

Minutes of the Minnetonka Park Board
December 5, 2007

1. Roll Call

Park Board members present included Jahn Anderson, Kyle Gallagher, Bruce Gefvert, Tim Goodyear, Amber Greves, Denny Lambert and Linda Witte. Staff members in attendance included Geralyn Barone, Jo Colleran, Dave Johnson and Perry Vetter.

2. Approval of Minutes

Lambert moved and Greves seconded a motion to approve the meeting Minutes for the November 7, 2007 regular meeting with the City Council as submitted. All voted "Yes." Motion carried.

Greves moved and Gefvert seconded a motion to approve the meeting Minutes for the November 7, 2007 Joint Meeting with the City Council as submitted. All voted "Yes." Motion carried.

3. Citizens Wishing to Discuss Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Business Items

A. Review of proposed tree preservation ordinance

Colleran introduced the item and provided a brief summary of information reviewed at the November 7, 2007 meeting. Colleran outlined details of the proposed Tree Ordinance draft and described differences between the draft proposal and the existing ordinance. She noted that the goal of the draft ordinance is to look at our urban forest from a protection standpoint.

Colleran reviewed the criteria of the draft ordinance as it pertains to the protection of trees defined in three categories: 1) Woodlands; 2) High priority trees; and 3) Significant trees, and explained the mitigation criteria proposed for each category.

Colleran noted that park board feedback was requested through a series of six discussion points detailed in the staff report. She opened the floor to park board member questions and feedback.

Witte questioned why this item was in front of the park board, noting that it primarily dealt with private property requirements. Colleran responded that the park board's strategic plan includes an objective to review proposed changes to the city's code of ordinance that pertain to the natural resources. Witte asked how the ordinance pertains to the park system. Colleran responded that the park board also oversees the open space component of the bond referendum, noting

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that the ordinance draft dealt more with issues in that area of the park board's responsibilities. Barone added that there is no requirement in the ordinance approval process for the park board to review the proposed ordinance. However, based on the park board's strategic plan, staff felt that park board input, at a minimum, would be beneficial.

Barone asked Colleran to summarize why the city council was proposing changes to the existing ordinance. Colleran responded by explaining that redevelopment projects taking place in the city are changing the character of neighborhoods. She added that residents are expressing concerns to the city when a redevelopment project results in significant tree loss. Residents have requested changes that result in reduced tree loss. Colleran noted the recent Crosby Cove project as an example. Barone added that annual community survey results indicate that residents are concerned with tree loss and the lack of protection opportunities included in the existing ordinance.

Witte stressed the point that she did not feel that part of the park board's responsibilities included private property rights. Barone noted that past park board projects have dealt with private property issues noting trail system challenges and the 2007 tree sale program as examples. Witte defined the tree sale as a program and indicated that programming seemed to her to be a different issue.

Barone noted that the council has asked for park board feedback as part of the overall review of the draft ordinance. She noted that the planning commission will also be actively involved in the review process.

Lambert stated that he agreed with Witte that the draft ordinance was outside of the park board's responsibility and expertise.

Goodyear asked how the proposed ordinance compared to those in place for other cities. Colleran explained that tree preservation ordinances in other cities vary in degree from those that are more lenient, to some that are even more restrictive.

Lambert suggested that if the planning commission was scheduled to review the draft ordinance, the park board should review and respond to the outcome of their review. Barone noted that the draft will be forwarded to the city council following the planning commission's review, and the park board's review and comments would be considered as part of the planning commission's discussion.

Greves commented that she felt that the park board has taken on smaller reforestation efforts and that the opportunity to review the draft ordinance provides an opportunity to be involved on a more significant scale. She noted that she supports the draft as presented and feels that the mitigation requirements are reasonable.

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Gefvert noted that he appreciates the fact that the park board was asked to provide their input on the draft ordinance. He added that he supports all aspects of the draft with one suggestion. He asked that staff consider an option that allows trees to be “banked” as credits for other projects if it is not feasible or practical for all mitigation to occur on a project’s private property site.

Anderson commented that from a park board member perspective, he is in favor of the changes identified in the draft ordinance.

Gallagher indicated support for the draft ordinance, noting that he did not see an impact of the ordinance on him as a resident.

Goodyear indicated that he has concerns with the draft ordinance and would not be able to respond favorably to some of the questions being asked of the park board. He noted that he understands the desire for the ordinance changes but feels this is a private property issue and is not in the park board’s area of expertise. Goodyear indicated that he feels flexibility needs to be a part of any requirements and added that education is very important in the process. He stated that he is concerned about the language included on page 6 of the draft, item E4 that appears to allow the city to do things residents cannot.

Colleran commented that the language Goodyear referred to pertains to the removal of trees in a woodland preservation area, or the removal of a high priority tree only if the city council determines that there is “a greater public good” and defines what allowances could be considered.

Barone asked the board for feedback on how the city could incorporate changes to address the concerns expressed.

Witte reiterated her previous concerns that the park board’s role should be with park related projects and activities and not those related to private property rights.

Goodyear inquired if anyone had a motion for consideration.

Greves moved to support the process to revise the existing tree preservation ordinance and to support the proposed tree preservation ordinance as drafted by staff. There was no second to the motion. Motion failed.

Greves reiterated her stance that the park board should be involved in providing feedback on this ordinance. She noted that the Park Board Strategic Plan includes in its mission statement that the board will proactively advise the city council in ways that will “protect and enhance Minnetonka’s natural environment.”

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Lambert expressed his reluctance to approve the draft ordinance for the reasons he expressed previously. He noted that the park board's actions to this point were to not either approve or deny the draft ordinance. He noted that the meeting minutes would serve as feedback from the park board and provide reasoning for the board's concerns.

Anderson indicated that he did not feel he had the qualifications or expertise to make recommendation on the draft policy at this point.

Colleran, wishing to clarify the board's actions, summarized the discussion by indicating that the park board reviewed the draft ordinance and provided feedback; however, no action in support or denial of the ordinance was taken. She asked if that was a correct assessment. The park board in general indicated it was.

B. Parks for Tomorrow

Vetter introduced the item and provided a summary of the existing Parks for Tomorrow program. He explained that people interested in donating funding to the park system in the form of a memorial can do so in three ways, 1) planting a tree: for a cost of \$25, the City will plant a young native tree and issue a certificate; 2) planting a Recognition tree: for \$150-\$200, a donor may select a more mature tree, assist in selecting the planting site, and take part in the planting ceremony; 3) funding a Special Project: donations of \$500 or more allow the donor to direct funds to a special project located in the park system.

Vetter noted the existing Parks for Tomorrow program has been well received and, for the most part, works well. He stated staff is not recommending any changes to Special Project donations.

Vetter detailed suggested changes to the Plant a Tree and Recognition Tree aspects of the program. He explained staff's recommendations of combining the two aspects which allow donors to participate in planting trees in a designated recognition grove along with other donors. Vetter noted the plantings would most likely occur in the spring, and the location of designated groves would rotate from park to park. He explained that the grove concept allows for better monitoring by staff and would reduce the chance that trees would die prematurely from disease, drought or lack of care.

Vetter closed by noting that donors could opt to have the honoree listed on a recognition grove marker if desired.

Lambert commented that he supported the grove concept and the overall changes recommended by staff. Colleran noted that maintenance and inspection of the trees could be much improved if the recommendations were adopted.

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Greves asked if the groves would only be planted in larger parks within the system. Vetter responded that all parks would be considered on a rotating basis. Greves asked if the Special Projects donations would still include the addition of benches in all parks. Vetter indicated it would.

Anderson asked for a description of what a grove of trees under this plan might look like. Vetter explained that there would be a single small plaque indicating who the trees were planted in honor of. He added staff would designate a location once an adequate number of trees were requested. Staff would then select a tree type that was conducive to the surroundings and environment. He noted that trees are continually being lost within the park system and that the revised Parks for Tomorrow program would provide an excellent opportunity for reforestation of the parks.

Gefvert indicated that he was not comfortable with the marker concept and asked if Vetter could explain in more detail. Vetter explained that the marker would be as small as possible to include all names included in the memorial plantings. He added that the marker would include wording such as "in honor of" or "in memory of". He noted that the park board could review a template of a draft design if interested.

Gallagher suggested use of the Minnetonka Memo or other publication as a possible replacement of the markers. Gefvert agreed, suggesting either the Minnetonka Memo or a central location that listed all individuals honored.

Greves asked if staff had any estimates for the number of residents interested in this type of program. Vetter responded that the number of residents who contact the City with memorial requests vary, and estimated that 9-10 bench requests and approximately 12 tree planting requests were made in 2007.

Goodyear noted that a discussion point in the staff report asked if the park board supported expansion of the program to other portions of the park system beyond only parks. He asked for examples such as canoe landings, trails and mutt-mitt holders. Goodyear suggested grove plantings off of the trail system as a possibility he would support. Gefvert agreed, indicating he would support expansion of the program beyond the parks.

Lambert questioned if the numbers of interested people mentioned by Vetter made the program worthwhile to continue. Vetter responded that he felt it was important to continue, primarily for the benefit of reforestation. He expressed confidence that the program would grow if publicized.

Anderson asked if larger donations such as play equipment could be donated. Vetter expressed concerns related to sponsorship and naming rights placed on amenities such as a park's play equipment.

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Greves asked if staff had researched the memorial program provided at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Vetter responded that he had not, however staff had surveyed other cities and found that similar programs exist.

Witte noted that she has been involved in memorial projects connected with past work she has done. She indicated that a memorial project in the Minnetonka park system was not a concern to her.

Lambert summarized his thoughts as they relate to the discussion points asked of the board. He indicated that he supports an update to the existing program in the form of Recognition Groves for memorial tree plantings. He added that he had concerns with the inclusion of a memorial marker or plaque and also expansion beyond established parks.

Goodyear indicated that he also supported an update in the form of Recognition Groves. He requested that recognition markers be minimized, and added that he supports expansion beyond the parks as staff sees fit.

Goodyear expressed concerns related to memorial benches and the need to eventually replace them. He asked if staff anticipated any concerns related to this, or any requirements that the City must continue to recognize the donation past the expected life of the bench. Vetter indicated that he has had one bench replacement and noted that the donor was very understanding of the process and had no expectations that the initial bench memorial would be replaced.

Gefvert suggested that expectations be provided in advance of such projects.

Vetter indicated that he would incorporate the park board's suggestions and implement the recommendations into the new Parks for Tomorrow Program. He noted that the program will be evaluated during 2008 and the park board will receive a year-end report.

C. Oakhaven Park Play Equipment Review

Vetter introduced the item and informed the board that Oakhaven Park play equipment proposal requests were sent to the six potential vendors, with four proposals returned. He explained that the initial proposed budget for play equipment was \$80,000, with returned proposals ranging in cost from \$63,457 to \$72,000, an average of \$67,252. Vetter distributed copies of the proposals submitted and recommended that the project budget be reduced from \$80,000 to \$55,000. Vetter explained that each proposal included play areas for ages 2-5 and 5-12, along with a designated swing area. He noted that the cost for each included installation ranging from \$6,000 to \$10,000 and suggested looking into the use of volunteers to provide installation under the direction of a certified contractor.

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Witte asked if there were State or National Standards relating to play equipment safety. Vetter responded that he and other staff were certified under the Certified Playground Safety Institute (CPSI); however other programs exist as well. He informed the board that the primary safety concerns include fall heights and strangulation risks.

Vetter reported that he would revise the budget to \$55,000 and report back to the board in January 2008 with vendor responses.

D. Consideration of the 2008 Park Board Strategic Plan

Johnson introduced the item, explaining the park board annually reviews at years' end, their current year strategic plan in order to make adjustments for the following year.

The board reviewed the current mission and vision statements and made no recommendations for changes in 2008.

In a review of the goal "To protect natural resources and open space", Greves suggested that a future discussion be scheduled in 2008 to review this goal and determine to what extent the park board should deal with environmental issues, natural resources and open space issues. She cited an earlier discussion as an example of existing, conflicting opinions on the board.

In a review of the goal "To renew and maintain parks", Vetter recommended the addition of "trails" to this goal. Objectives under this goal relating to a review of trail projects, and an assessment to determine if areas of the City are deficient of parks were suggested as additions.

In a review of the goal "To provide quality athletic and recreational facilities", an objective was added to "conduct an evaluation of the 2007-2008 cross country ski season at Glen Lake Golf Course and develop recommendations for the 2008-2009 season." In addition, a new objective to review changing demographics to ensure park amenities are provided in future years was requested.

The final goal to "Enhance long-term park board development" was reviewed. Changes to defined objectives included the park board's participation in updating the Post Plan, and a review and update of the Parks for Tomorrow program.

Johnson indicated that the strategic plan would be updated with the recommendations requested for 2008 and brought back to the board for adoption at the January 9, 2008 meeting.

5. Park Board Member Reports

Gefvert thank Colleran for clean-up work recently finished at Lone Lake Park.

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Lambert noted that the City-owned homes along Minnehaha Creek, east of I494 had been removed. Vetter provided a summary of the process that was used.

6. Information Items

Johnson provided an update on the Glen Lake Golf Course Ski Trail scheduled to open on December 15, 2007. He reviewed the information for a press release included in the meeting packet. Johnson explained that agreements for the operation of a ski trail were being signed by all three parties involved (City of Minnetonka, Three Rivers Park District and Hennepin County), and upon completion, the press release will be distributed.

7. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

The upcoming 6-month calendar was reviewed with no modifications.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 p.m.