

MINUTES
WEST ST. PAUL PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
September 12, 2017

- Park & Rec. Members Present:** Bonnie Bellows, Jay DeLaRosby, Dave Lynch, Rachel McNamara, Mike Petrasek
- Non-voting Members Present:** Sharon G. Hatfield, Parks and Public Works Secretary; Dave Schletty, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director; Ryan Schroeder, City Manager
- Guest Presenters:** Bob Slipka and Ryan Ruttger, WSB Associates
- Guest:** Kari Denissen Cunnien, Kelly Bilig, Hilda O’Hanley, Jaci Kuta, Kevin Kuta, Karl Norm, Christina Sanchez, Scott Schwister, Mark Schroeder, Bruce Withrow

1. **REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES**

Chair Petrasek Called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. The August 8, 2017 minutes were approved.

2. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **Marthaler Master Plan Update**

Bob Slipka of WSB gave a brief summary of the public open house in which residents commented on the park reconstruction. Residents marked the park features that they thought were good with green stickers and marked the features that they did not want with red stickers. A few residents left hand-written commentary and answered questionnaires. Some of the comments included: buckthorn removal, a berm for the sledding hill, a paddle bar for the tennis court, security in the park, art work and trail maintenance.

Slipka also provided committee members a worksheet with the estimated costs of the reconstruction/park features. The estimated cost for the reconstruction is 2.3–2.7 million dollars. There are some hidden costs for WSB consultation and electrical work. (Xcel may charge up to twenty-eight thousand dollars for electrical installation.) The current budget for the project (Phase I) is 1.5 million dollars. Dakota County has indicated their interest in assisting to fund the construction of the regional trail (\$330,000- 380,000) and the trailhead facility/restroom (\$500,000.)

Member Lynch asked if residents gave a reason for wanting the amphitheater. Slipway replied, “No.” Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Schletty said that the more optimal location for an amphitheater would be the golf course area. An amphitheater would not be a good fit in Marthaler Park.

Residents commented on the Marthaler plan/budget. John Wadell from 45 W Kraft has a concern about how the new parking lot will abut to his property. He wondered if there were any other design plans for the parking. Slipka said that there were originally three different designs for the park; the committee did explore different configurations. The plan before the committee [today] was deemed the most

desirable. The parking lot in the present plan falls forty feet from the resident's property line. Slipka said [to mitigate impact on nearby residents] minimal security lighting will be installed in the parking lot. Patrol cars will be able to see the parking lot with only two light fixtures. The light fixtures will not reflect light [outward.] One of the reasons behind the parking lot's size is because of the requirements/necessity of the rain garden filtering system. The parking lot is "wet."

Schletty said that city staff can "look at" lighting the parking lot at the south end away from residents' properties and "losing two parking stalls" and having "pull-in parking."

Hilda O'Hanley asked about the purpose of the northern parking lot and why the parking lot next to the pond could not be kept. A committee member replied that the city would like to avoid on street parking on the weekends which would cause dangerous situations for the coming bike trail. Member Bellows remarked that there will be more visitors to the park once the Regional Trail is established. The city is not allowed to use the parking lot at Garlough School. Slipka said the southern parking lot cannot be enlarged because of stormwater requirements and the direction of the traffic loop around the park. O'Hanley did an informal survey of the shelter renters; they said that they did not want the elimination of both of the current shelters. O'Hanley remarked that a lot of people are content with the way the park is [now.] Schletty said that because of the closeness of both shelters, rental parties [virtually share the same space when they rent.] The city would like to give renters a better experience and more privacy with the new construction plan with one large rentable shelter.

Petrasek addressed the residents at the meeting and said that the committee is an advisory committee; any recommendation the committee makes will go before Council. The recommendation from the committee will probably be presented at the [October 9] meeting.

Lynch asked if the improvements to the sledding hill could be done soon. Schletty said that the work is budgeted to be done in 2018. (There is no plan currently to build the River to River Trail through Garlough Park.)

Slipka reviewed the priorities with committee. O'Hanley asked why the playground needs to be replaced. Schletty replied that the current playground equipment does not meet safety requirement and is 32 years old. It also does not meet ADA accessibility.

Lynch commented that the vista from the sledding hill should be improved. Slipka said that many volunteer trees can be taken out to improve the view. Bellows and member McNamara said that the fishing pier is low priority. McNamara remarked that to save money, the city could do the pond in a "light" way. The sledding hill landscaping could also be done minimally. Bellows said that the playground area is high priority. Member DeLaRosby asked about the Wentworth street improvements scheduled for next year. Slipka said that the street improvements could be coordinated with the park improvements, (i.e. curb cuts and the parking lot.)

Petrasek asked if the committee had a motion to make regarding the priorities. Bellows was reluctant to put forward a recommendation. (Petrasek remarked that the budgeting is like “a moving target” with the possible funding from Dakota County.) The committee talked about tabling the discussion. Slipka said that it would be more ideal to have the priorities recommendation before Council in October to meet the optimal bidding window, but he does not want to “push: the committee. If a recommendation is not made, Slipka will work with Schletty to for “the next steps” and to prepare for winter and to establish a base from which to go forward. A survey of the park needs to be done this fall. Slipka said that the committee could meet again on an amended date if they needed more time. (He did say everything will slide a month if the discussion were delayed.)

Petrasek said that the target for the committee is \$1.5 million. Petrask said that he would entertain a motion to table the discussion or to recommend priorities.

A motion was made to table the priorities discussion. The motion failed.

Lynch said that the committee could move priorities two and three, ten through thirteen, \$1.3 million. (Slipka said that once construction of the new trail/trail head begins the playground will be torn down.)

A motion was made to put forth priorities two, three, four, five and twelve..

- **Discussion followed the motion. Slipka looked at the priorities and said that the motion did not have a parking lot at the south end of the park. (It would need to include priority eight.)**
 - **The motion was amended to include priority 8. Slipka commented that priority one was necessary for the other priorities to be possible.**
 - **McNamara said this recommendation is made with the assumption of funding coming from Dakota County.**
 - **DeLaRosby clarified that the other amenities would stay ‘as is’ and could be added at a later time.**
 - **Schetty clarified that “what is on paper” is not necessarily what will happen in actuality. The committee is moving forward with a preliminary plan.**

The motion carried.

b. Kennedy Park- Remote Control Truck Track

Schletty made an introduction to the discussion. A resident [Dave Lynch] who happens to be a member of the Parks and Recreation Committee has a proposal to build a remote control (RC) truck track in a city park. The first location explored

was a vacant lot at Smith and Dodd. High traffic and [future development] of this lot was deemed “not good” for the track. Schletty looked for some open, low-use green space options and suggested Kennedy Park to Lynch.

Lynch said that Kennedy Park has large flat area where the grass is shortly mowed; the area is flooded in the winter for an ice rink. The ice rink at Kennedy Park will most likely not be flooded this year. The area has very poor sod and already has berms along its north side. There is a steep hillside along its eastside with buckthorn around the area that to be cleared up. The proposed track would not affect the playground or the wooded hill.

Lynch said that Facebook page discussion has informally started regarding the proposed track. There is a large group of forty people that would support the track. They live in West St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights and Woodbury. There is a group called Extreme Team that also supports the track. They have raced their cars at St. Stephens. They have volunteered to maintain the truck as well. Lynch said that there have been concerns raised regarding the noise the cars generate. The track would only be for electric [battery-powered] cars that cause minimal noise. Lynch brought a couple of cars to show to the committee. He said that nitro/gas cars do make noise but these cars would not be allowed in the park. Lynch noticed a big hole in the proposed area for the track and has patched it with a couple bags of dirt. He does not feel that the area has been used very often.

The proposal calls for the city not to use the area for an ice rink and approval of the RC track.

Petrasek asked if the committee had any questions for Lynch. Bellows asked about the entrance to the park/proposed RC track. Lynch said that once the buckthorn is cleared at the end of the fence at the south side, it will “open up the area.” Bellows is concerned about the parking for the track and where people will park when they come to Kennedy for the RC track. Lynch said that people will use the on-street parking. Bellows asked who would be in charge of the group. Lynch said that he is the unofficial liaison for the park. Like with any other park, it is [up to] the users to use the park responsibly. Bellows said that the proposal asks for a porta-potty. Lynch said that this would benefit everyone that visits the park. (A porta potty is provided in winter for the ice rink at Kennedy Park.) Bellows said that the proposal asks for an electrical outlet. There is an electrical pole there and an outlet would be nice to have to charge batteries and the [RC track people] “can do without it.” Bellows asked if people would be charged for use of the track. Lynch said that no; it is a public park. Bellows is concerned with the up keep of the track. Lynch said that the worse that could happen is that the track returns to its present state. It is like the disc golf course at Garlough Park. Bellows asked what would prevent people with gas-powered cars from using the track. Schletty said that the city could post signs saying only allowing electric cars. Residents can call police if there are problems in the park.

Schletty asked about kids riding their bikes on the track. Lynch said that bike riding would not affect the berms on the track; the dirt would be packed down hard.

Petrasek opened up the discussion to guests. Kari Denissen Cunnien of 766 Dodd, talked about how Kennedy Park was unique in that the park abuts to residents' properties. She said that, "the park wasn't built for us but it is used for a lot by our children and our neighbors for creative play like kick ball. They do all kinds of things in that park. There has been more traffic in the park lately. This activity is not across the street; it is right in our backyard. If the RC track were built, use would be restricted to one group. Also regarding permanent changes to Kennedy Park, [residents] would like to be part of a larger plan and to see how this park would meet the future needs of the city with interested parties. She asks the city about a longer term plan for the park and to be part of a broader process in making decisions for the park.

Resident Mark Schroeder came to the committee meeting with a survey of residents whose properties abut the park; he got eleven respondents and ten were against the [RC track.] He does not think that the "first come first served" policy would work in the park because the park would now be a dedicated RC track park. As far as the property line goes, the buckthorn resides in Ramsey County in St. Paul. There are right of way issues with Kennedy Park. Schletty agreed; half of the playground does sit in St. Paul. The hole in the middle of the designated area was done by a person with a metal detector.

Christina Sanchez of 791 Winslow, has lived there over 20 years. Her biggest concern with building the RC track is parking. She is concerned with there being RC events and having 50 people at the park. Most people who go to the park walk to the park. It is only street and alley parking around the park and there is a lot of children in this area.

Karl Norm of 136 Belvidere asked about the dirt on the track. He does not think that the black dirt is a good idea; Lynch conceded that it would blow around a lot in dry weather. Norm said that the track [would serve] a niche group and would prevent other children from many other activities like bocce ball and kite flying. He also commented about the volunteers maintaining the track and the Extreme Team membership. He wonders why they cannot continue to use their trucks in their present location. He commented that the one house that is in favor on the track is the "frat house." Norm asked Lynch to recuse himself from the committee vote to the RC track. Kennedy is a [small] "pocket park." It should not be used for a committee member pet project.

Schletty clarified that the Parks and Recreation Committee has been in existence for about 40 years. It even predates Petrasek's membership. To Schletty's knowledge, there has been no project pushed through as a "pet project;" the disc golf course was built prior to Lynch's membership. Schletty agreed that Lynch should recuse himself from the committee vote.

Kevin and Jaci Kuta of 116 Belvidere commented about the proposed track. Their property abuts the playground and has been surveyed. The border of the playground belongs to the city of St. Paul. Kevin Kuta is wondering what would stop children bringing in a lot of dirt to the proposed RC track and making high bike jumps.

(Schletty said that the park maintenance staff would have issues with this type of jump.) Jaci Kuta added that this track may cause more work for park maintenance staff. [An ordinance would prevent motorized vehicles from Kennedy Park.] Kevin Kuta talked about how to keep this a “regional” track. Lynch said that the track would be open to all people, like other parks.

Kelly Billig and Scott Schwister, 227 Curtice W, came to meeting. Twister has issues with the process in which the RC track was proposed. Billig has problems with a niche group using a public green space using it for their own uses. The track would set a precedent to do this.

Petrasek said that he appreciated all the comments from the residents. He said that they are a “well spoken, articulate group.” Petrasek said, “In fairness to Dave [Lynch,] he explained that Lynch moved along the disc golf course. It had many of the same objections in the beginning but there has been no trouble with the course. Schletty said that the discussion reminds him of residents’ concerns with the community garden. In response to the concerns, the city found a different spot for the garden. Schletty can work with Lynch to find another location for the track.

A motion was made to reject the Remote Control track proposal in Kennedy Park.

- **Discussion followed.**
 - **McNamara wondered if the subject could be tabled until more input from neighbors could be sought. Lynch said that he thought that it would not make much difference to get more input from other residents.**
 - **Member DeLaRosby has visited Kennedy Park and walked around it. “All things being equal, based on the proposal, he visited the Facebook page and said , the area is away from fast moving vehicles and that the playground area was a benefit; we would preserve the majority of the amenities. Taking away green space is always problematic. He tried to talk to residents there. He talked to the “frat” resident and to the gentleman on the SW corner; he said that he has never used the park. It’s not a problem with a no cost to use the park but it gets sticky when you want to permanently change the park for a niche purpose.. He agrees with Bellows to reject the proposal for Kennedy Park. He would like a robust period for people to weigh in on the subject.**

After the discussion, the motion passed.

Petrasek said that the advisory committee’s recommendation will be to reject the proposal. Lynch can still appear before Council and present his case. Lynch repeated that he wishes to be transparent in the process.

c. Proposed Warming House Hours

Schletty is looking at ways to save money for the city by not flooding every rink and placing staff at every rink this year. The city looked at attendance records for all the ice rinks. Schletty presented a worksheet with committee members with the use of each park for the last 3 years. Bellows asked why the city would close the park based on these numbers; the weather has not been good for ice skating in the past year. Schletty said that Kennedy Park is a very hard park to flood because of the location of the ice rink and because the park is mostly used for sledding. The flooding is very hard for staff.

Petrasek polled the residents regarding flooding Kennedy Park. One resident asked how much it costs to flood the park. Four residents were in favor of flooding the park; two residents were indifferent. Schletty does not have the costs to flood the park yet. It takes about 45 minutes to clear and flood Kennedy Park. He said if the city decides to close the ice rink this year, it does not mean that the rink is permanently closed. One resident said that staffing is not important for the rink. The flooding is more important. One resident said that there is liability having single personnel alone in the warming house, i.e. sexual abuse. It was suggested to have benches by the rinks so that people can put their skates on next to the ice rink.

A motion was made to have Kennedy Park be flooded this year and not have it staffed.

- **Discussion followed the motion.**
 - **DeLaRosby asked for a cost breakdown for water, lights and what it costs to staff the park. Schletty said that attendance does not really affect the cost of the maintenance. It has to do with the time it takes maintenance staff to flood it. It affects the quality of the ice in other parks as well.**

The motion died after discussion.

Lynch said that he would like to see previous year statistics to see what ice rinks are declining.

A motion was made to table the discussion until the committee can see the data from previous years and the costs of maintaining the ice rinks. The motion carried.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. Halloween Event

Schletty introduced Alisha McGraw and Laura Vaughn to the committee to talk about the Halloween event. The event will be brought back to Harmon Park on Halloween night. McGraw said that a “little hard to gauge how many people will come to the event.” She thinks that maybe 200 people will come to the event. Bellows said that there will be more, since Harmon is a “walkable” park.

McGraw talked having face painting and having a couple of fire pits for the event. She would like the event to be totally outdoors. The only indoor thing feature would

be a photo booth in the lobby area of the Neighborhood Center. There will be a costume contest. She would like this to be more of a community event and get the police and South Metro Fire Department involved. The public have seen the police and fire department at previous events and McGraw would like to carry their presence throughout the year.

There are two moveable fire pits for the park use. We have the option of doing s'mores for the fires. We can also provide seats near the pits. The police department will help with the fire pits.

There will be free hot dogs at the concession stand. Bellows suggested having lemonade and water as well. The city can do the premade hotdogs again. Lynch said that this worked very well last year. McGraw would like to do a trick or treat trail. She provided a list of possible sponsors for the event/trail. The city will ask that they provide candy and decorate their part of the trail/table. There will be coloring contest and have staff decide who was the best entry and have Dan Nowicki can generate a coloring sheet for entrants.

Lynch said that the Harmon Park location will make the crowd a lot more "transient;" he is wondering if the costume contest is a good idea. McGraw said that the contest will be at a set time to address staffing issues; the contest time will be well-advertised on social media. The contest will take 20 minutes at the most.

Lynch really likes the photo booth idea; he does not like the music feature for the park. There is too much noise in the park already. Face painting may not be a good feature if children are wearing masks and with the cold weather. The committee said that tattoos could be done instead. Lynch does not think having only two fire pits will be enough. Schletty suggested "scrapping the s'mores," and having just the fire pits.

Vaughn said that face painting/tattoos are something little children would really like. The focus for the event now would be a family-focused where families go through activities very quickly. In terms of public safety, the bonfire is more of a "hang-out" activity in the past. DeLaRosby agreed with this; he spent probably 15-20 minutes with his children at the last Halloween bonfire. Vaughn said that if this is going to be a family centered event, the event may need to be on a different night (non-Halloween night) to ensure police and fire department can attend.

A motion was made to move the event forward as planned by McGraw without the s'mores, face painting and the music.

The motion was amended to try to add a fire pit to the event. The motion carried.

Schletty added that there is a \$1,000 donation probably coming from the Commercial Club.

b. Sports Complex Update

The update was tabled.

4. **Other**

a. **Council Update**-There is no update reported.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

The committee members adjourned at 8:30 pm. The next Park and Recreation Committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 10, 2017 at 5:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sharon G. Hatfield