**PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
November 16, 2023
MINUTES**

The November 16, 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

**Public Forum.** The meeting began with a Public Forum. Barton Winter stated that his chief complaint about the hockey rink was with the flooding. Winter went on to describe his suggestions for how the rink should be flooded and maintained. He said that he was at the rink nearly every day in the winter, and he volunteered to help with the flooding Winter mentioned that there is a drain in the parking lot and that it was important to not allow the drain to be covered. Winter pointed out that there are some downed trees outside the rink that need to be removed. He commented about the pleasure rink and wondered whether a concrete slab was feasible, physically or financially. Winter said that maybe a grant was possible to fund improvements in the pleasure rink, and the committee asked if he would look into the possibility of a grant. Winter was provided with the email address for the Parks Committee.

**Agenda.** The agenda was adopted unanimously.

**Minutes.** Winter requested a couple of changes in the draft Minutes. He said the Minutes should state that Curt Feistner was a graduate of West Point and did not serve in the Air Force as the draft Minutes stated. He also asked that the Minutes be changed to clarify that his comments about the rink not being level related to the pleasure rink, not the hockey rink. Mitchell said that he thought the draft Minutes should be revised to attach copies of several documents that were identified in the draft so that readers can readily find the referenced documents. The Minutes, with these changes, were unanimously approved.

**Special Revenue Fund.** Council Member McCarthy stated that the Council discussed this matter at the November Council meeting and requested that going forward, the city staff should provide more detailed information regarding receipts and expenditures with this Fund. The Committee then discussed the status of the Fund, using the 11/7/2023 Treasurer’s Report that was in the agenda packet for the November Council meeting. The receipts included payments from the Birchwood Dock Association, and the 2023 expenditures were for Fireworks ($200), Music in the Park ($3,159.99), the Owl Street handrail – supplies ($2,487.65) and labor ($2500). The present balance is $10,823.05. The Committee agreed that reporting specific information regarding the Fund would be helpful.

**Community Outreach.** Chair Michalk asked if members had suggestions for the next City Newsletter. Topics suggested included announcements about the hockey rink opening, that snowmobiles are not permitted on the beaches, and that residents should consider the potential environmental impacts of spreading salt on the ice in the winter. The Committee also discussed that in future Newsletter issues the Committee might want to include information about water usage and mowing and leaf mulching. The Committee also discussed that next Saturday (November 18) was a cleanup day in Birchwood and wondered how broadly the community had been advised of the volunteer opportunity

**Conservation Initiatives.** This matter was postponed until the December meeting.

**Planning for Tighe-Schmitz Park.** There was nothing further to report regarding plans for Tighe-Schmitz Park. McCarthy and Weier mentioned that the City has undertaken efforts to address the various maintenance items the Committee had identified earlier. The Committee agreed that Lori Tella of the Washington Conservation District should be invited to one of its meetings in February or March as the Committee prepared for a public forum in the spring.

**City Code Review.** McCarthy and Weier advised that the Council adopted the final version of the code amendments at its November meeting and that a no fishing restriction on Kay Beach was not part of the amendments.

**Public Signs on City Beaches.** The Committee agreed that with the adoption of the amendments to chapter 607 of the City Code, the language for new signs could be finalized. Arsenault will prepare language consistent with the new code provisions and bring those proposals to the December meeting. The Committee agreed that new signs should be prepared for other city parks as well, not just for the beaches. Simmons reported that she had talked to one sign manufacturer and learned that the cost of five new signs (18 x 24 inch size) for the beaches would run about $183. Simmons will check with other businesses that prepare signs about the cost. Simmons also reminded that the Washington County Sheriff wants to review our sign proposals before they are prepared to ensure that law enforcement can enforce the restrictions. The Committee also discussed that in the spring the Committee should address the need for buoys at Kay Beach.

**Visual Mitigation of the Lift Station Generator.** Weier advised the Committee that her daughter’s Girl Scout Troop was considering taking on this project and will decide quickly whether they will do so. Weier added that if the Troop does take it on, they will meet with the neighbors and residents before finalizing any plans.

**Volunteer Initiatives.** It was mentioned that this coming Saturday (November 18) – a city wide cleanup day – was one such volunteer opportunity Arsenault stated that she could prepare a spreadsheet that listed projects that volunteers might want to undertake and this spreadsheet could be provided to any person who might be interested in learning of such opportunities. The Committee thought this was a great idea and agreed that she should go ahead and do that. The Committee wondered whether late November was a good time to be trimming trees in case volunteers on Saturday intended to do that. Barton Winter pointed out that the trimming that had been done on the cedar trees near the hockey rink had left some sharp edges where branches had been cut and that the City might want to check on this because kids sometimes recovered hockey pucks that had flown into the trees.

**Management of Ice Flooding at the Hockey Rink.** Weier reported that she had spoken to the person in Minnetonka (Todd) who is in charge of that city’s outdoor hockey rinks. Minnetonka has 21 total outdoor rinks, five of which are on blacktop and the rest are on dirt. Weier described the flooding process that Minnetonka uses. She added that Minnetonka has tried plastic liners on some rinks but the city experienced problems with rips in the liner and with the ice being bad. Weier said that the Minnetonka person was impressed with the fact that Birchwood had a warming house with the hose inside and wished that Minnetonka had such facilities since that would make flooding easier for them because they presently use a water truck to do all their flooding. Weier said that Minnetonka recognizes that volunteers need to be trained on flooding outdoor rinks or they are likely to use way too much water, and that is expensive. The Committee discussed the issue of how much water is required to flood a hockey rink and keep the ice in good condition. Only rough estimates were possible, but the Committee agreed that flooding can result in significant costs and that efforts must be taken to minimize water usage. Barton Winter added that he had never heard that there might be budget issues over the use of water on the rinks. No specific action was taken but it was agreed that a policy describing how the rinks would be flooded and maintained would be helpful.

**Beach Easements.** In response to the comments from Randy LaFoy at the October meeting, Arsenault said that she inspected Birch Beach. She was uncertain what would be gained by clearing trees by the runoff from the rain garden.

**Update on Hall’s Marsh MOA.** McCarthy advised that the City is still negotiating with the Rice Creek Watershed District and other parties over the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the draining of Priebe Lake. McCarthy said that there is a question over whether Rice Creek has any easements that allow for such action.

**Next Meeting.** The Committee discussed whether the date of the December meeting should be changed from December 21 (the third Thursday) to some other day. It was decided that the regular December meeting would remain on Thursday December 21. The Committee discussed whether the regular meeting date should be changed from the third Thursday but no action was taken to do that right now.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary