

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING March 18, 2025
MINUTES

The March 18, 2025, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:31 p.m.

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

Others: Lori Tella from the Washington Conservation District. Barton Winter.

Agenda. The agenda was approved unanimously with the addition of five items to be added at the end of the agenda. These items included discussions about Music in the Park and the Lake Links Bike Trail Task Force, which were added at the request of Mitchell, discussion regarding construction of additional fencing along the Ash Path, requested by Sperl, and discussion of an issue regarding signage at Kay Beach and a matter relating to new nets at the hockey rink, raised by Michalk.

Public Forum. Barton Winter addressed the Committee regarding the hockey rink. Winter explained how new nets would be an improvement in the present nets. Winter also said that the biggest issue he sees regarding maintenance of the hockey rink is with the flooding of the ice and he urged the Committee to make recommendations regarding the procedures that should be implemented when flooding occurs.

Minutes. The Committee unanimously approved the draft February Minutes.

Tighe-Schmitz Future Planning. Lori Tella from the Washington Conservation District was present to lead a discussion regarding possible projects that might be implemented in Tighe-Schmitz Park with the \$70,000 Board of Water and Soil Resources grant for water quality improvements that the City had been awarded and perhaps authorized under the \$10,000 HELP grant from BWSR for habitat enhancement. Tella provided the Committee with three documents showing a possible Tighe-Schmitz Park Stormwater Management Project, one entitled Concept Plan, a second called Existing Conditions, and the third labeled Concept Images. (These drawings are available at city hall.) The Concept Plan has a Legend showing the following different areas: Rain Gardens/Basins, Bioswale Planting, Forested Wetland, Bee Lawn/Shortgrass Prairie, Wet Meadow/Pollinator Planting, Shoreline Buffer (on Kay Beach), and Low Mow Lawn.

Tella stated that she need guidance from the Committee regarding what the Committee would like to see done and stated that ultimately the City Council would have to sign off on the final plan. Referring to the drawings, the Committee discussed a number of issues over the course of forty-five minutes, including the following:

- **Public Input.** The Committee recognized the importance of taking into account the comments from the public that were received at a public forum in May 2024. The Committee confirmed the importance of again soliciting input from residents, particularly those living near the Park and from the Birchwood Dock Association, once a proposed plan is identified.
- **Sports Activities.** The Committee discussed that any plan to address water issues in Tighe-Schmitz Park must take into account the need to accommodate certain sports activities. Weier mentioned that the City has recently entered into a contract to rent the soccer field to the Mahtomedi Youth Soccer Association for practice so the field needed to remain even though it isn't large enough for a full soccer field. It was also pointed out that the City intended to remove the backstop on what used to be a baseball diamond.
- **Water Management.** The Committee recognized that whatever plan was decided upon, it would be a plan to control water runoff and improve water quality ending up in the lake. The present plan does not entail the addition of any fill to any part of the Park and looks to the addition of various plants to help control the runoff. The Committee focused on the importance of managing public expectations and ensuring that the public was aware that any projects implemented under the grant would not result in Tighe-Schmitz Park being dry – the Park will still be wet on occasion, the runoff will just be less and will be managed.
- **Maintenance.** Tella emphasized that regardless of what plan is ultimately implemented, the City will have to ensure that any projects that are constructed will be maintained. Tella stated that under the grant each project has to be maintained for a period of ten years. The Committee was of the view that it would be great to be able to rely on volunteers to do the maintenance but that it will be necessary to address the maintenance issue in detail going forward. Tella mentioned that the Washington Conservation District does have a maintenance crew and it might be possible to arrange

with WCD to provide the necessary maintenance.

- **Changes.** The Committee did not develop any specific ideas for changes to the proposed project but identified several areas, such as catch basins and flooded areas, where more attention to detail would be helpful. Tella agreed that she would revise the drawings in accordance with issues that were identified and would provide them to the City electronically before the City Council's April meeting.
- **Schedule.** The Committee summarized the discussion by setting a schedule for proceeding with development of a final plan. Under the grant terms, the work needs to be completed by the end of 2026. The Committee set forth the schedule for the next couple months, as follows:
 - ✓ April 5. Birchwood Dock Association spring meeting.
 - ✓ April 8. April City Council meeting.
 - ✓ May ? Public Forum; date to be determined.
 - ✓ June ? An event to host a walk-through Tighe Schmitz Park to explain the project to residents; date to be determined.

Tree Stewards Volunteer Program. Simmons reported that the Washington Conservation District is presently training volunteers to become tree stewards and that in order for a city to participate, the city must appoint a city advisor to supervise the volunteers. The Committee decided that since the City is presently conducting a search for a new city administrator, it was not going to be possible for Birchwood to participate in the program this year.

Committee Budget. Sperl presented a draft Resolution directing the Parks Committee to prepare an action plan and a proposed budget annually as part of the City Council's development of a budget and a levy. The Resolution will be presented to the Council at its April 8, 2025 meeting for approval. (The Resolution will be part of the Agenda Packet for the Council's April meeting.) The terms of the Resolution would go into effect immediately and the Committee recognized that it would be necessary to submit its project plan and proposed budget to the Council no later than August 2025 for the Council to consider it as part of the 2026 budgeting process.

The draft Resolution recognizes that the Parks Committee could rely on the money in the Special Revenue Fund, which is primarily dock fees paid by the Birchwood Dock Association members, to financially support its project list, but the

Committee must report quarterly on how dock fees are allocated and spent and must provide an annual report to the Council describing completed projects. These reporting requirements would go into effect in 2026. The Committee discussed that it could propose a budget that exceeds the amount in the Special Revenue Fund, but in any event, the Committee would have to prioritize its proposed projects. The Committee recognized that any development of a project list and a budget should take into account any maintenance obligations that would follow the completion of a project. The Committee expressed its full support for passage of such a Resolution.

Music in the Park. Mitchell reminded the Committee that he asked at the February meeting if the Committee had any recommendations for improving the venue of the concerts in the hockey rink. Following up on suggestions that some kind of indoor/outdoor carpeting and a canopy would be nice additions to the hockey rink, Mitchell reported that he had priced out both and that for approximately \$300, the City could purchase both some carpeting and a canopy. Mitchell added that he had spoken to city staff who assist with the setup each Sunday of the concerts and learned that it would not be a problem to set up both each week. The Council's existing continuing Resolution No. 22-06 authorizes up to \$3700 per year for concert expenses, \$3000 of which goes to the artists who perform. The Committee suggested that the Council be asked to authorize up to \$300 of the \$3000 be used to cover the expenses of carpeting and a canopy. Mitchell agreed to prepare the request to bring the matter before the Council at its April meeting.

Lake Links Bike Trail Task Force. Mitchell informed the Committee that he attended the Task Force's monthly meeting on March 13 and expressed the Parks Committee's inquiry whether some of the money potentially available for work related to the Bike Trail could be used to improve Tighe-Schmitz Park. Mitchell reported that the Task Force thought that the money was limited to safety and signage issues directly affecting the Trail and that improvement of Tighe-Schmitz would not likely be eligible for funding, although perhaps the purchase of benches along the Trail might qualify. The Task Force stated that it planned to bring its recommendations to the Council at its May meeting. Mitchell said that the Task Force was focusing on its final recommendation and saw no necessity to have a joint meeting with the Parks Committee. Mitchell added that the City was hosting a public meeting scheduled on April 5 to report on the Capital Improvement Plan for the roads, which would include the Lake Links Task Force recommendation. Mitchell said that the Task Force was unsure about how the City might go about

actually applying for some of the grant money available for the Bike Trail and that issue remained to be worked out.

Ash Path. Weier stated that the Council was planning to remove the barbed wire along the Ash Path on the side opposite where fencing had been installed a few months ago and install matching fencing on the other side as well. Simmons agreed to contact the landowner along the path where the fencing will go and advise the owner about the plans to install fencing.

Hockey Rink Nets. Winter led off the discussion with an explanation of the need for the new nets and indicated that he had already bought two new nets and would be requesting partial reimbursement. Sperl and Weier responded that the Council had already determined that Winter could not spend money and then ask for reimbursement. The Committee took no action, recognizing that if Winter wanted to pursue his request, he would have to take that to the full Council.

Kay Beach Signage. Michalk advised the Committee that the City had received a complaint that people were still bringing dogs down on Kay Beach even though the sign posted at the entrance to the beach stated that no dogs were allowed. The Committee decided to put a reminder in the June Newsletter and to monitor the situation over the summer. Michalk will advise the city administrator of the Committee's decision and will also provide the administrator with cost estimates for new nets on the tennis courts.

Hockey Rink Netting. The subject of netting at the end of the hockey rink to prevent pucks from sailing out of the rink and across the street was brought up. The Committee decided that the decision to install the netting was up to the Council. Simmons indicated that the landowners across the street were still willing to pay half the cost of installation of the netting. The Committee stated that it would be worthwhile to investigate whether installation of the netting might cause a problem with birds flying through the area.

Adjourn. 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary