



## NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes April 5, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330

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### I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

### II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Lori Dando, Pam Foster, Judy Gibbs, John Lindgren, Mike Schrage, Nancy Schuldt, Andrew Streitz

Absent: Sophia Green, Tiffany Sprague

Staff Present: Allison Brooks, Clark Christenson, Jim Filby Williams, Kate Kubiak, Ryan Granlund

### III. Approval of the Agenda

**Commissioner Schrage made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Vice Chair Schuldt. Unanimously approved.**

### IV. Approval of the February 1, 2023 Meeting Minutes

**Commissioner Streitz made a motion to approve the February 1, 2023 meeting minutes; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.**

### V. Old Business

#### A.) 2023 Agendas Preview

Kubiak provided a brief preview of future meeting topics and the general timeline for when anticipated projects will come before commission. Kubiak highlighted that future meetings will likely include an update about the Natural Areas Program, and presentations about both the Tischer Creek and Hartley Pond Feasibility Study and the Public Lands Transfer. There will be no meeting in July.

Williams commented that this is an exciting year for the City and the Natural Resources Commission as the City finalizes the transactions for the Public Lands Transfer. Once completed, conversations can begin about how a future phase of tax-forfeit land transfers could take place. Likewise, the City's response to Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is still moving strong. In the coming years there will be an opportunity to discuss what the City wishes to prioritize for Duluth's urban forest when ash tree removals are predominately completed.

#### B.) Tischer Creek & Hartley Pond Feasibility Study – Bimonthly informational update

Kubiak shared that the public informational meeting on February 23 at Hartley Nature Center went well, with about ten members of the public in attendance despite weather challenges. There will be two additional meetings this summer. Williams asked for additional information about the timing for when a conclusion will surface on the feasibility study and future implementation. Kubiak responded that a solution will likely be identified before the end of the year. Chair Lindgren commented that there would likely be the potential for additional funding to support supplemental modeling, which would be valuable for the study, then construction of the selected alternative could take place in 2025, depending on funding availability.



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### VI. New Business

#### A.) Streams and Stormwater Update [Ryan Granlund, Utility Program Coordinator]

Granlund shared an overview of the City's stormwater efforts, which includes education and outreach, MS4 and erosion control permitting, pollution prevention projects, and administration of the stormwater best management practices program that provides complying organizations with a reduced annual stormwater fee. There are additional operations that include partnerships with other City departments, and state and county entities.

Commissioner Streit asked how the City is involved in impaired waterways. Granlund responded that, while the state conducts the water quality monitoring, the City is responsible for making efforts and successfully reducing pollution contributions that results in improvements of the receiving water body. Chair Lindgren commented that there are state and federal scoring systems that are used to determine solutions for impairments, and the systems will be incorporated into the Tischer Creek Roadmap to Resilience.

Granlund stated that two bio-filtration systems will be installed at Irving Park and Hartley Park in the future. Granlund shared that the City recently completed a green infrastructure siting and feasibility study to determine where the City should prioritize installation of stormwater treatment projects. During the study, staff identified roughly 200 total sites as feasible locations, which indicates there are many opportunities for stormwater infrastructure additions across Duluth. E coli studies were conducted for Keene Creek and Tischer Creek. Chair Lindgren commented that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are interested in pursuing re-meandering projects for Keene, and that the portions of the creek with the most significant growth of E coli are the channelized, ditched areas. Commissioner Schrage asked what sources of human contamination occur in the watersheds. Granlund responded that there are some sanitary sewer lines that are leaking in Keene Creek, and of the 21 lines that were identified, the 14 most significant leaking lines have been successfully addressed.

Commissioner Foster asked how the stormwater infrastructure will be maintained at Irving Park. Granlund responded that the design will have a 25-year lifecycle before it would need to be excavated and reset. The maintenance of vegetation in stormwater infrastructure will likely be contracted.

Williams stated that there is strategic, integrated, and ambitious progress happening by the stormwater program. By establishing the Natural Resources Commission and positions of the Natural Resources Coordinator and the Utility Programs Coordinator, the City is cultivating a systematic approach towards the betterment of natural resources within Duluth. The projects that the stormwater program is undertaking involve significant collaboration across different Duluth departments and outside partners including federal entities, St. Louis County, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, DNR, and SWCD. Vice Chair Schuldt commented that there is noteworthy improvement within the past 25 years to create a concerted effort to restore and protect fundamental projects for the improvement of Duluth's waters. Chair Lindgren agreed and noted that there are significant funding opportunities for projects that further progress, and that unfortunately, staff capacity is the primary limitation to taking on additional new projects.



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### B.) 2023 Prescribed Fire Pilot Project

Kubiak stated that the City will be contracting prescribed burns for three pollinator meadows, including two sites at Hartley Park and one at the western end of Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail. The burns will be a pilot to assess how controlled burns can be used for future management. Commissioner Schrage asked if there has been interest in conducting a burn at the Scientific and Natural Area at Park Point. Vice Chair Schuldt responded that there is ongoing research, including a project by students from the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, and that there are plans to explore proceeding with the potential return of controlled fire to Park Point.

## VII. Staff Reports

### A.) Natural Resources Coordinator Report [Kate Kubiak]

Kubiak shared that the Minnesota Land Trust has been invited to provide a full proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes grant program to update the management plan for the Magney Snively Natural Area.

### B.) Forester's Report [Clark Christenson]

Christenson commented that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has reclassified the Northern Long-Eared Bat as endangered, which use trees as brooding habitat. There is uncertainty as to how this designation will influence the removal of ash trees affected by the Emerald Ash Borer. Christenson shared that the City will begin contracting tree purchasing, and that staff will begin propagating trees, including oak, hackberry, European larch, and dogwood species. These strategies are intended to ensure the City has sufficient stock to replace trees with the anticipated sourcing challenges in the future.

### C.) Director's Report [Jim Filby Williams]

No report.

## VIII. Announcements

No announcement.

## IX. Public Comment

No comments.

## X. Adjournment

**Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to adjourn; second by Commissioner Foster. Unanimously approved.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

**Next Meeting** - Wednesday, May 3 at 6:00 p.m. in Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330.