



# PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

## Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



### I. Call Meeting to Order

President Crosby called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

### II. Roll Call

Present: Amanda Crosby, David Demmer, Natalie Chin, Kala Pedersen, Barb Darland, Tjaard Breeuwer, Jenny Peterson, Sarah Beehler, Britt Rohrbaugh

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

### III. Approval of the October 12 Meeting Minutes

**Commissioner Breeuwer motioned for approval of the October 12 meeting minutes; second by Commissioner Pedersen. Unanimously approved.**

### IV. Presentations

A. Chester Bowl Improvement Club (Informational) Dave Schaeffer, Executive Director

Darland questioned if the chalet is structurally sound. Schaeffer stated that it is structurally sound; the foundation will be maintained.

Crosby questioned how they get equipment. Schaeffer stated that they purchase most of their equipment. Occasionally they get donations but not all items can be donated and used.

### V. Commissioner Committees

Administrative (E-Board) meeting date: Tentative Thursday, February 2 at noon, Parks Conference Room  
Amanda Crosby, David Demmer, Natalie Chin [Jessica Peterson, Bridget Erickson]

### VI. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

### VII. New Business

A. Discontinuation of Public Golf Committee (Action Requested) – Jessica Peterson, Manager

Manager Peterson provided an overview of the accomplishments of the Public Golf Committee and explained the decline in participation and attendance by members and the public. Decline in participation was mentioned as a main reason for changing the way that City staff engage with this user group. Requested a motion to discontinue the Public Golf Committee. Explained that the ask was not to take a motion on the informational document describing an outline for future communications with golfers to take place in a flexible meeting structure including meeting at Enger Park Golf Course.

Commissioner Peterson stated that she is concerned about discontinuing the committee. Shared that she agrees a new approach is needed but the proposed change is a step backwards. Stated that having a committee that meets regularly and understands the project would provide better feedback. Stated that the implementation of the renovation plan would benefit from the committee's input. Applauded committee for doing great work. Stated that there is a deep lack of trust among the golf community and City and that there has to be a concentrated effort to build back that trust. Referenced plan approved proposal approved by Council that included a commitment to have a permanent golf advisory board. Stated that to discontinue the committee would be breaking this commitment. Described committee structure in which only Commissioner members could vote, citizen members were not voting members. Questioned if the Commission has the authority to disband a permanent golf advisory committee that was part of a City Council approved plan...or do we need to have Council involved?



## PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

### Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



Manager Peterson stated that after consulting with the attorney's office, the Parks Commission has the authority to disband a subcommittee of the Parks and Recreation Commission, which the Public Golf Committee is.

Director Jim Filby Williams stated that the 2018 resolution was a resolution of intent, non-binding, was not intended to forever bind staff and councilors to it. Ordinances are binding. Shared examples of resolutions of intent that serve as a broad framework to follow and adjust as necessary when implementing.

President Crosby thanked and acknowledged members of the Public Golf Committee. Expressed not being bound by Roberts Rules and Open Meeting Law will provide more open dialog and not require voting rights amongst members. Stated that discontinuing the structure of the committee would allow golfers to participate without the formality of not being voting members.

Commissioner Pedersen questioned if the Public Golf Committee could be reinstated if it was needed?

Manager Peterson shared past experience with other user groups, key decision points, large projects, etc. have different levels and quantities of communication. Referenced relationship and communications with the Duluth Cross Country ski club, commitment to the Grand Avenue Nordic Center by the club via fundraising, support, promotion, use, etc. Explained that the communication is based on positive relationship and willingness to work together. Stated that change from Public Golf Committee to a different format with golfers would be different if there was an active friends group to help facilitate communication and could be valuable to the productivity of our relationship. At this time, communication could start with the leadership of the leagues because it is evident that they are invested in the course and have communication with league members.

Commissioner Darland shared that she was inspired by the Chester presentation and the collaboration and communication with that program and others. Stated that having more of a partnership between the City and the golf community would be beneficial. Stated that there is not a user group mentality in the golf community. Stated that having another user group help the golf community form more of a user group relationship with the City could be a possible option. Suggested that a non-City person could help with conversations. Agreed that the current structure needs to be revised and thought through. Stated that she does not know if anyone will show up to more informal meetings either. Stated that there is a lack of communication. Unsure whether more or less structure is helpful.

Commissioner Breeuwer stated that he is also concerned about the 2018 resolution that committed to a permanent advisory board and agrees the committee is not fulfilling its function. Expressed he felt that in hindsight the original language was too vague. Stated that this group was to provide ideas for golf as users of the space. Stated that a scheduled committee benefit is that Commission can see what was discussed, in an informal meeting there is not a way to track the conversation and formal process. Hard to know if ideas brought by user groups are received by the City and make sure useful input is not left aside.

Manager Peterson stated that the current structure lacks transparency because of the lack of quorum experienced and that Commission has on their agenda a request to approve a series of meeting minutes. The problem with the structure of the committee requiring quorum to conduct business meant that when there isn't quorum, and there wasn't at two of four meetings in 2022, it meant the lag between meetings delayed the sharing of that information. In December, the committee approved minutes from the Spring. Peterson expressed that was a concern and stated that timely information is important to the community and we could not deliver on that because of the structure of the committee. Peterson stated that many mini-master plans have been approved and amended, have not required a sub-committee to do so, and



## PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

### Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



staff have still brought forward input from user groups and changes to be shared with the Commission over time. The change in communication structure with this group is to make it more similar to the ways that staff reach out to dozens of other user groups in the park system.

Commissioner Peterson stated that a lack of quorum was an issue due to the flawed structure of the committee.

President Crosby stated that she and Commissioner Demmer were the quorum; if one of them could not attend, quorum was not met.

Commissioner Beehler questioned if it is possible to both continue the standing committee and also cultivate a friends group.

Manager Peterson stated that the goal of the subcommittee was to get feedback from the golf community. Stated that members of the committee also had varied attendance, as well as voting members. Would like to communicate with a larger group and that the subcommittee is not an effective avenue to convey information to golfers. Stated we did great work, had great engagement. Stated that a subcommittee is not necessary because public comment and information is available here at Commission.

Commissioner Beehler asked if there can still be a user group if there isn't a subcommittee?

Manager Peterson stated absolutely, we would love to have a high functioning user group we could engage with in similar fashion to other user groups. We do not need a subcommittee to make that possible. Stated City has engaged with dozens of user groups in the past few years on important work in the park system.

Commissioner Beehler asked about an advisory board separate from or in addition to the committee?

Commissioner Demmer stated that the language used in the resolution was to create a permanent advisory group. Stated there needs to be some sort of group that is guided by the City.

Commissioner Breeuwer stated that the Public Golf Committee was formed as a response to the resolution.

Director Filby Williams stated to treat this as a decision for how we allot a limited pool of resources, including staff time. Stated dedicated City staff resources have shrunk in past two decades. Stated that the staff time for Public Golf Committee is almost as much and sometimes more than for the Commission. Stated that the budgetary impact is much greater for golf than for other recreation activities and groups. Stated it is a disproportionate investment that threatens ability to attract and retain good staff. Stated it is impossible to substantiate the claim that golf is unique enough to warrant this disproportionate allotment of resources. Shared lack of uniqueness in state of deferred maintenance, cost to participate, financial barriers, number of participants. Stated that the reason a subcommittee was considered was that golfers demanded it. Yes we would like to provide more engagement with them as we would with all groups. How do we realize these ideals with a tiny pool of staff resources? It is not sustainable to allocate this amount of time and it is unnecessary based on the effectiveness of the engagement level. Stated that the public golf program has turned around significantly due to leadership supporting the program. Before there were two courses in poor condition with no chance of improvement, and now we are moving a reinvestment in Enger Park Golf Course forward thanks to Mayoral allocation of \$1.5 million to support this work. It is a signal of how badly we wish to save this program. Stated staff are highly professional and dedicated, and the constant suggestion that they have failed to earn the trust of golfers is offensive.



## PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

### Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



Commissioner Chin stated that discontinuing the Public Golf Committee would not have been asked if it was not necessary. Stated that it is unsustainable for staff. Stated that she trusts Manager Peterson.

Commissioner Demmer stated he wants to address the trust and integrity piece that was brought up. Stated people aren't questioning anyone's trust or integrity, it's about the institution of the City. Stated another aspect that plays into the trust is that the Director of the department is stating golfers approached this with a sense of entitlement. Stated did not join this conversation because of entitlement for two courses but because a user group was losing access to a sport they love. Stated it is a problem that is the sentiment heard in meetings by the City. Stated it is a problem that staff takes it personally when integrity and trust questions come up. Stated he agrees especially with Commissioner Peterson. Stated disallowing a vote by a citizen member of the committee was a hard thing to do. Stated that the subcommittee was designed to fail. Stated he advocated for a less formal plan and committee. Stated the committee is not working with lack of public engagement. Stated that discontinuing this committee in its current form is the right next step to engage golfers. Questioned how to still engage golfers. Stated implementation is an important time for engagement. Stated does agree with aspect of dissolving committee. Stated the hard part is we have to trust that communication will work and that golfers will show up. Stated not sure if voting for or against this will help that. Stated agrees that the committee should be dissolved with its current bylaws but does not know what the next best step should be.

Director Filby Williams apologized for his statement about entitlement. Stated that in random phone surveys average subsidy levels for golf differed between golfers and general public, with golfers stating a 10 fold greater level of subsidy than the general public responded.

Commissioner Rohrbaugh shared her experience with horseback riding in the City, working with the Duluth Area Horse Trail Alliance to organize and communicate with the City. Built personal connections. Advocated for horse trails, making connections with City staff. Stated did not ask for and were not offered a subcommittee but now there are horse trails. State they were effective in their strategy. Stated feels that golf has taken a disproportionate amount of time from Commission. Stated she will not renew for another term because she is done with golf. Stated that golfers have to organize and build relationships and talk to the City. Stated subcommittee seemed great at the time, it's not working, and time to trust the City to keep engaging and golfers need to be involved. Stated that DAHTA invited staff to their meetings and outings. Stated did lots of educating, meetings, and now great relationship between DAHTA and City with two-way communication. Stated DAHTA individuals may be willing to speak with golfers for how to organize and work with City.

President Crosby stated that she has been on the Commission for 10 years and wonders if the golf community knows how much time the Commission has spent talking about and advocating for golf. Stated that she sees the Commission as a part of the City entity and as liaisons between the City and the community. Stated she was proud to work with the individuals on the Committee but the Committee is not working.

**President Crosby motioned to discontinue the Public Golf Committee. Commissioner Rohrbaugh second.**

**Commissioner Peterson offered an amendment to the motion and proposed that this group consider another way and respect what was stated in the 2018 proposal approved by City Council to find a way for a permanent golf advisory board that would provide continuity in decisions that were made regarding public golf. Stated does not know what that would look like but some kind of group that could provide continuity.**

Demmer stated he was considering seconding the amendment and asked Commissioner Peterson if the



## PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

### Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



proposed two meetings would be sufficient as a permanent advisory board. Commissioner Peterson stated that it would be if there was continuity in membership in this group. Demmer questioned if there would be continuity in representation from the leagues at these meetings.

Manager Peterson stated that she cannot make anyone attend meetings, but can extend invitations. Stated that she cautions making a motion to approve a permanent structure without input from the golf community members. Stated recognition that the decision is being made for a group that is not represented in the room at this time. Requested that she has the opportunity to hold a meeting with golfers to determine what kind of meeting structure would work for them. Stated to date that no members of the public have spoken at a public meeting on this topic. Stated that making the structure permanent now would be doing so in the absence of golfer engagement.

Breeuwer stated that he agrees with the intention to uphold the resolution. Stated that it poses a problem to volunteer other people to show up to meetings in perpetuity. Stated that forming a permanent structure now would create the same problems as the Committee. Stated does not think he can support the amendment.

Commissioner Peterson stated that league representatives at meetings would represent continuity.

Darland stated that it is important to give Manager Peterson the latitude she needs to try to begin communication with golfers. Stated that having a neutral party in the room could be a good idea. Stated she wonders why the City does not sell the golf courses. Stated that golf courses require a lot of staff to maintain and cannot compare to other park assets. Stated the City should consider a possible sale, support trails, and forget about golfers. Stated each side will not change each other's minds about golf and entitlement. Stated someone else could take the course and make it better. Stated this is a lose-lose. Stated she would join the proposed meeting as an advocate if that would help.

Manager Peterson requested a restatement of the amendment. Stated the Commission would first motion on accepting the amendment to the original motion.

**Commissioner Peterson stated the amendment is to disband the committee as it's structured and create an advisory board that can provide consistent input to decisions that are being made regarding public golf and honors the 2018 commitment for a permanent golf advisory committee intended by the City Council.**

Director Filby Williams stated that golf is a highly valued essential way in fulfillment of our mission, we need to chart a course to provide a quality experience on a financially sustainable basis. The only way to do that is to close Lester and consolidate at Enger, which is a strategic progression. Stated does not want to suggest that all golfers are of the opinion that this process has been unproductive.

Manager Peterson stated the spirit of the amendment aligns with the final statement of the 2019 document that references input of golfers and that the motion directs our engagement rather than seeks input from golfers for engagement and consultation. Stated the motion misses the consultation step with golfers and looking for flexibility to regain that. Stated next step is for Commission to make a motion on the amendment before voting on the original motion.

#### **2-7 roll call vote:**

**Rohrbaugh nay**

**Peterson yea**

**Pedersen nay**

**Darland nay**



**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023  
Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330



Breeuwer nay  
Beehler nay  
Chin nay  
Demmer yea  
Crosby nay

**Motion to amend fails.**

Commissioner Beehler questioned if there could be periodic updates on how the communication is going with golfers. Manager Peterson stated that the Division Report is the primary means of updates. Stated that she is always open to phone calls, emails, etc.

**Motion to discontinue the Public Golf Committee. 7-2 roll call vote:**

Rohrbaugh yea  
Peterson nay  
Pedersen yea  
Darland yea  
Breeuwer yea  
Beehler yea  
Chin yea  
Demmer nay  
Crosby yea

**Motion carries.**

B. Approval of December 6 Public Golf Committee Meeting Minutes (Action Requested)

**Commissioner Demmer motioned for approval of the December 6 Public Golf Committee meeting minutes; second by Commissioner Darland. Unanimously approved.**

C. E-Board Election Discussion and Commissioner Term Review (For Future Action) Jessica Peterson, Manager

**Commissioner Breeuwer motioned to continue the current E-Board member appointments through the next meeting. Commissioner Beehler second. Unanimously approved.**

D. 2023 Commission Schedule (Action Requested) Jessica Peterson, Manager

**Commissioner Peterson motioned to approve the 2023 Commission schedule. Commissioner Pedersen second. Unanimously approved.**

**VIII. Old Business**

**IX. Division Report**

Jim Filby Williams stated that the city intends to invest a limited portion of tourism taxes into renewal, replacement, and improvement of the city's park-based athletic facilities. Stated that the city will ask legislature to renew the existing half and half tax now directed toward the St. Louis River Corridor to be directed toward athletics. Stated that if approved, the tax would be renewed July 1, 2024, after which the City would use that funding for a variety of capital improvements to athletics infrastructure. Stated that a



**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023**  
**Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330**



2023 community planning process will determine where to invest funding. Stated that a new resolution will be brought to Council dedicated exclusively to the renewal of this tax for this purpose. Stated that the hope is that senate and house tax committees will take up legislation as early as February. Stated that one of the anticipated investments is possible replacement of Enger clubhouse.

Breeuwer questioned whether Enger Golf is eligible for tourism tax. Jim Filby Williams stated that this proposal does not subsidize the status quo but raises the quality of the facility in order to support the current tournaments as well as growing golf tourism in Duluth.

**X. Public Comment**

**XI. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 7:31 pm.

**XII. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be Wednesday, February 8 at 5:00 p.m., Council Chambers.

**ATTACHMENT: COMMISSIONER PETERSON SUBMITTED COMMENTS**

## **February 8, 2023 Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting**

Motion by Commissioner Peterson to amend the minutes of the January 11, 2023 meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission, VII, New Business, item A. Discontinuation of Public Golf Committee to include the following:

*Commissioner Peterson cited two major reasons for her opposition to the motion to discontinue the Public Golf Committee: 1) While the \$5-6 million renovation plan is underway at Enger, a consistent, well-informed committee will provide more effective guidance than periodic meetings with anyone who randomly shows up. 2) There continues to be a deep lack of distrust between the city and the golf community. Disbanding the golf committee breaks a commitment to the golf community made in the 2018 council-approved resolution to establish a "permanent golf advisory committee"; discontinuing the golf committee will further erode trust. Peterson noted that the Committee's current structure which allows only the two Commissioners to make motions and vote has not allowed golfers to be full-pledged members of the committee. Peterson proposed that the public golf committee be restructured, or a consistent advisory board be created, that would allow golfers to fully participate in guiding the future of public golf in Duluth.*