

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING November 19, 2024
MINUTES

The November 19, 2024, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:34 p.m.

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

Others: Barton Winter and Shelly Ross (at 6:52)

Agenda. The agenda was approved unanimously.

Public Forum. Barton Winter addressed the Committee regarding several items about the hockey rink that he had identified in an earlier email to the Committee. The first issue had to do with the condition of some of the boards. Winter said there were a number of boards that needed replacement, that he had replaced six boards last year, and that he was willing to pay ½ the cost of replacing several additional boards this year and that he would do the installation. Winter also asked that a group of birch trees near the warming house be removed because they interfered with the dumping of snow and ice from the rink during the winter. Finally, Winter said he was displeased with some of the flooding that has occurred in the past and that he would like to be involved in the flooding.

Council Member McCarthy said that it seems the City has to replace some boards every year and wondered if there was a better, longer-lasting option instead of wooden boards. The consensus was that other options were probably more expensive and would take longer to install. Winter also said he would like a concrete surface or even some kind of plastic liner. Simmons stated that she supported replacement of the rotten boards but would not agree that the birch trees should be removed. Winter said he would do some research to explore other options for the wooden boards. McCarthy mentioned that last year the Council had passed a resolution accepting Winter's offer to cover the cost of new boards that he would install. Mitchell moved and Arsenault seconded that the Committee recommend to the Council that the City accept Winter's offer to pay ½ the cost of replacing a number of boards and that Winter be authorized to do the installation, provided Winter signed a waiver of liability. Winter agreed to the conditions and the motion passed unanimously. The Committee did not support removing the trees or authorizing Winter to participate in flooding the rink, but indicated that the City would raise the flooding issue with city employees involved in the flooding.

Shelly Ross then addressed the Committee and requested that the City install lights at Bloomquist Park so people could play pickleball and tennis after dark. The Committee raised two issues: (1) cost, and (2) how would lights be installed. The Committee felt that more information was required regarding the cost and invited Ross to look into that issue with the other pickleball players. The Committee also discussed various issues related to installing lighting, like how late at night could the lights be on and how would the lights be installed and operated. The Committee decided to contact the City Administrator and ask her to look into these issues. The Committee urged Ross to let her pickleball group know of the Committee's action and to solicit their input.

Minutes. The Committee failed to act on the draft October 15 Minutes so this matter will be taken up at the December meeting.

Lighting at the Tennis Courts. The Committee determined that there was nothing further to discuss under this issue since it was covered during the public forum.

Restoration of Hall's Marsh. Council member Weier stated that before a discussion about restoring Hall's Marsh would be meaningful, it would be necessary to resolve the Priebe Lake draining issue first. Weier provided an update on negotiations with the Rice Creek Watershed District about draining Priebe Lake, stating that there were lots of terms still under discussion, including the possibility of grant opportunities for work on Hall's Marsh. The Committee discussed briefly that the City of Mahtomedi was also looking into issues related to lowering the water level in ponds near the Mahtomedi/Birchwood border by Lost Lake. No action was taken.

Tighe-Schmitz Future Planning. The Committee discussed an email from Lori Tella of the Washington Conservation District dated November 19, 2024, in which Tella described work at Tighe-Schmitz Park to determine infiltration rates. Committee members Arsenault, Simmons, Hullett, and Mitchell had all helped with that work – digging test holes in various areas around the park, filling them with water, and checking on the filtration at periodic intervals. Tella expressed appreciation in her email for our help and indicated that she would now be looking into options to address drainage issues in the park. Tella also stated that she had taken some soil samples in the park and would be analyzing the samples for pH and texture.

Tella also suggested in her email that the Committee should begin to look at options for using the \$10,000 HELP grant (Habitat Enhancement Landscape Project) the City had obtained to fund a project to improve Tighe-Schmitz Park. Tella laid out the following options and asked the Committee to suggest its preferences:

We can use this to enhance the areas by the new basins

Plant the area by the ice rink that is soggy

Seed the edges of the park with the sedge meadow mix

Improve the forest area along the park to remove weeds and add in native tree mix and shrubs.

Target areas for buckthorn removal

Add plantings to the shoreline

Look at Hall's Marsh for opportunities

Committee members agreed to look at Tella's email and select one or two preferences by December 1 so the matter could be discussed by the Committee at the December meeting.

Simmons suggested that a notice be included in the upcoming city Newsletter explaining that the City was doing work at Tighe-Schmitz Park and residents might notice some activity in the park from time to time

Council member Weier advised the Committee that the City Council had authorized the Mahtomedi Soccer Club to use Tighe-Schmitz Park for soccer practice in the spring and that the Club had agreed not to interfere with the City's work in the park. The Club also agreed to mow the grass in the park and to bring their own soccer nets and install any chalk lines they might want and to only use the park for practice, not games.

Simmons mentioned that residents who attended the public forum the Committee held last May about Tighe-Schmitz Park expressed an interest in establishing exercise stations around the community. The Committee discussed the possibility of creating such stations at various locations, including the city beaches and parks.

Netting at Hockey Rink. The Committee was informed that City staff had prepared an estimate for installing netting at the hockey rink, and it was \$1340 plus labor charges. Council members McCarthy and Weier stated that the City could not afford to incur this expense this year. Chair Michalk informed the Committee that he had had a discussion with a representative from a company called Town & Country Fence and that the representative said his company could install a barrier along the end of the hockey rink before the end of this calendar year and that he would put a cost estimate together within a few days. Michalk agreed to provide the estimate to the City Administrator and have the matter placed on the Council agenda for its December meeting. Simmons agreed to advise the neighbors of the status of this matter and inform them that the City would be very appreciate of any donation they would make to cover the cost of the netting.

Polly's Park. Weier advised the Committee that the possibility of a grant to cover the cost of new trees was not feasible this year since the grant application period was not yet open. Weier also stated that there are still over 100 trees needing removal in the park because they are diseased or rotten. The Committee decided it was best not to plant any saplings until the older diseased trees were removed.

State of Tennis Courts. The Committee was advised that the loose tennis net at the park had been repaired.

General Maintenance. The Committee was advised that a fence along a portion of the Ash Walkway had been installed but that another short stretch on the other side of the path still needed installation. It was also reported that the wall along the Ash Beach Easement has been installed. The Committee discussed the importance of keeping the Birchwood Dock Association advised of the work of the Parks Committee and was aware that the Committee appreciated its input on matters affecting the beaches.

As a last item, the Committee discussed topics for the upcoming City Newsletter, which will go out in early December. Chair Michalk will submit items to Weier in time for inclusion in the Newsletter. Simmons added that the Newsletter should remind residents about minimizing their use of salt over the winter.

Next Month's Meeting. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, December 17, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. in city hall.

Adjourn. 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary

Update from Tella for tonight's mtg

From Mary Sue Simmons <marysuesimmons80@gmail.com>

Date Tue 11/19/2024 9:55 AM

To Parks Committee <parks@cityofbirchwood.com>

Good morning,

Update on T/S field work.

From: **Lori Tella** <LTella@mnwcd.org>

Date: Tue, Nov 19, 2024 at 9:48 AM

Subject: RE: Parks Committee Meeting Tuesday Night

To: Mary Sue Simmons <marysuesimmons80@gmail.com>

Hi! Thanks for checking in.

Yes, you can let them know that we had locates done and that helped to confirm utilities are not in the sites except for the area closest to the parking lot. We also ran soil tests and confirmed infiltration rates of at least 1.5" per hour in all of the selected sites except by the middle of the field by the ice rink (where it tends to be soggy). We will need to decide if that area would be better for native planting or if there are opportunities to amend the soil or add a drain. I also grabbed some soil samples and will be looking at soil ph and texture for each area. Your team was so helpful, I really appreciate the night time and morning check in on the test sites. It gave me a lot more information.

Next steps are for me to get going on the design. I will also be pulling together a memo for the HELP grant. This would be helpful for the committee to think about. There is \$10,000 is allocated to help create and improve habitat. Some options:

- We can use this to enhance the areas by the new basins
- Plant the area by the ice rink that is soggy
- Seed the edges of the park with the sedge meadow mix
- Improve the forest area along the park to remove weeds and add in native see mix and shrubs.
- Target areas for buckthorn removal
- Add plantings to the shoreline
- Look at Halls Marsh for opportunities

We can't do all of it. I can put some options in the plan. It would be good to know your preference for top 2 or 3 projects that I should spend time developing.

Looking forward to your thoughts.

Lori Tella

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