes to the last meeting because he could not be present. He said the Capstone plan has stayed the same since day one and they do not seem to be hearing the Commission's recommendations. He does not feel that the Commissioners comments and recommendations are being heard by the developer.

Chair Anderson pointed out that they think they are compromising. He wants to make sure they are serving the people in the neighborhood and making sure they have a park and programable space.

Mr. Bona said they could not do a bluff line trail because they financially need to have homes on that bluff. He feels like the property that they proposed for park dedication is the crown jewel of the

property because everyone wants to get down to the river. He said that they thought of it as more of a passive park and originally, they thought it was going to be an HOA park for the neighborhood. As they got into more discussions with the city, they thought the city would want it as a park themselves. Now they are having a financial issue if they cannot do it this way. Elk River is the only City they have ever worked with that requires 20% park dedication.

Mr. Bona said that they are trying to accommodate many different things to get to the 20%. While designing this plan they set aside so much open space, more than they ever have before. They wanted to create a big berm and landscape it which will also cost them a lot of money.

He asked the Commission to reconsider because he feels that the recommendations being put forth are not something that Capstone can financially do. Chair Anderson said that they are talking about usable programmable park space as park dedication, and he thinks Commissioner Niziolek's suggestion of compromise about the lower space is a good idea.

Mr. Bona said that he really needs the full park dedication credit for the lower park space to move forward. He feels like they are giving away their shoreland and it is very valuable. Chair Anderson said that Capstone would need to discuss these concerns with City Council then.

Commissioner Loidolt asked if the lower space by the river is buildable. Mr. Bona said not for homes, but it would be for other amenities if that was made a private park, and discussions were had with the DNR.

Mr. Stremcha suggested the potential compromise of a 7-acre park on the upland paired with the 7-acres space down below above high-water mark, then 7-acres of park dedication money as the remainder up to 15% instead of 20%. 45 acres of park dedication was the original 20% so 32.5 acres would be about 15%. Chair Anderson confirmed it would end up being about half cash and half land. He also clarified that it was City Council that produced the formula of the 20% so he is trying to follow the rules. Chair Anderson said because it is a planned unit development it has some flexibility. He said he could consider this suggestion.

Mr. Bona asked for clarification on this compromise. Mr. Stremcha explained that the green strip would no longer be included in the park dedication. He also said that when the ordinance was created it would not have taken into a property like this. He said the lower field is still the most important part. Mr. Bona said that he does believe the City could put a playground and all the regular park amenities in that lower area by working with the DNR.

Mr. Barker said they had an extensive conversation with the Kelly Farm about not having the trail come through their property via the bluff line. He also said there is nine acres that could be programmed on the green space corridor where the trail is currently shown.

Chair Anderson said that he knows they lost the bluff line trail. The overall intent is getting from the northwest to the southeast part of the property.

Commissioner Fermoye said she is concerned about amending the dedication fee to 15% and how that might affect future park dedication decisions.

Commissioner Niziolek said that all the park dedication fees will be going back into this community via the building of a playground and a pavilion in the park in their community. He shared they are not doing

this to be selfish but to look out for the community and make it as grand as they can. Mr. Stremcha said they could earmark the park dedication money for this specific park and property.

Chair Anderson clarified that someone would have to do the math later since they do not know the calculations for the land right now. Mr. Stremcha confirmed this could be done.

A recommendation that instead of 20% park dedication a reduction to 15%, 32.4 acres. The upland overlook area is estimated to be eight acres, the lowland minus the high flood mark is estimated to be eight acres, and then sixteen acres in cash which would be earmarked for the development of the upland park.

Moved by Commissioner Niziolek and seconded by Commissioner Stewart to recommend that the required 20% of park dedication be reduced to 15% which is 32 acres allocating 8 acres for Upland overlook park, 8 acres above the 10-year flood line and the other 16 acres paid in cash which would be 50% in land and 50% in cash with the cash to be used for projects specifically within this development. Motion carried 7-0

Moved by Chair Anderson and seconded by Commissioner Goodwin for the trail to be installed by developer with trail access easements access across any land not located on public property and that it is in the alignment shown in the presentation exhibit. Motion carried 7-0

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

9. RECREATION MANAGER UPDATE

9.1 Parks and Recreation Manager Update

Mr. Shelby presented his report.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS

11. MOTION TO ADJOURN

Moved by Commissioner Melissa and seconded by Commissioner Varty to adjourn the regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission at 9:12pm. Motion carried 7-0.



Dave Anderson, Chair



Tina Allard, City Clerk