

Minutes of the Minnetonka Park Board
May 7, 2008

1. Roll Call

Park board members present included Jahn Anderson, Kyle Gallagher, Bruce Gefvert, Tim Goodyear, Amber Greves and Tess Komarek. Staff members in attendance included Geralyn Barone, Jo Colleran, Dave Johnson and Perry Vetter.

2. Approval of Minutes

Gefvert moved and Greves seconded a motion to approve the Minutes of April 2, 2008 as submitted. All voted "Yes." Motion carried.

3. Citizens Wishing to Discuss Items Not on the Agenda

None.

4. Business Items

A. Review of City's Park Regulations

Perry Vetter, Parks and Trails Division Manager, opened by noting the park board is in the process of reviewing the city's park regulations in an effort to update any areas that are outdated and no longer practical. He noted that while minor changes have been made to specific areas of the regulations over the past few years, an overall review of the regulations has not taken place for several years.

Vetter reviewed existing language in the park regulations that referred to each of these areas and noted that staff was requesting feedback from the park board on three issues related to the park regulations:

1) **Animals in the parks**

Vetter noted three areas of concern exist:

- a. Surface water pathogens and the disposal of animal feces
- b. Areas being used are under active restoration
- c. Improved access to park facilities thru Park Renewal leads to conflicted use

Vetter went on to explain that the city spends between \$7,500 - \$9,000 annually on Mutt-Mitt dog waste bags, although the main concern is the costs to use staff and fuel to fill the containers.

Providing an overview on natural resources restoration efforts, Vetter explained that surface water quality can be negatively affected by animal feces within watersheds. While an official study has not been conducted, it is

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noted that the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District has an advisory not to use the creek for three days following a significant rain fall due to high surface water pathogens. He added that efforts to improve the natural areas of the park system, in place since the early 1990's, have at times been hampered by over use of the natural areas by dogs and their owners.

Reporting on the third aspect of improved access to the park system, Vetter reviewed the growth of the city and the trend towards dedicated amenities as opposed to multi-purpose use that often leads to overuse and conflict.

2) Geocaching

Vetter explained that staff was recommending language be added to the park regulations to officially recognize geocaching as an activity that takes place in our parks system and provide any language needed to regulate this activity. Vetter explained that geocaching involves the location of small caches throughout the community that people can use GPS units to locate and record their findings. He added that park properties are often prime locations for these caches to be hidden, noting that records indicate that over 340 are currently in the city's park system.

3) Use of electric scooters.

Vetter noted that there are more concerns related to the increased use of electric scooters in the park system, especially on trails, involving conflicts with bikers and walkers.

Vetter recommended that the two less controversial issues of motorized scooters and geocaching be discussed first, followed by the greater issue of dogs in parks and leash versus off-leash regulations.

Vetter noted that Police Chief Mark Raquet, Community Services Officer Deeann Bloom and Natural Resources Division Manager Jo Colleran were available to provide greater detail related to any of these issues upon request.

Goodyear noted that he would open the floor to public comments, adding that the city will continue receiving public input up until the next park board meeting scheduled for August 5, 2008.

Goodyear opened the floor to public comments related to electric scooters and received none.

Goodyear opened the floor to public comments related to geocaching.

Ralph Richardson, 3049 Lake Shores Boulevard, spoke in favor of the activity of geocaching and provided general information regarding the activity. He explained

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that caches are never buried; only hidden so that no damage is done to property. He noted he was in support of the regulations being recommended by staff.

David Munde, 501 Drill Lane, Hopkins, thanked Richardson for the explanation and indicated that he was attending the meeting for the dog discussion but was curious what the issues were related to geocaching. Vetter responded that there were no concerns about the activity, only the need to recognize it as an activity that takes place and to improve dialog with participants. As an example, Vetter noted that two caches were recently destroyed by fire when the city was performing a controlled burn as part of the natural resources restoration efforts.

Christine Wiley, 5901 Bell Circle, asked if the caches pose any concerns for the natural areas. Vetter noted that if problems arise, staff can work with the person placing the cache. Jo Colleran added that the activity is popular but not growing by large numbers to the point of concern.

Hearing no further comments related to geocaching, Goodyear proceeded to receive public comments related to animals in the park system.

Deeann Bloom, Community Services officer, stated the Police Department's intention is to improve public safety and not to eliminate off-leash areas. She reported that since January 1, 2005, 101 dog bite cases have been reported with only one occurring when the dog was on leash. Bloom noted that she felt an enclosed area for dogs would be the best due to several instances where walkers and trail users have encountered off-leash dogs. She added that existing park regulations are too subjective and make it difficult to determine if dog owners are in violation. Bloom added that in response to those who say that a few poor owners are ruining things for other responsible dog owners, her answer was yes that is probably the case, adding that this was no different than most laws that are in place for only a few violators. Bloom closed by indication that the Police Department employs two full-time and one part-time officers to patrol all parks and that limiting off-leashed dogs to fenced-in areas would help considerably.

Craig Berdan, 15835, Randall Lane, voiced support for designated off-leashed areas in the city noting that large dogs need to have areas that they can run. To do so, Berdan explained that the area would need to be fully enclosed, large and provide limited water. He suggested a partnership with other agencies if the city did not have the required piece of property. He added that he is embarrassed by the actions of irresponsible dog owners.

Christine Wiley, 5901 Bell Circle, returned to speak on the issue of dogs in the parks. She explained that she essentially lives within the boundaries of Purgatory Park and while embarrassed of the actions of a few irresponsible dog owners, she is opposed to the changes being considered. She suggested increased education, and feels that traditional dog parks alone are not the answer due to

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overuse and poor conditions. She closed by noting that dog walking is an important form of exercise for both animal and owner and is a primary source for her now that cross country skiing has been removed from Purgatory Park.

John Brookes, 5704 High Park Drive, noted that he endorsed the comments provided by Riley adding that he felt volunteers could help reduce the impact of dogs in the parks thru the adoption of cleanup programs, parks, trails and Mutt Mitt holders. He suggested that dog licenses be reinstated to provide a revenue source for maintenance and enforcement.

Adel Lenning, 3506 Sunrise Drive, noted that she uses Jidana Park to walk her dog 4-5 times per week and indicated that 75% of the dog owners she encounters are responsible. She noted that she does not support a fenced in area for dogs. She noted that New York City provides days and times when dogs are permitted in the parks and suggested that this might be an option.

Jill Manley, 5209 Clear Springs Drive, noted that she uses Purgatory Park regularly and asked that the park remain the "gem" that it is by regulating dog use. She indicated that increased dog use and misuse have resulted in fewer sightings of wildlife and vegetation. She added that she often sees several dogs off-leash together in a pack-like mentality and feels that can be intimidating to other park users. She closed by saying that clean-up is also a problem and noted that both Eden Prairie and Plymouth require that dogs be on leash when not in designated off-leash dog areas.

David Munde, 501 Drill Lane, Hopkins, noted that he comes to Purgatory Park from Hopkins 3-5 times per week and feels like non-dog owners seem to use the trails while dog owners use the off-trail areas. He disagrees that there has been a reduction in wildlife, noting that he often sees fox and other animals. He felt that aggressive dogs should not be permitted in the park on or off-leash and stated the importance of dogs learning how to act socially with other dogs. He asked if there was any record of other animals being attacked by dogs.

Dave Ingraham, 15475, Melody Lane, noted that he was not opposed to licensing of dogs. He stated that there are a large number of dog owners in the city, and he was in favor of designated dog parks, adding that they would be helpful but would not provide the benefits that Purgatory and Lone Lake Park do where an owner can hike with their dog. He felt that dog owners make the parks safer by providing increased use and less isolation. He closed by indicating that he has only seen one off-trail walker without a dog in all his visits to Purgatory Park and feels that the real issue is lack of enforcement.

David Peckitorie, 4340, Victoria Lane, indicated that he was in support of current regulations, noting that Purgatory Park brings neighbors together. He agreed that owners need to take responsibility and that aggressive dogs need to be controlled.

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Chris Sullivan, 3506 Sunrise Drive West, stated that he felt the use of Purgatory Park would be reduced significantly if off-leash dog access was eliminated. He provided examples of the risks people take when they go to a national park, noting that significant efforts are not taken to protect users from falling off of a cliff due to the impact those efforts would have on the park. He closed by noting that if vegetation is being trampled by dogs, the same must be happening to weeds that are unwanted.

Rich Hass, 5641 Scenic Drive, voiced opposition to any regulation changes and noted that he felt that most of the damage to the natural areas was being caused by enforcement vehicles driving in areas of the park that are not easily accessible.

Diana Hoyt, 17609 Jennifer Lane, indicated that 88% of the dog bite incidents are happening in locations other than the parks, she felt that water runoff from private property was a greater concern than dog waste, and that she had not witnessed a problem with dog owners not cleaning up after their pets. She closed by saying that she hopes the dog owner community comes together over this issue.

Cindy Redfield, 5333 Dominick Drive, suggested that donations be taken to cover the cost of maintenance and Mutt-Mitt purchases.

David Grout, 12814 Linde Lane, noted that he uses one of Minnetonka's parks on a daily basis and is surprised by the funding applied to enforcement. He felt that an increase in enforcement is needed regardless of any action taken and added that he supports the reinstatement of dog licensing and increased education.

Charlie Kuharski, 14506 Wildcrest Road, noted that he uses Purgatory Park's natural areas on a regular basis and disagrees that there is a conflict with other users. He noted that he regularly sees deer and feels that other wildlife is not impacted.

Adam Abrams, 16026 Temple Drive, stated that he regularly uses the non-active areas of Purgatory Park and does not see any impact with other users. He added that he does not support designated enclosed dog parks and he would be forced to use the trails on-leash creating increased interaction with walkers/bikers.

Hearing no further comments, Goodyear closed the floor to public comments and asked for park board questions and feedback.

Goodyear asked where the closest dog park was to Minnetonka. Vetter stated that Three Rivers Park District operates a park at Bryant Lake, the cities of Eden Prairie and Plymouth provide parks, and that both Minneapolis and Ramsey County have parks.

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Goodyear asked if Vetter had a history of comments and contacts related to dog/person incidents in the parks. Vetter responded that actual enforcement complaints go to the Police Department.

Responding to questions that were raised during the public comment section, Vetter provided the following information:

- Ski trails at Purgatory Park and other city parks have not been in place for approximately 5 years. He noted that skiing is allowed, however no groomed trails are maintained.
- There are volunteers in place in the park system including one person who regularly cleans the trail system of dog feces.
- The annual city survey indicates that 33% - 36% of residents own dogs, most have indicated that they would use a dedicated dog park and that size is the primary factor.

Vetter summarized the general comments received at tonight's meeting including:

- Research the possibility of dedicated off-leash times/days
- Involve volunteers for clean-up and policing
- Look at increased enforcement/education
- Consider reinstating the dog license program.

Gefvert indicated that he admired the passion those in attendance had regarding this issue. He noted that he has witnessed both responsible and irresponsible owners during his visits to the park. He hopes a solution to the existing problems does not impact the responsible owner. He closed by saying that he understood the primary issues were safety, environmental and clean-up.

Goodyear asked if an Adopt-a-Trail or Adopt-a-Park program was in place for Purgatory Park. Vetter indicated that both were.

Anderson requested a history on the dog license program. Bloom indicated that the Police Department required licenses until 2000 when the program was eliminated because of concerns that only the responsible dog owners were licensing their pets.

Greves asked if the Police Department has any records of the number of warnings and citations handed out. Bloom responded that there were no numbers available but estimated that one is given each time a park is visited. Greves added that she appreciates the comments provided by the public and felt there were no absolutes in the issue or solution. She agreed that the environmental and clean-up issues are concerns but felt that safety was the primary concern. Greves noted that a dedicated off-leash park would create

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issues as well related to safety and cleanup; and that she was in favor of reinstating a licensing program of some type.

Greves reminded those in attendance that Purgatory Park and others in the city are not “dog parks” under the existing regulations and that she did not feel that it is a civic entitlement to be able to walk your dog off leash.

Gallagher commended the one person who stood up to speak in opposition to dogs being off-leash in Purgatory Park, despite the number of dog owners present at the meeting.

Komarek voiced agreement with the comments made by Greves. She acknowledged that most dog owners are responsible but added that the few who are not can cause safety issues.

Goodyear asked that staff provide a summary of what other cities are doing for dog enforcement. Vetter indicated that he would and noted that Minnetonka has historically been different than most cities due to the amount of natural areas we have in our system.

Barone reminded those in attendance that public comments would continue to be received through the August 6, 2008 meeting and asked that those with comments contact Perry Vetter.

B. Consideration of a request from Bennett Park for an athletic field improvement partnership

Johnson introduced the item and stated that the proposed 2009 – 2013 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) includes a park board recommendation of \$50,000 in 2010 for unidentified field improvement projects that might be received from potential partnerships. He explained that Bennett Family Park (BFP) is in the process of planning for substantial improvements to their park including the addition of a new field for participants with special needs, building improvements, landscaping upgrades and general field improvements. He noted that the planning commission reviewed and approved the BFP plan at their May 1, 2008 meeting; and indicated that it will be considered by the city council on May 19, 2008.

Johnson explained that one field improvement planned for BFP is the conversion of an existing multipurpose field (field #5), to a dedicated baseball field for youth transitioning from Little League baseball to regulation baseball. This “prep” field will provide shorter fences and base paths better suited for 13 year old participants and will essentially provide the same amenity to Babe Ruth baseball in the Minnetonka School District as Guilliams Field does for the Babe Ruth association that serves the Hopkins School District.

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Johnson indicated that BFP was interested in forming a partnership with the city to help fund this field improvement, adding that the desired improvement is consistent with recommendations included in the city's Athletic Fields Needs Study. Johnson closed by indicating that John Williams and Bob Lietzke, both representing BFP were in attendance to answer any questions the park board might have.

John Williams, BFP board member, explained that BFP is a non-profit operation serving Minnetonka and other western communities. He noted that participation at the park includes: East Tonka Little League (820); Babe Ruth Association (250), Minnetonka Girl's Softball Association (600), and the new Miracle League (25). Williams explained that the need for a prep field is due to a significant drop off in participation from Little League to Babe Ruth due to field availability. He explained that a prep field would have 75' base paths and shorter fences to allow for the transition from little league play to regulation field play. Williams reviewed the proposed plan in detail.

Goodyear informed the park board that he has an affiliation with BFP through his children's participation in the programs offered. He indicated that he would abstain from voting or providing feedback on this issue, and asked if there were any concerns with him serving as the chair throughout this discussion. No one was opposed. Goodyear asked for questions from the park board.

Gallagher asked if participation in the Miracle League program was restricted to the Minnetonka School District. Williams indicated that it was not, adding that the Miracle League program has a goal of providing fields throughout the metro area for all who would benefit from the program.

Anderson asked how many teams would benefit from the addition of the prep field. Williams replied that they are using an alternate field this year with nine teams participating and suggested that the number of teams would grow in future years.

Gefvert asked Williams if he had any concerns that the field would be used to capacity. Williams responded that he did not have any concerns.

Greves asked Johnson if other requests for athletic field funding had been received. Johnson indicated he had not received any and was not aware of any under consideration. Greves asked if any part of the \$50,000 should stay in reserve. Johnson responded that any lesser of an amount would really not be practical in a partnership of any significance.

Gefvert indicated that he felt the proposed project was a good use of the athletic field funding allocation in the CIP. Gefvert moved and Gallagher seconded a motion to recommend to the city council that the \$50,000 included in the CIP for 2010 and identified as unallocated by assigned to a joint partnership with Bennett Family Park for the creation of a "prep" field for youth baseball. Anderson, Gallagher, Gefvert, Greves and Komarek voted "yes". Goodyear abstained. Motion carried.

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C. Play Equipment recommendation for Oakhaven Park

Vetter provided background for this item noting that at the April 2, 2008 meeting, the park board reviewed all proposals submitted for new playground equipment and directed staff to continue with a further review of the submissions for ADA compliance and national safety standards.

Park Maintenance staff member Bob Hill reviewed details of the plan received by Webber Recreational Design in the amount of \$54,986.83 that staff was recommending for approval.

Goodyear asked if the bid received from Webber Recreational Design was within the pre-approved budget. Vetter indicated that it was.

Gefvert moved and Greves seconded a motion to recommend to the city council the plan submitted by Webber Recreational Design be awarded the project bid at the city council meeting of June 9, 2008. All voted yes, motion carried.

D. Review 2007/2008 Glen Lake Ski Trail Operations

Johnson provided a summary of the inaugural 2007/08 Glen Lake Ski trail operations at the Glen Lake Golf Course. Johnson reminded the board that the agreement to conduct this program was approved by all parties one day prior to the facility opening with no time to market the program.

Johnson indicated that the total attendance for the 82 day season was 1,851, an average of 23 skiers per day. He noted that the start of the program was good due to excellent snow fall, adding that snow conditions became poor towards the end of the season. Johnson summarized that overall use was within projections, while revenues and expenditures were both lower than anticipated. He indicated that marketing efforts for the second year will increase the sale of season passes.

Goodyear commented that he used the trail frequently and felt that the amount of use was positive. He suggested that an additional year to test the program would be beneficial. He suggested that if the program is continued, staff fine tune the agreement to address any operational challenges that might have occurred.

Gallagher asked if the site was used for any competitions or recreational classes. Johnson responded that there were no competitions due to the length of the course, but did indicate that with appropriate marketing time, classes sponsored through Recreation Services would be offered and successful.

Johnson noted that he spoke with park board member Lambert who was unable to attend the meeting. Lambert indicated that he would not be in favor of continuing the

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ski trail partnership if it meant that funding needed to be taken from other programs and services. Lambert indicated that he felt other options were available for skiing outside of the city if residents wanted to travel a short distance.

Anderson moved and Gallagher seconded a motion to recommend to the city council that the joint partnership with Three Rivers Park District to operate a cross country ski trail at the Glen Lake Golf Course be extended for the 2008-2009 season and included in the 2009 city budget. All voted "yes". Motion carried.

E. Review draft of Parks, Trails, and Open Space Comprehensive Plan chapter

Barone reviewed the draft Parks, Trails and Open Space Plan chapter of the city's proposed Comprehensive Plan. She asked that the park board keep in mind that the city's POST Plan correlates closely with the Comprehensive Plan and is budgeted to be updated in 2009.

Barone indicated that she was looking for any input on the chapter that could be taken back to the Comprehensive Plan Committee for consideration. The park board indicated that they felt the chapter was well prepared and offered no additional changes for consideration.

5. Park Board Member Reports

None

6. Information Items

None

7. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

The park board was reminded of a joint meeting of the Comprehensive Plan Committee, Park Board, EDA and Planning Commission on June 16, 2008 at 6:30 p.m.

The park board reviewed the tentative upcoming meeting schedule included in the meeting packet.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 p.m.