

**PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
MEETING APRIL 25, 2023  
MINUTES**

The April 25, 2023, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources was called to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Birchwood city hall.

**Attendees:** Council Member Justin McCarthy, Council Member Kathy Weier, Committee Members Zachary Michalk, Mary Sue Simmons, Jennifer Arsenault, and Alan Mitchell. Committee Member Noel Hegedus was out of town and absent. Birchwood resident Bryan McGinnis also attended.

**Agenda** Kathy Weier wanted to add a discussion about the Special Revenue Fund to the agenda. The agenda was approved with that one addition.

**Minutes.** Moved by Arsenault and seconded by Simmons to approve the draft Minutes of the March 29 meeting, and the motion was approved unanimously.

**Bylaws.** Committee members recognized that the Council had finalized the bylaws for the committee. The final bylaws recognize that two members of the committee would serve one-year terms and three would serve two-year terms. It was agreed that Arsenault and Mitchell would serve for one year and Simmons, Michalk, and Hegedus would serve for two years.

**Election.** By unanimous consent, Michalk was elected chair and Mitchell was elected Secretary.

**Regular Meetings.** Because the Planning Commission meets regularly on the fourth Thursday of the month, the committee decided to hold its regular meetings on the third Thursday of the month and the meetings would begin at 6:30 p.m.

**Kay Beach Handicap Parking.** The committee discussed that it had already decided at the March meeting that it would recommend removal of the handicap parking spot at Kay Beach. Arsenault mentioned that the chain across Kay Beach did not allow enough room for a bike to pass through onto the beach and that maybe this should be addressed. McGinnis said that he has witnessed golf carts and ATVs go around the chain at Birch Beach. The committee decided to discuss the matter of access to the beaches again at the next meeting.

Motion by Simmons, seconded by Arsenault to recommend to the Council that the handicap parking spot at Kay Beach be eliminated, and it carried unanimously. Council member McCarthy said he would arrange to bring the recommendation to

the attention of the Council at its next meeting and that it was not necessary for the committee to put anything in writing explaining this particular decision.

**Signs.** Arsenault and Simmons reported that they had looked at a number of parks in the area, including some outside Birchwood, to see what kind of signs were used. They provided a photo of a sign they liked at Wildwood Park in Mahtomedi.

Simmons stated that she had talked with an officer in the Washington County Sheriff's Office and that the officer said that the Sheriff's Office would require signs to be posted before they would enforce the regulations, and that they preferred to educate people rather than enforce the requirements. The officer said the Sheriff's Office would be willing to look over any proposed signs the committee developed before the signs were finalized.

The committee discussed a number of issues regarding what should be included on the signs and what the signs should look like. One discussion point was whether the signs should include a citation to a specific city code imposing a particular requirement, and the consensus was that some kind of reference to the code should be included. The committee discussed the importance of having a Swim At Your Own Risk sign posted at each beach, except maybe for Elm Beach. The committee discussed that dog waste was an important issue that needed to be addressed and that some kind of language about cleaning up after your dog should appear on the signs. The committee also discussed the importance of making sure any signs that are installed are consistent with any requirements of city code, particularly the sign ordinance (chapter 601).

Weier raised a concern about boats coming in to the docks, particularly at Kay Beach, since it is a swimming beach only and it could be dangerous for swimmers. Various ideas for keeping boaters from coming in to the docks where people might be swimming were discussed.

Arsenault and Simmons agreed that they would continue to gather information about what should be on the signs and would prepare a sketch of what a sign might look like, for further discussion at the May meeting. The committee discussed that there was no time period established for getting new signs installed at the parks.

**Code Review.** Mitchell began the discussion with a reference to the document in the packet that listed the code provisions that referred to parks, or open spaces, or words to that effect. Mitchell said that it would be preferable to make sure the code provisions that applied to the city parks use terms with the same definition.

The committee discussed how the trails in the city should be considered when developing code provisions applicable to city parks. Michalk and Mitchell indicated that they would begin to focus on identifying substantive issues relating to regulation of the parks that might benefit from amendment.

**Tighe-Schmitz Park.** The committee discussed how it might advise residents that the new Parks and Natural Resources Committee, at the direction of the City Council, was beginning to look into possible uses for Tighe-Schmitz Park. Michalk said that he would write a short article for inclusion in the next city Newsletter, introducing the committee members and announcing the effort to look at options for Tighe-Schmitz. The committee thought that a public forum to solicit comments about Tighe-Schmitz Park would be a good idea and that a possible date for such an event was July 20, before the regular Parks Committee meeting that night. The committee discussed that the city engineer and city planner might be of assistance in examining options for the park. Simmons said she would contact the county and possibly others who might be willing to assist with examining the feasibility of various options for the park. The committee also recognized that there were ongoing issues regarding Hall's Marsh, too, and decided that a this matter should be included on the May meeting agenda.

**Owl Street.** The Committee discussed the possibility of installing a hand railing on Owl Street, on the hillside, similar to the hand rail on the Grotto Path off Hall Avenue, and determined that installation of a hand rail was a good idea. Bryan McGinnis, who lives on Owl Street, stated that the hillside can be slippery and hard to navigate at times, especially in winter or during wet weather. Simmons said wood is probably the cheapest material for a hand rail but is also the one to deteriorate most quickly. Arsenault volunteered to gather more details comparing the costs and other issues of various materials (wood and metal) for the hand railing and present those at the May meeting.

**Birch Beach Rain Garden.** McGinnis referred to the documents he had provided the Committee in advance of the meeting, addressing some of the history of the rain garden and showing recent photographs of the catch basin and garden. He said that the rain garden had been neglected over recent years and was in need of some maintenance. McGinnis addressed the City's Catch Basin/Sump Cleaning Policy adopted 12/14/2010, which requires sediment to be checked twice a year and water to be pumped from the catch basins when the depth reaches a designated level. The Policy also requires the City to maintain a written record of the

checking and pumping. Council Member McCarthy will check with the city administrator to determine what records about the sumps are available. Council Member Weier will check with the Washington Conservation District and ask if they can provide guidance or instructions regarding maintenance of rain gardens. The committee also discussed that street sweeping was the most effective way to keep dirt and other material out of the catch basins (and accordingly, out of the lake) and that might be an issue to examine more fully.

**Wood Chips on Birch Beach.** McGinnis showed the Committee photos he had taken of piles of wood chips stacked behind the kayak racks on Birch Beach. The Committee agreed that these wood chips should be removed. Council Member McCarthy will bring this matter to the attention of the city administrator and ask her to arrange for removal. The committee discussed the idea that perhaps a city-wide fall or spring cleanup (or both), relying on volunteers, would be a worthwhile endeavor.

**Special Revenue Fund.** Chapter 804 of the city code provides for the creation of a Parks Special Revenue Fund for the purpose of funding improvements to the land and facilities within the City Park System. Council Member Weier indicated that Assistant City Treasurer Mary Cahill has provided an update on the status of this fund, called the 210 Special Revenue account in the Treasurer's Report, listing all receipts and disbursements out of that fund for 2023. The fund has a present balance of \$19,70.69. (See Agenda Packet for April 11, 2023 City Council meeting at page 26.) The committee discussed the need to better understand what expenses are appropriately paid out of this Fund and what expenses have been paid in the recent past.

**Next Meeting.** May 18, 2023 6:30 p.m. City Hall

**Adjourn.** 9:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell  
Secretary