

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING February 18, 2025
MINUTES

The February 18, 2025, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:32 p.m. It was zero degrees outside.

Attendees: Committee Members Zachary Michalk, Mary Sue Simmons, Amy Hullet, and Alan Mitchell. Council Members Bridget Sperl and Kathy Weier.

Others: Barton Winter

Agenda. The agenda was approved unanimously with the addition of an item at the end to discuss possible articles for the upcoming city Newsletter, which will be available early in March.

Public Forum. Barton Winter addressed the Committee regarding the hockey rink. Winter said that he had been discussing his concerns about the rink with the mayor. Winter said he was concerned that the rink was closed longer than announced and that the quality of the ice was poor. He also stated that he would like to see the center of the pavement painted.

Minutes. The Committee unanimously approved the draft December Minutes with some language changes regarding what Barton Winter said during the Public Forum.

Tree Stewards Volunteer Program. The mayor had asked the Committee to help develop a list of projects the City might undertake as part of a Tree Stewards Volunteer Program. The Program is described in an email dated February 4, 2025, from Jessica Sahu Teli, a Water Education Senior Technician at the Washington Conservation District. (This email and the mayor's email are both included in the agenda packet.) Simmons reported that she had spoken to Sahu Teli and learned that the City could participate in the Program by submitting a letter to the WCD stating that it would like to participate and identifying a supervisor. The WCD also needs a "wish list" of projects that might be implemented under the Program. The Program starts in early April.

The Committee discussed a number of questions it had about the Program, including what was expected of the City, were there any costs to the City for participation, where do the volunteers come from,, what projects could be undertaken, and what kind of tasks would be involved. The Committee recognized

that there was little time to find answers to all its questions but agreed that it sounded like a program the City should participate in.

By way of a project example, the Committee discussed how a group of Mahtomedi residents had cleaned up the area near the covered bridge along the Lake Links Trail in Street Car Park in that city. The Committee discussed that perhaps work in Polly's Park could be completed by a Tree Stewards volunteer. Other work could include some tree plantings and watering and mulching in various parts of the city.

Simmons made a motion, seconded by Hulett, that the Committee recommend to the City Council that the City participate in the Tree Stewards Volunteer Program in 2025, that Simmons would be the contact person until a supervisor could be identified, and that Simmons would develop a possible "wish list" or projects to include with the letter of application. The motion carried unanimously and the Committee indicated that the Council should be advised of this action in time for Council consideration at its March meeting

Music in the Park. Mitchell advised that the schedule for the summer concert series had been set and that he wondered if the Committee had any suggestions for improving the arrangements in the hockey rink where the concerts are held. Mitchell mentioned that one possibility was to purchase a small segment of some outdoor carpeting to be used where the musicians set up. Simmons suggested that the background along the boards behind the musicians could be made to look nicer. Another suggestion was to provide a small portable tent for the musicians to stand under, to not only improve the aesthetics but also to provide some protection from the weather. The Committee discussed whether there was money to cover the cost of such enhancements. Mitchell advised that there was \$3700 budgeted for the concerts this year and that \$3000 of that would go to the musicians. Mitchell said he would collect some estimates on the costs related to carpeting and tents. Weier reported on the balance in the Special Revenue Fund, which is dedicated to certain costs associated with the city parks, which might be a source of revenue. The Committee discussed briefly the importance of the Committee putting together a budget for projects it would like to see the City undertake, and this discussion continued under a later agenda item.

Tighe-Schmitz Future Planning. Simmons reported that Lori Tella from the Washington Conservation District, who is the lead person in implementing the grant the City received for work in the Park, was unavailable and would be at the next meeting in March to provide an update.

Simmons pointed out that pages 12 and 13 of the agenda packet for this month's meeting provides a summary of the various projects that residents suggested at a public forum the Committee held in May 2024. The projects listed on these pages may be ones that could be addressed in implementing the smaller \$10,000 HELP Grant (Habitat Enhancement Landscape Project) the City had received (see September 17, 2024 Minutes) to fund additional work affecting Tighe-Schmitz Park. The Committee discussed possible projects that might be pursued, including new playground equipment, picnic tables, and improvements around city hall.

Simmons stated that she had discussions with John Carr of the Lake Links Association (an organization promoting the creation of a bike trail around White Bear Lake) about projects the Lake Links folks might be interested in helping with in the Birchwood community. Simmons added that she had also reviewed the Minutes of the Lake Links Trail Task Force meetings, a Birchwood group looking at bike routes through Birchwood. Simmons said that the Legislature had appropriated money to the various communities around White Bear Lake for work on the Trail and that while Birchwood had not been directly given any money, Mahtomedi had about \$70,000 left over from its allotment and the Legislature had agreed to make that money available to Birchwood. The best information the Committee had was that the deadline for developing a plan for what to do with the money was the summer of 2026 and an agreement for implementing the plan had to be finalized by the end of 2026. It will have to be determined who the parties to the agreement are and whether the Metropolitan Council would have to sign off on the agreement. The Committee decided that it would be helpful to schedule a joint meeting with the Birchwood Lake Links Trail Task Force within the next couple months.

Fencing on Ash Path. Weier advised that a split rail fence had been put up on a portion of the north side of the path and that it would be good to install such a fence along the corresponding south side. Mitchell moved and Michalk seconded that the Committee recommend to the City Council that it install a split rail fence along the corresponding south side of the path. The motion carried unanimously. Simmons volunteered to advise the resident along the south side of the path of the Committee's recommendation.

Skating Rinks. Barton Winter stated that he would prefer that the Committee recommend that the City Council adopt a Policy describing the procedure for flooding the rink. The Committee said that it was not asked to do that and it did not intend to do that. Mitchell explained that following last month's meeting, he

put together a proposal entitled Outdoor Ice Skating Rules, which are in the agenda packet at pages 9-12, along with a proposed sign to be installed in the Warming House, listing some of the various restrictions listed in the Rules. Weier suggested that in paragraph I., a provision be added to discourage people from walking on the rink with footwear that might be carrying dirt or salt or other materials that might interfere with those skating on the rink. Mitchell moved, seconded by Simmons, that the Committee recommend to the City Council that it adopt the Outdoor Ice Skating Rules as approved by the Committee, including the change suggested by Weier. The motion carried unanimously.

Committee Budget/Community Project Tracker. These two agenda topics were covered under one discussion item. The Committee discussed the importance of developing a proposed budget for park work for the entire year. The Committee thought that at some point it should have a special meeting or workshop to focus on developing a list of projects for 2026 and an estimate of the costs for these projects. The Committee discussed that it would be necessary to get a proposed budget for 2026 to the City Council no later than August so that it could be factored into the Council's development in September of a proposed levy for 2026. The Committee will begin these discussions at its March meeting.

Michalk mentioned that one project that should be implemented within the next couple months is replacement of the tennis nets on the courts in Bloomquist Park. The Committee recognized that in order to get the nets replaced before the warm weather returned the Committee the Council would likely have to consider the matter at its March meeting. Mitchell moved and Michalk seconded a motion to recommend to the City Council that it replace the tennis nets in Bloomquist Park this spring and that Michalk gather some estimates on the cost of such nets and installation. The motion passed unanimously.

General Maintenance. There was nothing to discuss.

Newsletter. This is the item added to the agenda. Simmons suggested that an article be included encouraging residents to participate in the organic food scrap collection program, which is free to Birchwood residents. Other topics that were mentioned were the Buckthorn problem and restarting the Plant Exchange program, if that might be possible, but the Committee decided these topics would be better in the Newsletter coming out in June.

Adjourn. Hulett moved and Simmons seconded a motion to adjourn at 8:55 p.m. It carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary