

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING July 20, 2023
MINUTES

The July 20, 2023, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources was called to order at 5:30 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.

Public Forum: The Public Forum lasted about an hour and was televised and recorded by local television Channel 16. The following is a list of the residents who spoke and a brief summary of their comments.

John Winters and Barb Winters.

Lived in Birchwood at the same residence since 1966. Tighe-Schmitz Park was a swamp at the time. Stuff like concrete and stumps were being dumped in the area. It still floods during heavy rains. Love seeing the park getting used and encourage continued use of the park. Keep everything maintained. Enjoy the music. Tighe-Schmitz may not have the substrate to allow concrete to be installed anywhere. Haven't observed much activity in the park at nighttime.

Susie Mahoney.

Moved into their house in 1989. There could be peat underneath the surface. A dog park would limit other uses. The path cost a lot of money and is now a mess due to lack of maintenance. New playground equipment would be nice. Check out Aaron's Park in Mahtomedi for ideas of playground equipment.

Robert Davidson.

Drainage in the park is awful. M.J. LaVine and Cynthia Tomlinson have worked to maintain Tighe-Schmitz. His major points were to keep what we've got but keep it maintained and stay within budget.

Mitchell Florence.

He likes the music in the hockey rink and suggested putting some community gardens in the park.

Debbie Harrod.

She was speaking for herself and several neighbors, who all live adjacent to or close to Tighe-Schmitz Park. Keep some open space for soccer and general play. Deal with the drainage issue. Maintain all the equipment and facilities that we have. New picnic tables would be nice. Strongly opposed to a dog park.

Laura Mum

Liked the comments others had made. A basketball court would be nice. Consider fundraising for improvements. Loves the swing set in the park. Consider additional benches. Haul in sand in a few places. Add wood chips. A park in Hugo has good playground equipment. A garbage can near the playground would be good.

Barton Winter

Has lived in Birchwood since 1976. Keep the ball field. Trees interfere with the hockey rink by dropping leaves and branches. Improve maintenance of the hockey rink. Consider painting the rink surface white. Mahtomedi has concrete on some rinks. Hockey rink might be good place for basketball court. Check on availability of grant funding. Improve drainage.

The consensus of participants was that parking was not a problem around the park and the hours the park is open seemed right.

The public forum ended around 6:25. The regular meeting started at 6:30.

Agenda. The agenda was approved without amendment.

Minutes. Moved by Simmons and seconded by Arsenault to approve the draft Minutes of the June 15 meeting. Motion was approved 3-0, Mitchell abstaining since he missed the June meeting.

Public Forum. The committee discussed what was heard from residents during the Public Forum that had just concluded. Items included: that folks were happy with the usage that Tighe-Schmitz is getting but that it needed to be maintained, that community gardens would likely require raised beds, that perhaps private rain gardens in the area might help the drainage situation, the Parks Special Revenue Fund created under chapter 804 of the city code could be a source of funding, grant funds might be an option and the City has already been exploring grant possibilities. The committee also discussed that other comments had been received outside the public forum, which focused on concerns about the condition of the streets in Birchwood and the costs associated with maintaining the roads.

Planning for Tighe-Schmitz Park. Most of the discussion following the public forum covered this agenda item. McCarthy identified a couple of possible grants from the Department of Natural Resources. The committee discussed that it was concerning to not know what was below the surface at the park, considering that it had been used as a dumping site for years.

City Code Review. Mitchell explained that he had prepared a revision of chapter 607 of the city code, entitled Open Space, Park Areas, and Facilities. The revised version of chapter 607 addresses all the provisions in chapter 607 and those in chapter 617 that regulates the use of the beaches. The committee focused on a few specific sections of the chapter. Mitchell commented that presently there are several different terms used in the code to identify the city parks, and this version uses “City Park System” since it is the definition found in section 804.020. The committee thought that this term was the appropriate one to use. The committee identified what is known as the Out Lot A, Lakewood Rearrangement, under the definition. The committee discussed the fact that the authorization of a Director to have authority over the parks, as the present code provides, was obsolete and should be deleted. The committee thought that only one permit process should be created for authorizing certain conduct in the parks. The committee discussed whether the code should restrict young children from being in the parks without adult supervision, and thought it should, and that probably under the age of twelve was the appropriate age to require supervision. The committee discussed whether dogs should be permitted in the parks and thought dogs should be permitted in all parks except Kay Beach, because Kay is a designated swimming beach, but that dogs should be leashed, and not allowed to run free in the parks, including the water at the beaches. The committee also thought the code should contain language requiring dog owners to clean up after their dogs. McCarthy mentioned that he has witnessed dog fights at Kay Beach. The committee has heard from residents about finding dog poop on the beaches. The committee also discussed the hours the parks are open and thought that the present 6:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. hours seemed appropriate. The committee discussed that it would take several more meetings to finalize a revision of chapter 607 and that Mitchell would put together another draft incorporating the changes discussed for further consideration by the committee.

Public Signs at City Beaches. The committee is continuing to consider what new signs at the city beaches should look like and recognizes that the signs will have to wait until the code amendments are finalized by the Council.

Sign at Curt Feistner Memorial Preserve. A new sign is available for posting at the beach but a location has not been decided upon yet. It is an historic sign like other signs in various locations around the community. The committee decided to tour Curt Feistner Memorial Preserve as part of its August meeting and find an appropriate location to recommend to the Council.

Swimmer's Itch Treatment. The committee was advised that there have been no reports of swimmer's itch from swimmers in Birchwood this summer, and that the White Bear Lake Conservation District would pay for treatment if Birchwood requested it, provided Birchwood would comply with certain reporting standards of the WBLCD.

Playground Maintenance. The committee discussed that maintenance of park playground equipment was an important issue mentioned during the public forum. The committee decided to tour Tighe-Schmitz Park in August as part of its regular meeting and look at the condition of the equipment.

Hall's Marsh. The committee was given an update by McCarthy and Weier regarding the Rice Creek Watershed District's plan to empty Priebe Lake in White Bear Township into Hall's Marsh. McCarthy said that Rice Creek has put together a draft Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) setting forth the conditions Rice Creek would comply with if the City authorized the discharge. This is only an advisory matter for the committee.

Next Meeting. August 17, 2023 6:30 p.m. City Hall. Tour of Curt Feistner Memorial Beach and Tighe-Schmitz Park

Adjourn. 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary