

WEST ST. PAUL PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday February 9, 2021

Parks & Rec. Members Present: Kirsten Mulraney, Jay DeLaRosby, Bonnie Bellows, Mike Petrasek, Dave Lynch,
Non-voting Members Present: Sharon G. Hatfield, Parks and Public Works Administrative Specialist; Dave Schletty, Assistant Parks & Recreation Director, Ross Beckwith, City Engineer, Parks and Public Works Director; Wendy Berry, Council Liaison

1. ROLL CALL

2. REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES

Chair Petrasek called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Petrasek welcomed everyone that was were streaming the meeting and watching the meeting live. Member Bellows made a motion to approve the January 12, 2021 meeting minutes. Member Lynch seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes. Petrasek said that there were new appointments to the Park Board that were made by Council. Council is rethinking the processing in which the appointments are made. Council has asked City staff to prepare a process change to include members that sought reappointment to remain on the committee. This process would extend the member's terms and possibly enlarge the committee. The process will be discussed at a future Council meeting. Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Schletty said the Committee will have three new members at the March meeting. More details will be known next month.

3. NEW BUSINESS

a. COVID Egg Hunt

Petrasek said that it is no longer an Easter Egg hunt; it is now a "COVID egg hunt". Schletty said that the City has hosted an Easter Egg hunt for many years; it started at Marthaler Park. It went to Thompson County Park at one point, and for the last few years, it has been held at Harmon Park. Last year the event was cancelled due to the pandemic and so much uncertainty. There are still some restrictions in place. Sam Murphy has come up with a cool alternative that would be safe. It should provide for a pretty good crowd and be fun for little kids the Saturday before Easter. The event would remain free; there would have to be capacity limits. Participants would need to preregister for the event so that staff can gauge the attendance. Participants will only be charged if they do not show up for the event. Since the numbers are so limited, staff does not want no shows to take up places that other interested people might like. Each family would be assigned a color to for their egg hunting team; Participants would take a one-way loop around the Sports Complex; participants would go on an egg-citing adventure and be guided to designated areas to hunt for eggs. People would be staged in the parking lot; pods of fifteen people (depending on how many in a household) would be designated a color, and then be sent to three different areas to look for their eggs at a designated time. There will be eggs strewn out in their areas. Participants will end up in the concession area. They would then turn in their eggs for candy and prizes. The eggs themselves will not be filled with anything. If participants want to keep them, they can. Each kid will get a prize bag for their eggs. There are no frills this year, no petting zoo. The groups will be sent out in fifteen minute intervals. The event will accommodate about one hundred people in 1½ hours. If it the event seems popular; the City may be able to do a night time activity for older children. April 3 will be the date of the event. Lynch asked about the budget of the event. Schletty said that the budget is lower. There will be no petting zoo and no door prizes. The only expense will be the treat bags. Schletty showed a map/trail of how the participants will travel though the Sports Complex to find their eggs. Bellows asked how the trail would be marked. Schletty said it would be marked with signage and self-explanatory with the signs and flags. It would be like the Story Stroll. There may be volunteers at designated areas as well. There will be colored tape designating the areas as well. Lynch asked about the empty eggs. Schletty said it was because of the sanitation piece. If staff fills the eggs, everyone is touching it. It makes it less inviting for people to grab [too many] eggs and it also makes less work for staff. Lynch said that since the City is spending less, maybe prefilled eggs could be ordered. Lynch also suggested having music playing during the event; some Easter Carols. Schletty said that they are not sure of having the

Easter Bunny there; it may not be safe social distancing speaking. Bellows suggested having an Easter Bunny board with the face cut out. Schletty said that would be a good idea. He asked Committee Members to think of a name for the event.

b. Pickleball Discussion

Petrasek said that last month the committee discussed adding the pickleball amenity to the parks system; Schletty has taken some measurements and it looks like Emerson Park might be the best candidate for the courts. Emerson is falling in as the prime location for this sport. The Committee has been talking about pickleball for about a year; Council has talked about this game being a priority. The City has been trying to get grants to build a pickleball court and has not been successful yet. West St. Paul's neighbors have installed pickleball courts. Inver Grove Heights has spent a lot of money into a nice facility. Mendota Heights has a court built into one of their ice rinks. With the departure of the YMCA there has been a [pickleball] void in the City, especially in winter. Schletty said that using tennis courts lined for pickle ball is not ideal. Tennis court nets are higher than pickleball nets; it is confusing to be playing with different court lines. Players are competing with different sports in the courts. It is better to have permanent facilities. The Committee has talked about having temporary courts at the ice rink in Harmon. However, there are a lot of other activities in the Harmon rink in the summer time. The City does not want to tie up with space with just pickleball. The City has determined the best thing to do would be to convert an underused tennis court into strictly a pickleball court. Last month, Schletty said that there would be two parks that would be good to investigate: Haskell and Emerson. He has veered toward Emerson Park for the pickleball court. The court is very visible; it is right next to the street and parking is not an issue. People visiting Haskell Park would have to park on the street and walk up a hill to get to the park. It is a hike to get to the courts and not easy to see where the courts are. Emerson Park's court is large; four pickleball courts could fit into the [tennis] court. There is \$20K in the budget this year to do court resurfacing. The parks maintenance supervisor said that Emerson is the only court that hasn't been redone in the last 8-10 years. It is next one on the list. The timing is right for Emerson. Schletty added that if the City were to remove the basketball court, there would be room enough for six pickleball courts. It could host leagues and tournaments.

Lynch asked about the four court layout. Schletty said that typically a 3-4-foot-high fence would be placed between the courts. Lynch visited both parks; he agreed with Schletty regarding the choice of Emerson. Parking is an issue with Haskell Park. The neighbors would not appreciate people parking on the streets and the court is hard to find. Logistically Emerson works better. Bellows said that she is concerned with doing away with the basketball. Schletty said he knew it would be a controversial suggestion on his part. Bellows said that the Committee talked about this a lot. There would be two very different kind of users that would be using the court at the same time. Schletty said it was not the best mix of users. It was his number one thought. His other thought is if the City is to do something right, it would be to make the facility as large as the City can and accommodate as many pickleball courts as it can. Schletty said that this location has had many issues with resident complaints regarding the basketball court. Of all the courts, this is the one that we get the most complaints. Schletty said that the City could add another basket at one of the other courts like Haskell, Oakdale and even Weschcke Park. Lynch asked about additional fencing if the pickleball court were to include the basketball court. Schletty said he did not think more fencing would be needed; he would add more seating, maybe bleachers or benches. Member DeLaRosby had some thoughts about converting the space entirely into a pickleball courts. The Committee has talked about adding amenities to parks and not sacrificing other amenities. The Committee is trying to have bigger goals, such as the skate park. The City [should be] democratizing and diversifying our spaces. He strongly disagrees with compartmentalizing parks for certain activities. The City wants people to come to the parks and the way they will be attracted to our parks is if there are many different things that are interesting to them. The Committee engaged in a long and hard conversation regarding basketball; the Committee went

through a laborious process to make it happen. DeLaRosby is a little surprised to hear that there are issues. This has not been brought before the Advisory Board. The Board wanted to act if there were truly an issue. He would like to know if there was anyone who played tennis in the court now and hear what they feel about the possible conversion of the court. The Committee went through the process of the open meeting so that people could speak their mind when they talked about introducing basketball. In terms of pickleball, he has some research on actual infrastructure on converting it. He would like to create two courts first and monitor the usage and build out from there. Member Mulraney asked about the issues with the basketball hoops. Schletty said that this is a court that has also been full-court. Hoops were never taken down. The issues were there long before the City put in basketball at the other parks. There were call logs that Schletty provided at the Committee meetings. The calls were not every day or every week; they were sprinkled here and there. The complaints were of language and suspected drug use. The neighbor that made the complaint said that basketball players would hoop the fence into his yard to retrieve their balls. They would jump the fence and urinate in his yard. Language is the biggest complaint. They are minor complaints. However, for the resident there, it is an issue. DeLaRosby commented that from there were only two incidences in the call log that were generated from the basketball players. He cautioned against associating a behavior with the activity. Lynch said that in West St. Paul, space in the parks is at a premium. The City does not have extra land that can be converted into a pickleball court that is not being used for something else. Tennis courts are in abundance in the City. The loss of one court would not be that detrimental to the City. He asked if the City wants to build a destination pickleball facility or only an amenity for the citizens to come and play closer to home. Bellows said at this point, the City does not know how many people will be using the court. The City could expand after staff sees how much use the courts gets. Schletty said that the plan is to have a public meeting and see if residents think it is a good idea. When the Committee does make a decision, they will have the testimony from the residents before the recommendation comes to Council. Petrasek asked for a clarification from DeLaRosby. DeLaRosby said the people of West St. Paul deserve at least one really nice pickleball court. Petrasek asked if this was the consensus of the Committee. Mulraney agreed with DeLaRosby. DeLaRosby said it would be great if the City gave more but that he is hesitant in taking away an amenity in order to put in another amenity. The tennis court is a tiny sacrifice that would give the Committee the first look. Petrasek said it possible to install the courts with the [scheduled] overlay to create the new courts. He has talked with some citizenry. He thinks that pickleball courts would be used regularly; he doesn't know about six courts. He would like to start with four courts first. DeLaRosby would like to start out with just two courts. Schletty likes the idea of having just two courts first (on the diagonal.) It would give the option for the City to add two more courts later. DeLaRosby said that he did not realize there was only one tennis court in the park; he said that the City might as well put four pickle ball courts in. Lynch said that residents are already using the tennis court to play pickleball now. Petrasek asked if it were possible to invite residents to come to the next meeting to be heard by the Committee. Schletty said that it is possible. He will research the expense for the new nets as well. Petrasek invited Bob Smutka, 1137 Allen Ave, to speak. He is an avid pickleball player. He is very appreciative of all the courts. He said that the tennis court at Emerson Park is the narrowest court he has ever seen. It would impact the pickleball court. Pickleball is a sideways sport. Players may run into a fence in between the proposed courts. He would like the City to work with the school district to make more courts. He said that the City has missed an opportunity to have pickleball in Harmon Park. He said that it is an ideal place to have a pickleball court. It is the perfect playground activity. A big pickleball court would bring more people into the community. The southeast area has been the pickleball dead zone. Inver Grove Heights has a nice facility. Petrasek asked Schletty if the public could be invited to the next meeting. Schletty said he will invite the public to the next meeting; if people are uncomfortable coming in, they can also email their input to the City. Petrasek said that the proposal is for four pickleball courts and to leave the basketball court as it is. Schletty will do some more definite measuring. He'll get his boots out. Petrasek said he would help with this.

c. 2021 Playground Replacement

Schletty said that there is \$75k budgeted for playground replacement(s). Maintenance staff has identified three park playgrounds that currently coming toward the end of their life span: Emerson, Kennedy and the park at the pool. There are plusses and minuses to each of the parks. The playground at the pool is the oldest of the three. It was put in when the pool was remodeled back in 1999. The pool was closed last year because of the COVID-19 precautions. The City is currently negotiating a new contract with the YMCA to run the pool. The caveat with replacing this playground is that Council may choose to not keep the pool amenity. With a lot of unknowns, a new playground at the pool may not be a good decision right now.

Schletty said it would make sense to put a new playground in Emerson Park if the City were to renovate the courts and put in pickleball. It would revive, regenerate and renovate the whole park. It would make it brand new. The City could get a nice playground for \$75k, as it is a smaller playground than the one at the pool. Schletty described Kennedy Park and the position of the current playground. "If you are swinging on the swing set, when you're up, you're in St. Paul. When you're down, you are in West St. Paul." It is not the most ideal location. Petrasek exclaimed, "Where else can you do that!" Technically speaking, a large part of the park (eastern side) is in the easement/right of way. There is a large storm sewer line that runs along this easement. It will never get developed and it is, "half St. Paul and half West St. Paul." West St. Paul does maintain it. The park no longer has a warming house or a skating rink. There is an ideal location at the bottom of the hill for a playground. The small hill is used for little children to sled on. A playground would not impact the sledding hill. Schletty would like to see a sidewalk or a trail crossing the park connecting Bidwell to and coming out on Dodd Road. Currently there is no interior trail. Petrasek remarked that there is almost a walking path in the grass following the proposed trail line. Schletty confirmed this; people are cutting through the park and creating a path. It would be nice to have a trail, and plow it in the winter to keep it open. The current playground is a much smaller one than the one in the pool or at Emerson Park. There would be money left over for a trail if the Committee chose to replace the playground in Kennedy Park. Lynch said if the playground in Emerson Park were replaced, it would get more use. Emerson Park is much more centrally located. It is surrounded by houses and not woods on one side. Petrasek could live with either of the suggestions. He likes the idea of the trail in Kennedy. There is already a makeshift trail already. Lynch asked if it were possible to get a theme-based playground structure. In some cities, kids know a park by the playground theme, like a "Space Playground Park: It would be a fun thing to develop. Schletty said absolutely. The City can write the RFP to ask the park vendors for creative options. Bellows asked about the age ranges for playground equipment. Schletty said that playgrounds typically have two structures, one geared for 5-12 year olds and other small structure is geared for tots, 3-4 year olds. The structures are usually separated in the park. With the smaller playground sets like the one in Kennedy, there will be one structure geared for an age in between. DeLaRosby said that it would be good to also get feedback about this playground as well from the nearby residents. He said of course, everyone is going to say, "Give us the new stuff!" Schletty said this is a good idea to get feedback; even if the City chooses not to replace the playground at this time, the information would be used in the future. Petrasek asked Schletty if he would like a recommendation from the Committee tonight. Schletty said that this does not need to be approved by Council right now. Council would approve the playground vendor when the contract is generated. Schletty would like direction for staff as to see what playground should be replaced. Schletty would come back to the Committee with vendor options once the Committee decides. The selection of the park does not necessarily need to be a Council decision. Lynch asked about the demographics of the neighboring residents, i.e. ages of the children. Schletty said that it would be tough to get this information without "door knocking." There is a council member in that neighborhood; the Committee could reach out to her.

DeLaRosby said that the City is getting twenty years out of the playground structures. The City will catch a generation in whatever it builds. Lynch said that it would make sense to replace the Emerson Park playground right now if there were more children in that neighborhood. Petrasek said that the Committee can gather the information at the pickleball open house. Bellows said that

the City is not putting in the skating rink at Kennedy; perhaps it should investigate what else can be put there. Lynch said that 2-3 years ago, the neighbors said that they like the flat open space grass area. DeLaRosby said his choice would be to spruce up Kennedy Park and connect what seems to be a natural walkway as it is. He asked if Kennedy Park has an historical marker. Mulraney said that it a great opportunity to make the park more familiar to residents because it is a lesser known park. Committee members came to a consensus that Kennedy Park would be the choice for new playground equipment. Schletty said that he will start working the numbers to make it work. Bellow said that they are keeping Schletty busy.

d. Marthaler Park Redevelopment

Schletty said that the timeline for the Marthaler Park renovations has been pushed up. The Committee has worked on Marthaler Park for a number of years; there is a draft masterplan that has not yet been finalized. Marthaler Park has been in redevelopment for many years; the plan started before Schletty's time at the City, (maybe not before the Chair's time, however. He may have predated it.) The original plan was to set aside money for the reconstruction over the next five years. Because of all the redevelopment in the City right now, there is more money coming in because of park dedication fees. The City Manager and the Finance Director have been looking at numbers and the getting the funding together for the renovation work to be done over the next 3 years. The trail work going through the park is going out to bid soon. The bid opening is on March 4. The work would hopefully be done this summer. The funding for the trail is primarily coming from the County with some money coming from the City. The trail will be widened and realigned; it will cut through some areas of Garlough that currently do not have a trail. The trail will be straightened and leveled out to county regional standards. The trail will cut through the park and get people to Humboldt and Wentworth. It will connect to the tunnel which will be completed this year as well. It is exciting to have the trail connection finally done. The City would like, to finish the work in Marthaler in 2022 and 2023. Staff would like to put another playground in the upper part of the park and a new large nice picnic pavilion. The parking lot will be relocated to the south end of the park near the tennis courts. The central part of the park would be used for park activities and not parking. Interior trails will loop around the lake. A boardwalk would go out into the pond itself and additional cleanup will be done around the pond. (buckthorn removal, installation of step piers for fishing or viewing.) Rehabbing of the sledding hill is planned. The trailhead building will be constructed in partnership with the county.

Schletty said that he would like to finalize the Master Plan with the Committee and to get a recommendation out to the Council. Schletty showed a draft of the Master Plan to the Committee. He said that the playground would be \$100-150K; the shelter would be \$250-300K depending on how the amenities, (i.e. running water, electricity, partial enclosure.) The parking lot and the trail work would be about \$350K. Rehabilitation on the pond is about \$130K; this would include the boardwalk. The sledding hill improvements would be \$100K; this would include the structure on top of the hill. Other costs would be additional lighting and the hill clean-up. Roughly, the renovation would be \$1.2 Million. Council will talk about this in the Strategic Planning retreat. For this coming year, the City would pay \$150K (trail project); in 2022- \$450K and in 2023- \$600K. Lynch asked about ongoing maintenance costs for the park. Schletty said that because the park is already there and maintained by the City, there won't be a lot of difference in maintenance costs. There might be some reduction because once the trail is completed, the County will take over its maintenance. Petrasek said that he likes the layout that Schletty had on the overhead. Schletty said that the homework has been done; it just has never been finalized.

e. Future Arts Council

Schletty talked about the grant for the Art Park and the work Kevin Hendricks did on the amazing piece of art in the park. The City hopes to build upon this work. Council is considering an Art Commission or Committee. There are a number of cities that have similar commissions. Cottage Grove started an arts commission two years ago. It was composed of seven adult members and

two teen members. They meet monthly and have specific events throughout the year. In their first year, their short term goals were to begin to market art events, contests, film festivals and community concerts. The commission wanted to engage community, especially youth and seniors. They wanted to create awareness of theater opportunities and to engage artists. A long term goal was to create an art festival. The council wanted to make Cottage Grove a destination for art. Cottage Grove have a number of art festivities that the city does throughout the year and Cottage Grove has been able to “put themselves on the map.” They feature local artist’s work in their city hall. Schletty asked for Committee’s thoughts. Petrasek said that a separate art council is needed; it would be overload for this group. Petrasek said that the current art park had a nice committee initially. There were art teachers from St. Croix and Sibley, members from this committee and a local artist. The thought at the time was to get high school kids involved. It fizzled out because the teachers had volunteered enough of their time and there was the question of funding. The art piece at Harmon Park did come out this effort, (Carol Pat, Sibley High School.) Schletty said that member Lynch’s daughter was part of it. The committee disbanded, but there was some awareness raised out of it. Lynch said that previously, people had great ideas and a plan, but no money. He asked if there is any point to the discussion if there is no money earmarked. Schletty said that he guesses if Council is passionate about an art commission that they will probably put a line item in for funding. DeLaRosby said that an art council would definitely worthy of its own committee. Petrasek said that he would like to see another art piece in the Art Park this year. He would like the keep the momentum going and volunteered to meet with Kevin Hendricks for this effort. Petrasek has some connections at Garlough; he could speak with someone there.

4. OLD BUSINESS

a. Skate Park Subcommittee Update

Mulraney reported that the subcommittee met on January 26, with Paul Forsline from City of Skate. It was a really interesting meeting. He showed a lot of pictures of a lot of skate parks around the country. City of Skate tries to ensure that quality skate parks are constructed. If uninspired or uninteresting or too small, it is a waste of resources. The meeting made Mulraney think of things in a different way and of how to make the best skate park. Instead of trying to rush the process, the City must gauge interest and find the right site. Forsline’s idea is that the Sports complex is the best site; it is the right size and accessibility. It is also a center point. Mulraney went on to say that after finding the site, a concept would have to be created, and then the funding would be explored. After the funding, the concept would be finalized. The cost would probably 200-350K. It is no small endeavor and the skate park would need at least 12,000 square feet. That would be on the smaller end. There may be some opportunities later on for a matching grant from the state funding for the skate park.

Mulraney said that the first task for the subcommittee is to gauge the interest of the community. The subcommittee brainstormed and proposed visiting other skate parks to see who might be interested. Mulraney encouraged people watching the meeting to contact the City if they are interested in having a skate park. Bellows asked if it were possible to put an announcement in the newsletter to ask about interest in the skate park. Schletty said that it may be premature to put this in the newsletter; funding for a possible skate park would be slated for about 2024.

b. City Council Updates

Clpn. Berry said that she will start bringing summaries from the Park and Rec meetings to report during the Council Comments. The work that the committee does is very important, and residents may not know about the committee. The strategic planning retreat is coming up.

c. Staff Updates

Schletty does not have any more to report. He added Sam Murphy is working hard, preparing for summer activities. Program registration will open up in early March. They will do what they can to make things seem normal with all the precautions in place. Murphy and he are thinking of bringing back one “Movie in the Park” this summer. The program was cancelled last year.

Mendota Heights was able to do one movie with social distancing in place; circles were painted on the ground for families to stay in place. There were no in-house programs in the summer in West. St. Paul last year; everything was done with contracted services. The service had a better set up with their plans and social distancing. It was easier to do a one-week camp instead of doing a summer-long program. The camps had very good attendance.

Lynch asked about the field rental in the Sports Dome. Schletty said that the City was up to almost the normal schedule of rentals; the only difference in the rental is that the City is not allowing spectators in the Dome. The City is limited to only 150 people in the Dome at one time. They have started a modified open dome rental; during the open dome period, a group would rent a sixth of the dome at the time. Staff can control the numbers and intermingling of the people in this way. Bellows asked about the community room at Harmon Park. Schletty said that it is limited to 15 people at a time; no one has wanted to rent the room for so few people. Hopefully the state will ease the restrictions soon to maybe 50 percent capacity. The City will be opening picnic shelter reservations starting in mid-March.

5. **OTHER-NA**

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

The committee members adjourned at 7:28 pm. The next Park and Recreation Committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sharon G. Hatfield