

PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MEETING APRIL 15, 2025

MINUTES

The April 15, 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 Kathy Weier.

Others: Barton Winter and Sue Hambly and Mike Kramer.

Agenda. The agenda was approved unanimously with the addition of four items to be added at the end of the agenda. These items included a discussion about possibly obtaining benches as part of the Lake Links Trail funding, requested by Michalk, improvements at the hockey rink, added by Michalk at the request of Barton Winter, a review of the Committee bylaws, raised by Mitchell, and an inspection of the city parks, requested by Weier.

Public Forum. Birchwood resident Mike Kramer informed the Committee that he was a member of the Washington County Parks and Open Space Committee.

Kramer gave the Committee an overview of the role of the county committee and indicated the committee has an advisory role only and makes recommendations to the Washington County Board. Winter asked whether the Wilder Center might open again, and Kramer said he would inquire and report to the Parks Committee.

Michalk inquired whether the county maintained a list of contractors who perform various tasks for governmental bodies like counties and cities. Weier wondered whether the county might have plants and trees available for cities to plant from time to time. Kramer stated that he would email Michalk with information in response to the issues raised and suggested that the Committee might want to check the county webpage periodically to keep abreast of developments

Sue Hambly, a White Bear Lake resident interested in the condition of Curt Feistner Beach, asked about whether the City might reinstall the sign about the designation, which is not presently posted, back up near the beach. Michalk responded that this matter was already on the Committee agenda and would be discussed momentarily.

Barton Winter stated that he had done some brush removal near the tennis courts but that some additional clearing was necessary. Winter also informed the committee that he has been monitoring Tighe-Schmitz Park recently and found that the park is not as wet as it has been in the past. Winter also complained about the manner in which the hockey rink had been flooded over the past skating season. Minutes. The Committee unanimously approved the draft March Minutes.

Curt Feistner Sign. Weier gave an update of the Curt Feistner Beach area, indicating that the access route was in bad shape and that there was no clear path to the water. Weier reported that the sign for Curt Feistner Beach had been removed during construction work on Century Avenue and was in storage. Weier stated that the Committee should check with Lori Tella of the Washington Conservation District about whether there might be any grants available next year to help pay for improvement of the beach access. The Committee discussed whether the sign might be temporarily posted in Wildwood Park. Hambly indicated that she would pass the information along to Jim Brisson, retired chaplain at St. Andrews Church and a Feistner family friend, of the possibility of placing the sign in Wildwood Park. Mitchell moved, seconded by Michalk, that the Parks Committee recommend that the City investigate the idea of placing the Curt Feistner Beach sign in Wildwood Park until such time as an appropriate location at the beach could be arranged. The motion carried unanimously.

Simmons mentioned that Elm Beach is also in need of improvement to address

runoff issues. Simmons added that she attended the Birchwood Dock Association 2025 spring meeting on April 5 and that the Dock Association members are in full agreement that Elm Beach needs to be addressed. The Committee recognized that Elm Beach had deteriorated to the extent that a major effort would be required to restore it.

Hockey and Tennis Nets. Weier reported that the City Council had accepted the gift of one hockey net from Barton Winter and authorized the Parks Committee to spend up to \$1000 for the purchase of a second hockey net and two new tennis nets. Weier added that the Council also determined that that the Committee could elect to purchase a second hockey net from Barton Winter. Weier said that the cost of two new tennis nets could exceed \$500.

Hullet moved, seconded by Mitchell, that the Committee arrange to buy the second hockey net from Winter, purchase two new tennis nets, and get all these nets installed, including installation of a new anchor for the net with a lose anchor, the cost not to exceed \$1,000. The motion carried unanimously.

Fencing Along Ash Path. Weier said the City Council decided to install some additional fencing along Ash Path and to remove some existing barbed wire in the area, with the landowner's approval. Weier showed a map indicating where the new fencing would be installed. Simmons agreed to contact the landowner to determine if the landowner has any objection to removing the barbed wire.

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Music in the Park. Mitchell stated that the City Council had authorized \$300 from the existing Music in the Park budget for the purchase of indoor/outdoor carpeting and a canopy. Mitchell said that he would work with the City staff to purchase the carpeting and canopy before the first concert on June 8.

Weier mentioned that she had contacted White Bear Lake High School band

leaders about performing as part of the Music in the Park summer series on an open Sunday free of charge. Mitchell added that there was no money in the budget to pay for additional concerts. Weier also added that the City Council had approved Top Green Lawn Service as the contractor to handle grass cutting for the City over the summer.

Ash Path Bikes. A neighbor has raised a concern with the City that kids are biking on the path at times when people are walking and that could be unsafe. The Committee discussed whether bikes should be prohibited on Ash Path as a safety measure. Michalk moved and Simmons seconded a motion to ask the City to prohibit bikes on Ash Path and to install a sign on both sides of the path stating that bikes are prohibited. The motion carried unanimously. The Committee liked the idea of the signs saying “Be Polite. Walk Your Bike.”

Tighe-Schmitz Park Update. The Committee discussed the status of the grantfunded work anticipated for Tighe-Schmitz Park. Simmons presented a revised Project Overview map that Lori Tella from the Washington Conservation District (WCD) had developed since the Committee’s March meeting. The Committee discussed that Tella was unable to attend the City Council meeting on April 8 to present a plan to the Council, as had been anticipated, and that approval from the Council was a necessary step before proceeding. Simmons emphasized that we also needed to have a specific plan developed before we could arrange a public forum or proceed with any work. The Committee focused on developing an upcoming schedule and agreed on the following:

May 13 Presentation to the City Council by WCD

May 20 Next Parks Committee meeting

May 31 Public Forum with a possible walk-through

Summer Maintenance Inspection The Committee decided with everything else

going on in May that the inspection of playground equipment and other city facilities in the parks would occur in June. The purpose of the inspection is to identify any maintenance issues that need to be addressed Weier mentioned that the City Council, as part of selecting Top Green Lawn Service to mow the grass,

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asked the company to vacuum out the rain garden at Birch Beach and various stormwater catch basins in the community.

Urban Soil Survey. The Committee discussed the fact that Washington County, through the Washington County Water Consortium, in cooperation with the University of Minnesota and others, has begun to generate an updated soil map of certain parts of Washington County, including Birchwood. The Committee was of the opinion that a soil analysis in Tighe-Schmitz Park could be very helpful in determining what actions to take to mitigate water runoff issues around the Park. Simmons moved, seconded by Mitchell, that the Committee contact Lori Tella to determine if the City of Birchwood would be eligible to be included in the study. The motion carried unanimously. Simmons agreed to make the contact with Tella.

Committee Budget. The Committee discussed that the Council had approved Resolution 2025-38, introduced by Council Member Sperl, directing the Parks Committee to prepare a budget and to account for expenditures of money paid to the City by the Birchwood Dock Association members. The Committee indicated that it will develop a 2026 budget for parks over the next several months

Benches along the Lake Links Trail. The Committee discussed the decision by the Lake Links Trail Task Force to recommend that benches at various locations along the Lake Links Trail in Birchwood be included as a fundable expense in any grant money awarded to the City.

Parks Committee Bylaws. Mitchell reminded members that in accordance with the Bylaws of the Committee, Margaret Ford, who was just appointed to a position on the Parks Committee, would serve a term from February 2025 to February 2027. Mitchell added that Michalk's and Hullet's terms would also run to February 2027 since they were just reappointed. Mitchell's term and Simmon's term run until February 2026.

Hockey Rink. Winter displayed a diagram of the hockey rink he prepared showing some posts around the rink that were degraded and needed replacement. Winter indicated that he would pay for one-half the cost. Weier emphasized that the City Council has to approve any expenditures by a resident before any purchases are made and before any volunteer work is done. Weier said that the Committee needs to conduct an inspection of the hockey rink and boards to determine what work needs to be done and that could be completed during the upcoming inspection of all park facilities. Weier stated that city staff could determine the size of posts that are needed and how to install the posts. The

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Committee agreed that a plan had to be developed and cost estimates made before any work could be undertaken at the rink. Michalk indicated that he would gather some new estimates regarding the cost of netting on one end of the rink, so that work could be included in the development of any plan for improving the hockey rink.

Adjourn. 8:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell

Secretary

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