



PARKS and RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes of March 9, 2016

City Hall Room 303
411 W. 1st Street



1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 5:05 pm.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Commissioners Schraepfer, Breeuwer, Wodash, Albright, Hall, Crosby, Contardo, Schmidt, and Councilor Sipress

NOT PRESENT: Commissioners Welles, Torch

3. Approval of Minutes

Motion made for approval of the February 10, 2016, meeting minutes; seconded. Motioned carried.

4. Presentations

A. Lake Superior Zoo/Fairmount Park Concept Plan – Jim Filby Williams, Director of Public Administration (action requested)

Commissioner Hall gave opening remarks, detailing the history of how the final concept plan was developed for Lake Superior Zoo/Fairmount Park.

Jim Filby Williams was invited to speak on the final concept plan. He reviewed the scope and highlights of the final plan. He offered a thank you to the community partners, consultants and internal City partners who worked on developing the plan. He highlighted a total of eight public meetings and corresponding public comment periods were held. He stated the plan being presented to the Commissioners is not a final document, but once approved by the Parks Commission is a final "common denominator" in both the upcoming Fairmount Park planning process and the Zoo Mini-Master Plan process. Mr. Filby Williams noted the Fairmount Park planning process will be led by Duluth Parks and Recreation Division. The Zoo Mini-Master Plan process will be a Zoological Society process. However, the City of Duluth and Parks and Recreation are looking at how to involve the Commission and City Council in the processes. It was noted that upcoming steps in planning for the Zoo and Fairmount Park will involve community input.

Mr. Filby Williams noted the changes in the plan from the last draft are minor. The most significant changes in the final plan involve the main building. The final plan calls for a two-story indoor play area. The integration of a play area in the main building is a result of public comment asking for the destination play area to be in a common area. Mr. Filby Williams noted the final concept should meet the community's desire for a large indoor play area centrally located in the zoo. He also noted the tiger holding area will remain the same. The estimated cost of the concept plan is \$15,758,111.

Mr. Filby Williams explained the steps of the concept plan after Commission and Council approval include speaking with our local legislative delegation and setting up meetings with committee chairs in St. Paul to secure a bonding request. Mr. Filby Williams added the

Zoological Society has worked hard on a bonding proposal and the City is cautiously optimistic money is possible in this bonding cycle. The legislative delegation, including Senator Reinert and Representative Murphy, are passionate supporters of the Zoo, as is Mayor Larson.

Commissioner Hall:

Is there a projected timetable on what aspects of the plan are implemented first?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied Phase One will likely focus on repair and repurposing of Polar Shores, development of the visitor area next to Polar Shores, development of the amphitheater, and restoration of Kingsbury Creek - including repairs to rock work and bridges. The most likely candidate of Phase Two will be the Forest Discovery Zone area as that is the best opportunity for our community and the Zoo to do something new, exciting and innovative. Mr. Filby Williams noted this project has interested partners and fundraising has already begun.

Mr. Filby Williams stated fund planning for the \$5 million main building project, albeit very important, has not begun. Other components are miscellaneous and will be picked off as funding and timelines allow.

Commissioner Albright:

Will the play place be a separate ticket item? If so, will any revenue made be re-invested back into the zoo?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied that the plan currently views the Zoo and the indoor play space as a single admission ticket, noting strong evidence that destination indoor play is a strong consumer need. He also indicated that the revenue will stay in the Zoo's budget.

Commissioner Albright:

What funds are available for the development of Fairmount Park?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied that \$400,000 in ½ and ½ funding was approved by City Council.

Commissioner Wodash:

To what extent will the Master Plan for the Zoo be brought up to the Commission and the public?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied the Master Plan process for the Zoo will be headed by the Zoological Society. The Society is consulting with their Association of Zoos and Aquariums mentor on how local government partners have engaged in Zoo Master Plan processes. He indicated the City will gauge our involvement based on the results of those conversations. Mr. Filby Williams noted much of the Master Plan work is not about the facility – rather it's about programming, education, financing, the nature of the partnership, how the Zoo responds to emergencies, etc. There may be opportunities to tweak the facility plan as the Master Plan moves forward and the City will be engaged in those discussions.

Commissioner Hall requested the Parks Commission be updated on the process and apprised of developments in the Zoo Master Plan. He stated it remains the prerogative of the

Commission and City Council to step in if needed; however, he did not feel the Parks Commission would need more than updates as long as developments are within the scope of the plan.

Commissioner Brewer:

Is there a separate budget for the full picture of Zoo expenses including operations and capital improvements?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied there is no anticipated change in the City's contribution to the Zoo's operating budget; not to say there won't be changes, but they have not been discussed.

Commissioner Hall:

Are there plans to run project revenue of the current final plan?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied 18 months ago when the City first completed two concept plans, ConsultEcon – an organization that specializes in advising municipalities on how to develop Zoos with an eye toward long-term financial viability – was commissioned to project revenue long term. The current plan under consideration is similar to the plans they modeled. Mr. Filby Williams reported he is in conversation with ConsultEcon to ascertain if they will rerun those projections based on the final concept plan, if approved. ConsultEcon is awaiting the final product so they can determine cost to run those reports.

Commissioner Hall recognized Jolene Boe, Acting Executive Director of the Lake Superior Zoo to make comments. Ms. Boe believes the final plan is a great way to move the Zoo and park forward. She noted it's a plan developed through significant work with City administration and a strong community planning process. That work will continue as the plans move forward. Ms. Boe stated the Society strongly supports the final concept plan and the approval of the plan will help shape the future of the zoo; as well as support the upcoming accreditation process and possible funding from State legislature.

Commissioner Albright:

What is the timeline to move the perimeter fence from its current location to its proposed location?

- Mr. Filby Williams replied there is not a definitive timeline due to the number of factors that play into the move.

Commissioner Hall noted the continued need for an eye towards ongoing maintenance with any Park developments.

Citizen Comments

Citizen – Spoke about his excitement about the sustainability of the plan and its recognition of people's former experiences at the Zoo as well as building on the future markets.

Citizen – Spoke on how the proposed plan was an opportunity to do something great that would impact more than just our community.

Commissioner Albright made a formal motion; seconded by Commissioner Schmidt.

“To approve the Lake Superior Zoo/Fairmount Park Concept Plan and its implementation of the plan as funding becomes available.”

Upon call for discussion, Commissioner Schmidt commented on his experience as a member of the task force. He stated the mission of the Zoo - which is to provide connection to animals - especially in a world where children are losing that connection - is more important than ever. He noted that he was deeply impacted by the numbers of children who visit (especially those low income), the number of volunteers, the quality of the Zoo staff, partnership between Zoo and City staff, and the respect and care that was given to public input during the development of the plan. He noted he is not often impressed with out of town consultants but PJA earned his respect for their authenticity and the care and commitment they showed to the community. He noted it is a good plan and it is a compromise. It leaves room for improvement. The resiliency and sustainability of the plan is significant. The future challenge is to move forward and to care for and maintain what we build.

Motion passed unanimously.

5. Commission Committees

- A. Parks and Facilities –meeting date: TBA
Chair -Michael Schraepfer–Jon Welles, Ed Hall, John Schmidt, Patrick Contardo [Dale Sellner]
- B. Administrative (E-Board)–meeting date: TBA
- C. Trails and Bikeways–meeting date: TBA
Chair –Tom Albright -Andy Holak, Tiersa Wodash, Tjaard Breeuwer, Art Johnston, [Judy Gibbs]
Commissioner Wodash attended the Cross City Trail public meeting and reported it was a nice representation of stakeholders.
- D. Recreation Programming (youth and adult) –meeting date: TBA
Chair -Jon Welles –Andy Holak, Erik Torch, Amanda Crosby [Pamela Page]
Needs volunteers to help select bands to play at Chester – 2-3 Commissioners needed. Pull Tab grants: The fund is currently at \$10,000. We’re going to wait until the amount gets to \$25,000.
- E. Skyline Parkway Advisory Committee–meeting date: TBA
Chair –Patrick Contardo–[Dale Sellner]
Commissioner Contardo: The group is meeting frequently and currently working with a consultant. This group is a working group, not an enduring committee.

6. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

None given.

7. New Business

- A. Parks Commission Special Meeting
A Parks Commission Special Meeting will be held on April 20, 2016 at 5pm in City Hall Room 303 to review and vote on upcoming mini-master plans including Quarry Park, the Neighborhood Parks, the National Water Trail, and the Chester Chalet Expansion project.
- B. Thank You to Outgoing Commissioners at Term Completion

Parks Manager, Lindsay Dean, recognized Commissioners Holak and Albright for their service and tenure as they have completed their terms. Both were recognized with plaques.

C. Dog Parks

Jim Filby Williams acknowledged the discontinuation of a defacto policy that has been practiced by the City of Duluth regarding the support of our dog parks. It has been noted that while the City would provide in-kind support; the City would not provide cash support for dog parks. While that policy is not unheard of for a park use that is relative new –the time has long passed since the City has needed to recognize dog parks and the people who help to build, and maintain them. Mr. Filby Williams noted that dog parks are a highly valued part of our parks system. Moving forward, capital improvements to support dog parks will be made precisely on the same basis Duluth Parks and Recreation make any other decisions (ie., number of users, etc.) This does not mean a flood of money will suddenly be available toward dog parks but they will not be excluded moving forward. Mr. Filby Williams noted he wanted to make this announcement in a public way and asked for Denette Lynch, a local champion of dog park development to make a comment.

- Ms. Lynch noted the people who use the parks are all ages and represent a broad spectrum of park users. Dog parks in Duluth are heavily used all year round. She noted people come from many nearby towns to use the dog parks and they are relatively low-cost to build and require minimal maintenance. Duluth Dog Parks has over 1000 friends on Facebook. Visit Duluth has a tab for dog parks on their website and the 2016 Visit Duluth brochure specifically mentions that Duluth has two off-leash dog parks. Dog parks have a value to tourism. She thanked Mr. Filby Williams for his statement which legitimizes the efforts of Duluth dog park advocates.

8. Old Business

A. Update on US Steel Negotiation

Jim Filby Williams: No changes since last report

B. Update on St. Louis River Corridor

Lindsay Dean: The Water Front Trail project is being led by Hansi Johnson from the MN Land Trust. There will be a public open house to gather citizen input at Center City West on Tuesday, March 15. The plan is available online for public comment. The plan will likely go to the April Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.

C. Annual Meeting Update

Lindsay Dean: The Parks Commission Annual Meeting will be on Wednesday, April 13, at 5pm held at the Grand Avenue Chalet. Mayor Larson will be speaking and the theme of the meeting is to celebrate the partners that work with Duluth Parks in park development and improvement.

D. Recreation Management Software update

Lindsay Dean: "Rec1" software was selected. The company was selected for a variety of reasons, including its experience working with over 200 municipal parks and recreation departments and its user-friendly interface for both staff and the public. Ms. Dean noted Duluth Parks and Recreation has very unique park permitting and she is confident the selected software will accommodate our needs. The software will also be used for league sign-ups and park and building reservations. The contract will likely go to City Council at the end of March for approval.

E. Parks Commission Meeting Dates and Location

Commission Hall: The Commission will be looking at potentially changing the day of the month they meet to accommodate the desire to meet at City Hall.

9. Division Manager's Report

A. Hartley Park work directed by the Legacy Grant has commenced. Buckthorn removal is underway and the Pine Thinning will start in August or September 2016. An Open House was held last week at the Nature Center with a small group in attendance, most of whom were partners and supporters. Next Open House will be on April 28th, 5:30pm, at the Hartley Nature Center.

10. Liaison Report from Councilor Sipress

Council representative Sipress made the following announcements of Park related items that would be covered at the next City Council meeting:

1. Commission approved Lake Superior Zoo/Fairmount Park Concept Plan will be offered for discussion and vote.
2. LHB will be presenting their findings from the Lakewalk Study in a meeting prior to the Council Meeting at 5:45pm on Monday.
3. Introduction of a resolution for the City to adopt a Pollinator Friendly Policy that will include prohibiting the use of herbicides and chemicals in public parks that contribute to bee die-off and supporting, when possible, the planting of pollinator friendly plants in our parks.

11. Adjournment:

Commissioner Albright made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Contardo, unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 6:39 pm.

12. Next meeting

Wednesday, April 13 at 5:00pm at the Grand Ave Chalet