PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING August 19, 2025
MINUTES

The August 19, 2025, meeting of the Parks and Natural Resources Committee was called to order in city hall at 6:32 p.m.

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

Others: Lori Tella (Washington Conservation District), Molly Nelson (Rice Creek Watershed District), Marcus Johnson (Birchwood city engineer), and Barton Winter (Birchwood resident).

Agenda. The draft agenda was approved unanimously with the addition of the following items: Ash Path Dog Poop Bags, Soccer Club practice, Fall Cleanup Day, Special Revenue Fund, Hockey Rink Netting, and Little Library, which would be discussed after the listed agenda items were completed.

Public Forum. Barton Winter reported that had been working on the hockey rink, replacing rotted posts. He said that he had four more posts to replace. He added that some of the vertical boards would also have to be removed and replaced. Winter commented that he had observed how rainwater runs down Lake Avenue into the hockey rink and that this water would have to be diverted.

Minutes. The draft July Minutes were approved unanimously.

Tighe-Schmitz Park Projects. Lori Tella from the Washington Conservation District (WCD), Molly Nelson with the Rice Creek Watershed District (RCWD), and Marcus Johnson, the City's engineer, described the status of the Tighe-Schmitz Park Stormwater Management Project and the upcoming steps that remain to be completed.

Tella provided a set of drawings (comprising 24 pages) that she had prepared for the Project. There are four separate projects that are part of the overall plan. The four projects are described at page 3 of the drawings as follows

A) Shoreline and Swale Enhancement at Dellwood Beach.

B) Filtration Basin North of the Hockey Rink.

C) Filtration Basin South of the Hockey Rink and Native Planting Area.

D) Storm Sack Pretreatment Filter near Lake Avenue and the Hockey Rink.

A copy of the drawings is on file at city hall. The Committee was advised that none of the four projects was designed to hold water and that these areas where water accumulates should drain within 48 hours of a storm event.

Tella explained that after approval by the City Council of the Project, more specific plans will be prepared and potential contractors will be given 21 days to review the plans and submit bids. The City will need to get three bids. The Project is expected to cost about $80,000.

Nelson explained the process for getting a separate Water Quality grant from the Rice Creek Watershed District for up to $10,000 to cover certain work designed to protect White Bear Lake. Tella stated that she would help with preparation of the RCWD grant application. Nelson explained that the RCWD staff reviews grant applications once per month on the first Wednesday and that the District needs a completed application by the 20th of the previous month to make its calendar. The City plans to submit the application by September 20, 2025, for October consideration. Nelson stated that the recipient of such RWCD grants has 18 months from approval to complete the project and that the RWCD pays the grantee after the work is completed and approved. She informed the Committee that an Operation & Maintenance Agreement for ten years will be required. She also added that retrofit grants are possible if something goes wrong with the project through no fault of the City.

Johnson stated that as the Project Manager, he would put together a Project Plan with a proposed schedule. Councilwoman Sperl stated that such a Plan was necessary to ensure that the work can be coordinated with other projects in the city that could impact the Project, such as road work. Johnson added that the contractor who is selected will also prepare a schedule.

The Committee inquired whether the Project would include pouring the concrete pads for the four benches that were going to be installed along the Lake Links Trail. Johnson said he would include that in the bid request. Johnson said that the contracts would require the work to be completed by October 15, 2026.

Johnson said he would put together a contract form for the bids for the Council to review at their upcoming meeting on September 4, 2025, and that the City should be able to get bids within three weeks. Johnson also indicated that he would provide the Parks Committee with regular updates on the Project.

Budget Priorities. Mitchell stated that he had presented the Committee's preliminary budget figures for 2026 at the City Council meeting on August 9 and that a more detailed report should be prepared for the Council's December meeting. He stated that the Council was advised that the Park Committee's budget would essentially be funded by the Special Revenue Fund, which is comprised of money from the Dock Association, and would not likely affect the levy for 2026.

Mitchell said that since improvement of the condition of Elm Beach was a top priority for 2026, it was important to begin looking into what that work might entail. The Committee discussed that it was likely that the City would be looking into the possibility of obtaining grant funding for all the beaches with the help of the Rice Creek Watershed District and the Washington Conservation District and that is where efforts should be directed.

The Committee discussed the importance of planning for maintenance of our parks and of the projects that are undertaken.

Michalk volunteered to put together a memorandum for the Committee's September meeting with a list of possible projects for 2026 and a rough estimate of the anticipated costs

Little Library. The Committee discussed the placement of the Little Library donated by the Harrods. The Committee reviewed the motion it passed at its July meeting accepting the gift and decided that allowing the Harrods to select the location near Tighe-Schmitz Park where the library should go was consistent with that motion. Michalk agreed to contact city administration and ask that the City notify the Harrods that they can select the site for the library and that they should contact Xcel Energy before digging.

Ash Path Dog Poop Bags. The Committee was advised that a resident had complained about dog owners allowing their pets to crap on the owner's vacant lot on Wildwood Street near the Ash Path entrance and requested that the City install a dispenser with poop bags. The Committee determined that it would not install such a dispenser on private property but that it seemed appropriate to install a dispenser near the entrance to the city-owned Ash Path and that the dispenser should be just like other dispensers the City had installed in various public spaces around the community. The Committee also decided that it would not recommend installing a garbage container near the dispenser because that would require an additional collection charge from the waste disposal hauler. Michalk said he would let city administration know about this decision.

Hockey Rink Netting. Simmons reported that she talked to the Department of Natural Resources about recommendations the Department might have for protecting birds from netting such as was proposed for the hockey rink. The Committee decided that the netting should be installed in such a manner that it can be taken down seasonally (when the rink isn't in use as a hockey rink) and that the Committee should monitor whether any birds are getting injured from the netting when in use.

Soccer Club Practice. The Committee simply recognized that Tighe-Schmitz Park would continue to be used for kids soccer practice.

Fall Cleanup Day. Michalk stated that there should be a Fall Cleanup Day this year and that we should set the date so it can be announced in the Fall Newsletter that will come out around Labor Day. The Committee determined that October 11 would be the day. The Committee decided that at its September meeting, it would develop a list of potential projects for volunteers to undertake on Cleanup Day.

The Committee discussed the idea of asking residents to consider adopting some public place in the city and to take responsibility for maintaining that area. Another idea was to see if residents might be interested in paying for a brick to place along some designated route.

Next Meeting. September 16, 2025

Adjourn. 8:28

Respectfully submitted,

Alan Mitchell
Secretary