



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes May 10, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Council Chambers



I. Call Meeting to Order

President Crosby called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: Amanda Crosby, David Demmer, Kala Pedersen, Tjaard Breeuwer, Sarah Beehler, Terrance Lovejoy, Hailey Sigafus, Dave Cizmas, Josie LaPorte

Not Present: Noah Hobbs – City Council Liaison, Annie Harala – St. Louis County Commissioner, Kelly Durick Eder – ISD 709 School Board Liaison

III. Approval of the April 19 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Pedersen motioned to approve the April 19 meeting minutes. Commissioner Demmer second. Unanimously approved. Motion carries.

IV. Presentations

A. Incline Steps (Informational) Doug Stevens, Friends of the Incline Steps

Commissioner Lovejoy questioned what the exact location of the steps. Stevens stated that it goes even above Skyline, up to 9th St past the old weather station. Stated there is some concrete that was either a power house or pavilion at the top of the steps. Stated it goes down to Mesaba Ave by Duluth Bethel.

Commissioner Demmer questioned if the steps are a trail. Stevens stated that it has been a trail for some time but has not been declared. Manager Peterson stated that the steps are on the Parks Outdoor Recreation map marked as a recreational trail corridor.

Commissioner Demmer questioned if there are easements over the two private parcels along the steps. Stevens stated that there are easements signed by the two property owners to allow users to climb the steps and 4 feet on each side.

Commissioner Demmer questioned when they would pursue historical designation for the steps. Stevens stated he does not know if they will pursue that. Stated it would not work to get them on the national register of historic structures due to removal and replacement of some of the steps. Stated it is likely better to leave it as a recreational hiking trail.

Commissioner Demmer questioned what happens as the steps continue to deteriorate and need work. Stevens stated they are in terrific condition for being 132 years old and not looked after. Stated that aggregated concrete made them much stronger. Stated that neighbors will work to keep them maintained if needed.

B. Trails Update (Informational) Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator

Commissioner Demmer questioned what the policy is on sponsorships for trails or trail segments. Andrews stated that one issue could be that sponsor groups may not exist later on while sponsorship signs remain. Stated that sponsorships and signs could have a limited term or project. Manager Peterson stated that across the park system there is already sponsorships, most specifically and frequently in athletic facilities. Stated that user groups have agreements that include terms of use, maintenance, as well as fundraising. Stated that groups interested in sponsoring would need to go through a process. Stated that the term "sponsor" is loosely applied and that is why the structure of the process is important. Stated that it takes



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long-term maintenance and administration to make the sponsorship work. Andrews stated that there is a difference between a trail and an infrastructure sponsorship, as there are different expectations that come with those.

C. Hillside Sport Court Park Improvements (Informational) Katie Bennett, Parks Project Coordinator

Commissioner Breeuwer questioned what group is proposing the community garden and if they are proposing funding as well. Bennett stated that the group is Health Equity Northland, and that part of the project proposal process includes a funding question. Stated that this group is looking to understand what is and is not possible at this site before they kick off a fundraising effort for their process.

Commissioner LaPorte questioned if implementing the community garden project would close the park and for how long. Bennett stated that the portion of the park where the garden would go would be closed. Stated that the entire park may not be closed, just limited access in certain parts.

Commissioner Beehler questioned how the decision will be made on the project proposal. Bennett stated that the conversation will begin at the community input session. Stated that there are other factors to consider as well. Manager Peterson stated that community engagement happens first then is weighed against other factors. Stated that a recommendation will be made to PRC in a plan, which pending approval will then proceed to Council.

Commissioner Beehler questioned how the community engagement will be structured. Bennett stated that the intention is to show a variety of possible options and hear ideas from the community as well. Stated that visual aids will be provided as well to consider different choices.

Commissioner Beehler questioned if there is already a garden space in that neighborhood. Bennett stated that there is one nearby, run by the same group, which has outgrown that space and wants to expand.

Commissioner Beehler questioned if the space sees a lot of use. Bennett stated that currently it is not programmed heavily. Stated it is mostly a neighbor-used space. Stated that there will be some MTB programming there this summer.

Commissioner Beehler questioned how the funding priorities will be determined. Bennett stated that community priorities are considered, as well as grant funding requirements. Stated that there are a lot of factors that goes into what can happen in the space.

Commissioner Demmer questioned if creating a crossing of 6th Avenue East to connect from Myers Wilkins has been considered. Manager Peterson stated that this conversation has not been included in this planning process, but could be a conversation for Planning and Engineering. President Crosby stated that there is an upcoming event on the topic of safety of 6th Avenue East.

Commissioner Lovejoy questioned if there are already park concept plans for this space. Manager Peterson stated that this project will have a page in the Planning Library on the parks website, where the proposed ideas will be posted.

Commissioner Sigafus questioned what the conditions are for the locked garden space in the garden proposal and how the community reacts to the current garden space. Manager Peterson stated that this is simply a proposal which has not been approved yet, and all elements of the proposal will be considered by the public and City staff, including the locked gate. Stated that in other parts of the park system, there are times where a locked gate makes sense, and other times when it doesn't.



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Commissioner Sigafus questioned what the space at the top of the diagram is. Bennett stated that it is a stage. Questioned what the worship space is. Bennett stated that the proposal is for a labyrinth of hedges.

Commissioner Cizmas questioned what the lifespan is of playground equipment. Manager Peterson stated that Park Maintenance has certified playground safety inspectors on staff. Stated that they monitor about 40 playgrounds annually for safety and conditions assessments. Stated that the typical lifespan is 15-20 years industry standard, but Duluth pushes those limits. Stated that if we replace less than one playground per year, it would take over 40 years to replace all playgrounds. Stated that for this playground, the fall zone has to be replaced to fulfill ADA standards. Stated that the preference is to replace the entire playground as well.

Commissioner Cizmas questioned if the proposing organization would need to have a maintenance contract and what would happen if the organization dissolves mid-contract. Manager Peterson stated that all improvements on City property revert to City ownership. Stated that agreements are set up for maintenance and upkeep for improvements across the park system. Stated that if a third-party dissolves, the City is left with the assets and must determine what to do from there. Stated the City could find an alternative third party to take over maintenance, the City could take over maintenance, or the City could remove the asset. Stated that in this case, there is a community garden program that is well-established, highly effective, and that we have a good relationship with.

Commissioner Breeuwer questioned if the mini-master plan will include final designs for specific park features. Bennett stated that the recommended plan will be more of a conceptual design that guides the improvements to the park space.

V. Commissioner Committees

Administrative (E-Board) meeting date: Tuesday, June 6 at 4:00pm, Parks Conference Room
Amanda Crosby, David Demmer, Kala Pedersen [Jessica Peterson, Bridget Erickson]

VI. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

VII. New Business

A. Park and Trail Co-Naming (Discussion) Jessica Peterson, Parks and Recreation Manager and Cliff Knettel, Senior Parks Planner

Manager Peterson introduced the topic of determining an Indigenous co-name for a park, specifically for Lincoln Park. Stated that there is a lack of clarity in order of operations for roles and responsibilities of the Parks Commission, Indigenous Commission, Administration, and City Council in this process. Stated that we have committed to an Ojibwe co-name for Lincoln Park. Stated that in the signage package, there is a space left for an Indigenous co-name on the standard sign template. Asked Commissioners what they think is the right approach in this process. Stated that she and Knettel will be attending Indigenous Commission next week to continue the conversation there.

Commissioner Demmer stated that the Parks and Recreation Commission bylaws are clear that the Parks Commission names the parks. Stated that he thinks the Indigenous Commission should make a recommendation to the Commission for final approval. Stated that the Parks Commission should not waive any authority in naming decisions.

President Crosby stated that Parks staff should go to Indigenous Commission for a suggestion or recommendation, which would then come to Parks Commission for a vote on that recommendation, then



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go on to Council from there.

Commissioner Cizmas stated that it has taken a long time to receive a recommendation for a name for previous projects. Stated that the Indigenous Commission should not be pressured, but that it would be nice to have a more concrete process. Stated the recommendation should come from Indigenous Commission.

President Crosby questioned what the timeline is for the signage for Lincoln Park. Knettel stated that the signs have been ordered, but there is a placeholder for co-naming language. Stated that there is no rush, as the signs can be installed and a co-name added at a later time. Stated that the signs are scheduled to be installed this fall.

President Crosby questioned if they have gone to Indigenous Commission yet. Manager Peterson stated that they will be going to Indigenous Commission next week. Stated the conversation started with Parks Commission.

President Crosby questioned if they would go to consultants or other groups before bringing a recommendation back to Parks Commission. Peterson stated that in the past, there have been conversations with both the Indigenous Commission and Fond du Lac Band. Stated that the question has already been posed and the decision has been made on pursuing a co-name working together. Stated that the Fond du Lac Band and the Indigenous Commission are two separate entities that have important input on topics of Indigenous culture, language, history, etc. Stated it is important to include both, but that a process has to have an order as well as inclusion.

Commissioner Breeuwer asked about creating a task force. Peterson stated that there is a City policy, Commemorative Naming Task Force Policy, which should fit into the process. Stated that City administration comes into the process here, as well as a public comment period.

Commissioner Breeuwer stated that according to the bylaws, Parks Commission approves park names, usually included in a mini-master plan. Stated that the Indigenous Commission is an appropriate body to recommend a name to us in this case, and in other cases other groups may be the right group to recommend a name. Peterson stated that there is a backlog of parks that could be co-named which will need a process in the absence of a mini-master plan, which would already have happened.

Commissioner Demmer questioned if there was a name included in a mini-master plan would it still go to the Naming Task Force. Peterson stated that there are feedback loops built into processes to allow for smooth steps toward approval. Stated the Parks Commission makes recommendations, which always go to Council for approval before taking effect.

Commissioner Demmer stated the proposed order of operations is that staff brings plan or proposal for co-name to Indigenous Commission for a recommendation to bring back to Parks Commission, which then goes to the Commemorative Naming Task Force, and then to Council.

Peterson stated that the above process includes Parks staff going to a different Commission before the Parks Commission, which is important to consider.

Commissioner Lovejoy questioned if the Fond du Lac Band has given input on what this process should be. Knettel stated that he has learned much of how they would like to work with Parks staff. Acknowledged that there has not been a set process for naming. Stated that part of the plan is to do an interpretive plan for the park, which includes Indigenous history. Stated that the Fond du Lac Band is interested in



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collaborating on projects like this going forward to recognize and showcase history.

Commissioner Lovejoy questioned how other communities handle this, and if this has been investigated to determine a process. Peterson stated that the first step was to familiarize ourselves with the history of our own community. Stated that Bemidji could be a good example to learn from on this topic.

President Crosby questioned if a report would be made in the June meeting from the results of the Indigenous Commission meeting. Peterson stated that the timeline is uncertain at this point, as this topic is not to be taken lightly or rushed.

Commissioner LaPorte stated that the Indigenous community does not always move in a linear way, and as they are the experts in this process, we need to defer to them for a timeline.

President Crosby questioned if this would be setting the tone for the process moving forward. Peterson stated that the goal is to guide future efforts and set a process in place.

Beehler questioned if the Parks Commission will need to modify any of its processes or codify a process at any point. Peterson stated that the answer is unknown at this point.

VIII. Old Business

IX. Division Report

Commissioner Demmer questioned which infrastructure was damaged by flooding and if it will be replaced by user groups or if it falls under City responsibility. Peterson stated that they have been submitted for emergency declaration funding.

X. Public Comment

XI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:54 pm.

XII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 14 at 5:00 p.m., Council Chambers.