



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes of September 11, 2019

City Hall – Council Chambers



I. Call Meeting to Order

President Crosby called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: Amanda Crosby, Jill Joyce, Dennis Isernhagen, Jenny Peterson, Erik Torch, Tjaard Breeuwer, Dudley Edmondson, and Britt Rohrbaugh

Not Present: David Demmer, David Kirby (ISD 709 School Board Liaison), Frank Jewell (St. Louis County Board Liaison), Em Westerlund (City Council Liaison)

III. Approval of August 14 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Torch motioned for approval of the August 14 meeting minutes; second by Commissioner Isernhagen. Unanimously approved.

IV. Presentations

A. Lake Superior Zoo Master Plan Revisions (Informational) – Erik Simonson, Chief Executive Officer

Erik Simonson indicated the zoo has turned a corner and closed on the most successful summer since the flood of 2012. Shared they hold a ten-year agreement with the City of Duluth that runs from 2016 to 2026. Discussed changes in staffing structure and operations that reflect a viable business model. Stated they completed a capital campaign to match the City's ½ and ½ funding contribution. Indicated everything they are working on is rehabilitation and maintenance based. Discussed new exhibits coming to the zoo including cougar, black bear, and brown bear. Stated the new brown bear exhibit will be opened in summer 2020. Shared the Lake Superior Zoo has started the initial planning process to pursue an onsite preschool facility out of the existing pavilion building, and confirmed they have hired a preschool director. Stated that by the end of 2020 the entire pathway and exhibits across Kingsbury Creek will be opened. Mentioned replacement or rehabilitation of the main building will be the next planning initiative they will take on. Explained the Zoo is happy to continue discussion on trail connections to the Zoo.

Breeuwer questioned if the preschool plan has been brought to the Duluth City Council. Simonson shared they have not brought this to City Council as they have checked all other required agency approvals. Breeuwer questioned which grant they were going for and who would submit the application. Simonson shared it is state capital investment funding and the City of Duluth would serve as the fiscal agent as the owner of the property.

Torch questioned if funding for the polar shores is complete. Simonson confirmed the polar shores funding is secured.



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Crosby questioned how Simonson envisioned the Parks and Recreation Commission being involved with the zoo moving forward. Jessica Peterson indicated Simonson's presentation tonight is purely informational and staff will work with the zoo on the level of involvement the Parks and Recreation Commission. Confirmed that Section 35 of the Duluth City Code does state the Parks and Recreation Commission should have a role with zoo property changes/development.

Simonson stated the zoo is committed to maintaining their relationship with the City and the Parks and Recreation Commission. Explained that current renovation involves current infrastructure and that in the future if new infrastructure or park expansion is in question, the Parks and Recreation Commission will likely be more involved. Encouraged Commissioners to reach out at any time.

V. Commissioner Committees

- A. Administrative (E-board) – meeting date: Thursday, September 19 at noon at the Parks Office
Chair – Amanda Crosby, Jill Joyce, Tjaard Breeuwer [Jessica Peterson, Alicia Watts, Lisa Luokkala, Jim Filby Williams]

VI. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

VII. New Business

Peterson shared that they are wrapping up interviews for the vacant Recreational Professional seat and hope to have that person on boarded by the October meeting. Stated the District 5 seat has been vacated and reposted.

VIII. Old Business

- A. Chester Park Shared Use Ski Trail Recommendations (Action Requested) –Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator

Andrews thanked Commissioners for their attendance. Indicated the executive summary they received was based on public feedback and serves as a means to clarify a few items. Discussed history of the project and the origination of the request to study shared use at Chester Park. Reflected on the elements of the executive summary and possible options moving forward:

- Limit Nordic skiing in all or major parts of Chester Park
- Building a separate parallel pedestrian trail
- Shared use continues despite pedestrians and skiers inability to coexist

Andrews indicated the MNDNR grant funding currently received for groomed trails at Chester Park and how this could be in jeopardy if ski trails are not groomed and maintained. Stated the recommendation is to build and maintain a separate parallel pedestrian trail. Summarized the public comments received during the two-week comment period. Stated that this project is not a numbers game in which they are trying to pin one user over against the other, nor is it based on user numbers. Confirmed the purpose of the study, as set forth in the master plan, is whether shared use is working



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at Chester Park.

Joyce questioned what stands to be lost or gained with their vote tonight.

Andrews referred back to the three options identified and indicated that continuing with shared use or limiting nordic skiing would likely result in a loss of groomed trails at Chester. Stated that building a parallel trail would provide opportunity for all users.

Crosby stated that in 2014, the Parks and Recreation Commission voted on the Chester Park Plan and that within the plan the three options presented were identified.

Rohrbaugh questioned if the recommendation would include grooming on the parallel pedestrian trail.

Andrews stated COGGS currently has agreements in other locations to groom trails in the winter, however; at this time the City would be unable to provide this a resource on the parallel trail.

Torch stated there are a number of trails in the winter that within a short period become packed down after a few days of use.

Peterson requested a review of the total cost of the parallel trail would be.

Andrews indicated that if volunteer labor or Park Maintenance staff completed much of the work it would cost roughly \$15,000.

Peterson questioned where funding would come from.

Jessica Peterson confirmed the funding would be from the Parks Fund. Confirmed that the cost range for constructing a parallel trail has a broad range, as the labor is unknown.

Isernhagen questioned whether within the City of Duluth there are designated shared use locations.

Andrews confirmed no and indicated he reached out to the MnDNR to confirm there are no other shared ski trails in the state that obtain grant in aid funding from the MN Ski Pass purchases.

Jessica Peterson stated Boulder Lake and Bagley Nature Center allow shared use on their trails, however; they do not receive grant in aid funding from ski passes.

Isernhagen stated that policing trail usage is a large problem and expressed his concern that a parallel trail would be built and pedestrians would continue to utilize the cross-country ski trail.

Crosby questioned what the dates of the MN Ski Pass are.

Edmondson expressed concerns with creating a parallel trail and that it would likely be a waste of



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money if users did not follow it.

Andrews thanked Commissioners for their feedback and clarified that while it is stated as “parallel”; the trail is often not that close to the ski trail.

Rohrbaugh questioned whether the pedestrian trail could be groomed for the first couple years to train users where to go.

Andrews shared that the City of Duluth does not currently have equipment to groom this type of trail.

Edmondson questioned how many miles of ski trail there are in the city and how many would be lost with the elimination of Chester.

Shoberg stated there are 64 kilometers of groomed trail; 3.6km of which are at Chester.

Crosby questioned if the Commission voted on the recommendation tonight whether there would be an additional planning process for implementation.

Jessica Peterson stated that tonight's vote would be on the conceptual trail plan as presented in the executive summary. Indicated the map is a conceptual design and trail alignment based on site visits, but stated slight modifications to the plan could happen once diving further into design and site surveys.

Torch referred to the length of trail, questioned how much mileage or kilometers, and questioned how many miles of hiking and mountain biking exists in Chester.

Shoberg indicated there is roughly 6 miles of combination hiking/biking with Chester Park.

Public Comment

Thom Storm questioned what the current reimbursement per hour is for grooming of cross-country ski trail. Stated that he used to groom the trails and it took him twenty minutes. Indicated that from his experience at Chester Park there has always been issues with pedestrian use on cross-country ski trails. Mentioned he tried separate hours for walkers and skiers. Stated that separate parallel trails will fail, as folks will walk on the groomed trail if an existing groom trail exists.

Lonny Coppin stated she hikes the ski trail nearly every day and she is here to talk about the ecosystem and the importance of giving thanks for what we have. Stated that Duluth has many recreational opportunities but people have become more entitled with time. Indicated that many of the walkers are local neighbors. Expressed positive experience on the trail last winter with shared use. Stated hopes for St. Scholastica ski team to use other parks if they can drive to Chester Park. Stated that even if a parallel trail were built she would continue to use the groomed trail because of her concern for the ecosystem.



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Ryan Jones-Casey stated he lives a couple blocks from Chester Park and walks his dog in the park every day. Indicated he skis the trails twice a week and walks his dog on the ungroomed trails in the winter. Shared walkers and dogs make the ski trails harder to ski. As an avid dog walker and skier at Chester Park, he would welcome new parallel trail that would allow a full loop in Chester Park that would eliminate any degradation to the ski trail.

Annalisa Peterson indicated she grew up skiing in Chester Park and that she appreciates everything that has been said and everyone's hard work. Stated what is different now is a Chester Rim trail that allows a separate trail for pedestrians. Mentioned having a groomed trail for walkers is important but supports City's recommendation.

Amy Crodig indicated she is a board member for Chester Bowl Improvement Club. Recited their mission statement. Discussed their involvement with the Chester Park Mini-Master Plan and the shared-use study and stakeholder consultation.

Dave Schaeffer introduced himself and indicated the Chester Bowl Improvement Club does not have an official position on the shared use. Stated they would support a parallel trail and new bridge crossing should it be passed. Indicated the interim plan is missing and requested a plan. Requested an interim plan, preferably continuing shared use.

Maria Shuber indicated she is the head ski coach from College of St. Scholastica and pointed to student athletes in attendance tonight whom largely live in Chester Park. Stated students are here tonight to express their support of the ski trail remaining as it is important to their ski program and if removed would negatively impact them. Mentioned it allows students to ski without a car as they can walk from campus. Stated that in other places shared use does work if it is signed well. Highlighted the strong support staff recommendations and pledged their support in making it possible.

Matt Ryan indicated he is a neighbor of Chester Park for 18 years and former board member for Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club. Expressed support of parallel trail for pedestrians. Indicated shared use on ski trails is problematic as it deters skiers from using it due to safety and ski ability.

Jennifer Witt indicated they live off the Chester Park Trail and they hike and ski on the trail. Stated that they are confused why the shared use does not work, as they have never experienced negative use. Expressed concern for the land and ecosystem. Stated that the recommendation made by staff indicates a large amount of volunteer time was quoted but what about the cross-country skiers.

Mark Herman stated he is a lifelong skier in Duluth and he supports separating the trail users, as it is a unique site for Nordic ski training. Indicated the site is centrally located in Duluth and close to colleges, with terrain for training that make it unique but also dangerous for shared use.

Jay Gilpin indicated he lives on Hovland Lane, shared disagreement with there being a safety concern at the park. Stated he does not understand why shared use cannot work. Explained he granted the City an easement on his property for the Duluth Traverse and safety issues are just as



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problematic at that location. Asked the St. Scholastica students how often they would actually utilize the trail if it were shared use. Indicated the maintenance cost is high and building an additional trail is a wasteful use of money.

Rohrbaugh questioned the financing of building and maintain additional trail and whether additional grooming on the ski trail is feasible versus building a completely new trail. Jessica Peterson indicated the City of Duluth Park Maintenance Division has seen reductions over the past years that do limit the amount of grooming we can provide on our ski trails throughout the winter season. While our desire would be additional grooming across the city, we are challenged by our budget that requires a range of services across parks in addition to snow removal across the city. Rohrbaugh questioned if we could make Chester a priority. Andrews stated logistical hurdles with mobilizing the equipment is challenging as we move equipment from one location to another, as equipment is not on site.

Torch questioned if the City groomer runs through the nordic trails when they complete the alpine trail.

Andrews stated twice a week based on last years' experience.

Crosby questioned if we have an interim plan for this year.

Andrews stated that if the staff recommendation were to be approved we would continue shared use until that recommendation could be implemented.

Peterson indicated the comments show it is clear how complex the issue is and by keeping things status quo it would be unfortunate to the skiers. Questioned how we would enforce separate trails.

Jessica Peterson confirmed enforcement on trails is challenging and that she continues to look at options where split use across town works because of rules in place. Stated how this is largely social enforcement and less legal. Cited other park locations where separate trails for separate use exists.

Torch summarized the plan and stated that education and clear direction for walkers on the separate trail is important.

Edmondson indicated that it would be great to see the community work together to encourage separate use as part of the interim plan.

Breeuwer addressed the passionate park users and suggested snowshoes.

VOTE: Breeuwer motioned to approve the final staff recommendation for separation of pedestrian and nordic ski trails at Chester Park. Peterson second. **4/4. Motion does not pass.**

Jessica Peterson indicated city staff will reevaluate how to move forward with shared use on this path.



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Torch requested feedback from Commissioners and Staff on what their no vote indicated and asked they share their thinking so staff has assistance with creating a path moving forward.

Isernhagen expressed thanks to Matt Andrews and staff for their hard work. Stated light has been shed on the issue and his goal is to make the parks as multi-use as possible. Indicated he heard Thom Storms comments and expressed concerned for the lack of compliancy with staying on a non-groomed trail. Requested feedback from public and staff on other solutions, and additional study of the issue.

Joyce stated she voted no because she received numerous comments that did not support additional trail. Shared the disagreement between users shows more study and work needs to be done. Noted the existing erosion issue at Chester Park and on additional trail would further complicate this problem. Challenged cross-country ski groups to do the work to make things happen.

Rohrbaugh stated she represents Chester Park and the district. Expressed her reliance on Thom Storm and his experience with the trails and park Discussed the poop fairy campaign and how an idea like this could be incorporated into public education for shared use. Expressed concern to create additional trails at Chester Park. Indicated she does not wish to lose skiing or hiking.

Edmondson expressed agreement with previous Commissioner comments and indicated that the option to coexist is still reasonable and requires additional discussion. Encouraged the ski group to raise money. Suggested widening the trail or having the ski group pay for grooming.

Crosby questioned whether we could continue the study during the upcoming seasons.

Jessica Peterson stated the study was three years in length and was not intended to be so. Explained that if the Commissioners wished to extend the study, she would request further clarification of what they are looking for beyond what was already provided. Stated that if the Commission desires additional engagement with public and stakeholders, it could run separate from a formal study extension. Requested Commissioners share specific requests for additional study.

Edmondson discussed whether it was possible to get the stakeholders back in the room to determine how this shared use trail could work.

Jessica Peterson stated a stakeholder committee was largely involved with the planning process.

Crosby expressed concern with loss of MN Ski Pass grant in aid for this park.

Torch stated that shared use based on the study findings seems obvious shared use does not work. Recommended staff go back and look at what other options are out there.

Crosby requested motion to move the Wester Waterfront Trail Plan above. Torch first. Joyce second. Motion carries.



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B. **Western Waterfront Park and Trail Mini-Master Plan (For Future Action) – Lisa Luukkala, Parks Stewardship Assistant Manager**

Luukkala indicated that the document before them was at nearly 90% completion last year but per Commissioner feedback they addressed three identified questions, which have since been addressed. Indicated the document has aged and will require some reworking. Stated the plan will be posted one week from today for the two-week public comment review period. Highlighted those that participated in the process, including staff, stakeholders, and city councilors. Indicated table of contents is largely the same and sets them up for future Legacy grant funding, which is important for future designation. Explained that she would provide a brief overview of the plan, including the community engagement process and plan development and implementation.

Torch expressed that bias towards indigenous people often comes off as historical versus contemporary people and what they contribute to our community. Indicated the cost is tough to swallow and questioned if the five million dollars is feasible.

Luukkala stated this has been an ongoing conversation and when they reconvened the stakeholder committee last month they had real conversation about a collaborative approach to fundraising. Suggested advocacy as a strategy and they believe it fits well for legacy designation and funding. Confirmed that this will certainly require strategic, unique and creative fundraising approaches.

Filby Williams stated that this project links together river neighborhoods and is important and extraordinarily historically, socially and ecologically. Explained there is a unique opportunity to collectively advocate for larger pots of money that we have not attempted to get in the past.

Edmondson questioned segment four and how a major change of direction suddenly happened. Filby Williams stated that interpretation of how the City has worked to balance wants of everyone is difficult. Indicated if natural resource professionals were here they would state ecological restoration possibilities with the causeway removed are better than restoration possibilities if the causeway remains. Shared other stakeholders often cited marginally small difference in restoration possibility is acceptable trade off to preserve the historic railway. Mentioned there is a cost to health of the river but they are comfortable with the tradeoff. Assured that regardless, care of the river health is of high importance.

Dave Moore stated affiliation with LSMR rail line and expressed confusion with why the rail line falls under parks. Indicated after consideration, he realized they do fall under recreation. Expressed support for the City of Duluth's rail and trail proposal as stated in the Western Waterfront Trail Park and Trail Mini-Master Plan. Expressed their organizations commitment to working with the City to make this happen and find creative approaches to find synergy with the rail and the train.

Isernhagen expressed appreciation for comments made by LSMR representatives. Stated he has been fascinated by how the rail and trail is a unique opportunity for Parks and Recreation and for the City of Duluth. Indicated this would be extremely marketable as an option to go from one end of town to the other; choosing when and at what point to walk, bike, kayak or train.



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- C. **Campus Connector Trail Mini-Master Plan (Action Requested)** – Jim Shoberg, Senior Parks Planner - - removed from September 11, 2019 agenda by motion. Will resume at October 9, 2019 Parks Commission Meeting.

XIII. Division Report

Public Comment

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

XIV. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, October 9, 2019 in City Hall Room 330.