

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING December 21, 2023
MINUTES

The December 21, 2023, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:30 p.m.

Attendees: Council Member Justin McCarthy, Council Member Kathy Weier, Committee Members Zachary Michalk, Mary Sue Simmons, Jennifer Arsenault, and Alan Mitchell.

Others: Barton Winter

Agenda. Mitchell moved that the agenda be amended to add consideration of the proposal by Barton Winter to donate \$100 and have the City authorize another \$160 to purchase new boards for the hockey rink and that it be amended further to consider this new item and the matter of the flooding of the rink as the first items on the agenda. Arsenault moved that the agenda be further amended to add a discussion of committee members terms at the end of the agenda. Both motions were seconded and approved unanimously.

Public Forum. Chair Michalk stated that speakers would be limited to five minutes. Barton Winter said that he had provided material to the committee regarding the amount of water that was used in the past to flood the hockey rink. He said that he had calculated the amount of water that is required to flood the rink (based on square footage and an assumed depth and an assumed cost of water) and that 30 floods would cost about \$600. He said that last year the rink was flooded on 21 separate occasions so the cost last year would have been less than the \$600 he calculated for 30 flooding events. Winter said that the rink was not flooded often enough in February 2023 and was in poor condition. He added that he doesn't agree with the practices the city used to flood the rink. Winter mentioned that somebody walked a dog across the rink during slushy conditions and the rink was in bad condition after that. Winter said that he would donate \$100 to cover a portion of the cost of several new boards to replace old boards. He suggested that any cost to the city for new boards could be covered under the Parks Fund. The Public Forum ended at this point.

New Boards for the Hockey Rink. Without further discussion, Mitchell moved that the Committee recommend that the City accept Barton Winter's offer to make a gift of \$100 to the City for the new boards and authorize an additional \$160 for a

total of \$260 for the purchase of several new boards for the hockey rink. Arsenault seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Weier stated that she would prepare a Resolution to that effect for the City Council's consideration at its January meeting.

Flooding Authorization. Winter had asked the Committee by email in advance of the meeting to authorize him to have access to City facilities and be authorized to flood the rink. Weier said that she would not support authorizing volunteers to have access to City facilities and equipment. She added that the City would flood the rink more often if somebody removed the snow and slush as it accumulated. Weier also stated that she had looked at the costs incurred with the use of water for flooding and that the City was going to consider installing a meter to measure the amount of water used. She said that this season will be shorter than usual given the warm weather we have been experiencing. Winter added that he still thought that more flooding was necessary.

The Committee took no action.

Minutes. The November 2023 Minutes were adopted unanimously.

Conservation Issues. Simmons provided information about the use of salt in the winter by homeowners. She emphasized that salt free deicers are available at local hardware stores. She indicated that she will provide a list of better alternatives for the environment. A product called Pet Safe is reported to be the biggest seller of the alternatives. Weier added that she would post the list on Facebook. The list will also be attached to the Minutes.

Simmons stated that she had called the City of Vadnais Heights and talked to their environmental person (Erin Spry) about steps cities might take to protect the environment. Simmons said she heard about the importance of trees in mitigating warming, attracting birds, and providing beauty to a community. Simmons stated that Birchwood might start looking at the possibility of planting trees. She added that perhaps bird watchers in Birchwood might be interested in examining the tree situation in the City and maybe conducting an inventory of our existing trees. She pointed out that Birchwood ordinance 302.055 actually requires homeowners to replace significant trees that are removed. (City Code section 302.055 d.3.).

Simmons went on to discuss the importance of reducing water usage in the city and sustaining our future groundwater supply. She mentioned that White Bear Lake restricts watering in the summer time between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 5:00

p.m. and that Birchwood has a similar ordinance with the same restrictions (City Code 201.440). The Committee discussed the importance of advising city residents of this restriction but made no specific recommendations.

Simmons identified Conservation Minnesota as an excellent organization with information about how cities can work together to identify environmental problems and implement solutions.

Mitchell asked whether the City should be implementing measures to minimize the use of salt on city streets. Weier responded that the City has talked to our snowplowers – Brightview Snow Plowers – about minimizing their salt use while still maintaining safe winter streets. Weier pointed out the importance of keeping the various drains around the city open to allow for runoff when melting occurs. Barton Winter mentioned that earlier this year the streets bordering Century Avenue were slippery and that he talked to Ramsey County about that and learned that plowing Century Avenue was the County’s responsibility.

Planning for Tighe-Schmitz Park. Simmons advised that she had talked to Lori Tella of the Washington Conservation District, who made that schematic of Tighe-Schmitz Park that has been available to the Committee for several months now (and is attached to the October Minutes), about obtaining her assistance with regard to the Park. Tella said that she was anxious to meet with the Committee and that she could make a larger updated version of the schematic that would be useful at a public forum. Simmons said that she asked Tella to go ahead and make the larger schematic. Tella told Simmons that she would be happy to meet with the Committee and talk about possible grants that might be available and about how to encourage public involvement. One possible grant is for pollinator gardens, perhaps as much as \$500. The Committee decided that Simmons and Arsenault would contact Tella and ask her if she could meet with the Committee in February. As an aside, Mitchell mentioned that the schematic prepared by Tella included the possibility of pickleball courts on the hockey rink in the summer. Arsenault added that it might be worthwhile to consider the possibility of a curling rink in Tighe-Schmitz Park since we had several Olympic curlers in Birchwood.

Community Outreach Michalk inquired when the Committee should send out reports to the community about the activities of the Committee. Weier responded that the city Newsletter goes out with the water bills and the next one would be in March. The March Newsletter will be the spring issue and will be a good time to report on the Tighe-Schmitz public forum, the boats, the beaches, and the spring

cleanup day. McCarthy suggested that the Committee could ask the Council to include more frequent announcements at City Council meetings about upcoming activities related to our parks. It might also be possible to gather pamphlets on various topics and make those available at city hall.

Public Signs on Public Beaches. Arsenault handed out the latest version of the park signs for the beaches and Tighe-Schmitz Park and Bloomquist Park. Copies are attached. The Committee also discussed a concern about the water spigot at Bloomquist Park and the unnecessary use of water. Arsenault moved, and Mitchell seconded, that the Committee approve the signs as shown and recommend that the City close off the spigot at Bloomquist Park and that there be one sign at each of the beaches and two signs at Tighe-Schmitz and Bloomquist parks. The motion passed unanimously. Arsenault and Simmons will provide the City Administrator with the necessary information about the signs, including cost estimates, that can be provided to the City Council for its January meeting.

Visual Mitigation of the Lift Station Generator. Weier advised that there were no plans from the engineer yet and the Girl Scout troop that was considering decoration of the generator cover were not able to meet yet and had not made a decision. Weier reported that no work on the generator would occur before June or July so there was still time to consider the matter. It was also discussed that perhaps the artists group meeting at city hall might be interested in painting the generator cover. The matter will be brought back to the Committee as further developments occur.

Beach Easements. Arsenault provided a spreadsheet she had made that could be used to record maintenance items needing attention on the beaches. The Committee discussed that it would be good to take a look at the condition of the beaches in the spring to determine if any major cleanup or improvements might be necessary.

Update on Hall's Marsh MOA. McCarthy gave an update regarding negotiations with the Rice Creek Watershed District over the draining of Priebe Lake. The City has met with the Watershed District and discussed whether the District has an easement allowing it to discharge from Priebe Lake to Hall's Marsh. The District has not provided the City with any documentation regarding the possibility of an easement. Simmons suggested that the City might want to talk to John Waller, the representative to the Rice Creek Watershed District from our area. McCarthy said he would contact Waller. Mitchell moved and Arsenault seconded that the Council

take whatever action is necessary to resolve the easement question to the City's satisfaction. Simmons and Weier related some past history regarding the creation of Priebe Lake.

Term Limits. The Committee reviewed the bylaws regarding term limits for committee members. The bylaws provide that two members would serve one-year terms and three members would serve two-year terms so that not every member's term expired at the same time. Terms run from February to February. Mitchell and Simmons were appointed for one-year terms in February 2023 and the others were appointed to two-year terms. The Committee agreed to discuss terms again in January in advance of expiration of two members' terms in February.

Confirm Next Month's Meeting and Identify Agenda Topics. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. in city hall. No specific agenda topics were discussed beyond what was identified during the course of the meeting.

Adjourn. 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary

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Kay Beach
Per Birchwood City Code: 607

Park Hours 6:00 a.m.-9:30 p.m.

- Kay Beach is a designated swimming beach.
- Swim at your own risk. No lifeguard on duty.
- No dogs allowed.
- No motorized vehicles on the beach.
- No motorized boats inside buoyed area.
- Alcohol, smoking, littering, fires, and camping are prohibited.

Be considerate of neighbors and beach users

Violations: Call Washington County Sheriff- 651-439-9381



All Other Beaches
Per Birchwood City Code: 607

Park Hours 6:00 a.m.-9:30 p.m.

- Swim at your own risk. No lifeguard on duty
- Dogs must be on a leash
- No motorized vehicles on the beach
- Alcohol, smoking, littering, fires, and camping are prohibited

Violations: Call Washington County Sheriff- 651-439-9381



Bloomquist and Tighe-Schmitz
Per Birchwood City Code: 607

Park Hours 6:00 a.m.- 9:30 p.m.

- Dogs must be on a leash
- Alcohol, smoking, littering, fires and camping are prohibited

Violations: Call Washington County Sheriff- 651-439-9381