

**PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING February 15, 2024**  
**MINUTES**

The February 15, 2024, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:33 p.m.

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

**Others:** Lori Tella, Washington Conservation District

**Agenda.** The Committee voted unanimously to add a discussion of the Volunteer Form to the agenda at the end: McCarthy mentioned that Simmons and Mitchell had been reappointed to two years terms by the City Council at its meeting on February 13.

**Public Forum.** Nobody was present to comment.

**Minutes.** The draft Minutes for the January meeting were unanimously approved.

**Presentation by Lori Tella of the Washington Conservation District.** Simmons introduced Ms. Tella and explained that in her contact with Tella, Simmons had learned of the valuable assistance available from the Washington Conservation District (WCD) and that Tighe-Schmitz Park was a lot more than just a small grassy area.

Tella handed out a packet of material that included several pages from a report entitled The SE White Bear Lake Stormwater Retrofit Analysis by the Washington Conservation District for the Rice Creek Watershed District in May 2017. The pages focus on possible projects at Tighe-Schmitz Park and other areas in and around Birchwood. The packet also included an application for a Mini-Grant Program from the Rice Creek Watershed District (RCWD) for grants up to \$500 for projects that improve water quality in the watershed and an information sheet on the Rice Creek Water Quality Grant Program for larger grants. A copy of the packet, along with other material that were part of the presentation by Tella, are available at city hall.

Tella explained the role of the Washington Conservation District and that it seeks to partner with local government to help with soil and water quality primarily. She indicated that WCD staff will come out and inspect private property at no cost to the landowner if the landowner has a project in mind. Tella stated that the District

works closely with RCWD on projects and that the Watershed District has various grant programs available. She stated that stormwater throughout Birchwood drains into White Bear Lake. The Committee asked about the ongoing issue over RCWD's proposal to drain Priebe Lake. The Committee discussed its concern that drainage from Priebe Lake would flow through a pipe that was installed in Tighe-Schmitz Park around 1973 and runs underground into Hall's Marsh.

Tella made a slide show presentation to describe actions that might be undertaken to reduce runoff into the lake and improve Tighe-Schmitz Park, including

- Shoreline project opportunities and how landowners on the lake could get grants and design help for projects.
- Several projects in Birchwood that were evaluated in the 2017 Report, including a filtration basin project, an iron enhanced sand filter, various uses of Tighe-Schmitz Park, Priebe Lake, and enhanced street sweeping.
- A Stormwater Retrofit Analysis.
- A Dellwood Beach project.
- Estimated costs and a ranking of several projects by potential pollutant load reduction.
- The Conservation Partnership Legacy Grant Program, available to cities.

The discussion then turned to the holding of a Public Forum sometime this spring, which Tella would be invited to attend, to provide residents with an opportunity to learn about Tighe-Schmitz Park. The Forum would focus on a history of the use of Tighe-Schmitz Park and solicit public ideas and preferences for the Park and describe possible options and grant programs. The Committee decided to hold the Forum on May 18, 2024, but that the date might be changed if the WCD staff were unavailable to attend on that date.

**Mahtomedi Garden Club Grant Opportunities.** The Mahtomedi Garden Club has provided public notice that small grants are available for garden-related projects in public areas in the Mahtomedi area. (Information is available here: <https://mahtomedigardenclub.org/grants> ) Applications are due by April 1. The Committee thought that it would be worthwhile for the City to consider applying for a small grant, even with the approaching deadline. The Committee discussed that perhaps the City might qualify for a grant to plant trees in Polly's Park, and that information was already available regarding that project. Mitchell moved, and Simmons seconded, that Weier prepare an application for a grant to plant trees in Polly's Park; the motion passed unanimously.

**Conservation Initiatives.** Simmons provided a write-up for the March Newsletter about water usage and Arbor Day. Hulett asked if there was a map available of the City's parks, and the Committee used the map on the wall in city hall to identify the parks.

**Planning for Tighe-Schmitz Park.** There was nothing further discussed under this agenda topic.

**Community Outreach.** The Committee discussed what information should be included in the March Newsletter. There will be short articles on summer lawn watering issues, the upcoming Public Forum in May, the city code revisions, and Kay Beach. Simmons will check on the availability of free trees as part of Arbor Day.

**Visual Mitigation of the Lift Station Generator.** The City is still waiting for USEPA to approve the design.

**General Maintenance/Volunteer Initiatives.** No discussion occurred except see the discussion below related to the Volunteer Form item that was added to the agenda.

**Volunteer Form.** McCarthy and Weier stated that the City Council discussed the use of a sign-up system to allow people to volunteer to undertake various projects in the community and is in general agreement that such a program should be implemented, but that there are several concerns that need to be addressed first. These include that volunteers must first sign a waiver agreement, the tasks need to be clearly defined, the Parks Committee should monitor the use of the form and implementation of the program, volunteers must not do work that city employees do, the work should not be dangerous, and that if a volunteer should cause any problems, that person may not volunteer again. The Committee agreed that nothing should go on the volunteer spreadsheet form without the Parks Committee first agreeing that the project is one that volunteers could undertake. The City Attorney has a waiver form available for volunteers to sign. The Committee thought that the form should allow residents to also identify projects that volunteers might complete. The Committee recognized that these issues need to be addressed before the form could actually be made available on the city webpage.

**Cleanup Day.** The Committee was advised that Mayor Ford had suggested that the City organize a cleanup day for the spring, similar to the one that was held in the fall of 2023. The Committee decided to schedule a Cleanup Day for Saturday, April 27, at 10:00 a.m. Weier will put this announcement in the March Newsletter.

**Next Meeting.** The Committee decided that since at least two members would be out of town for the regularly scheduled March meeting, that the March meeting would be canceled, with the option of scheduling a special meeting early in April if necessary. The next regular meeting will be April 18, 2024, at 6:30 in city hall.

Weier brought to the attention of the Committee that she was advised that the playground equipment in Tighe-Schmitz Park may be under warranty. No specific action was decided upon to pursue this matter.

**Adjourn.** 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell  
Secretary