

MINUTES

1. CONVENE PARK COMMISSION MEETING

Chair Wenner convened the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

A. Roll Call

Present: Chair Wenner, Commissioners Garske, Bahneman; City Council Liaison Gorham; Parks and Recreation Manager Czech

Absent: Commissioner Hirner

B. Review Agenda

Commissioner Garske moved to approve the agenda as written. Commissioner Bahneman seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-0.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Park Commission Meeting Minutes of November 26, 2024

B. Park Commission Meeting Minutes of December 10, 2024

Commissioner Garske moved to approve the minutes of the November 26, 2024, and the December 10, 2024 meetings, as written. Commissioner Bahneman seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-0.

3. MATTERS FROM THE FLOOR

There were none.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2025 Work Plan Discussion

Parks and Recreation Manager Czech explained that the Commission operates off a work plan that is created on an annual basis so tonight's discussion was surrounding how they wanted to proceed beginning in March of 2025. He stated that its primary purpose was to establish some priorities for the year and to ensure that they were in alignment with the Council. He asked the Commission to give him some input on things that they might like to see included in the updated work plan and clarified that this was intended as a discussion item and a formal work plan would be brought back for review before it was sent to the City Council for approval.

Chair Wenner explained that the first thing she would like to request from the Council was a list of their guiding principles and goals because she felt the Commission has struggled for the past few years on how to organize its work plan.

Commissioner Garske asked about the budget that had been set aside for the Master Plan that was included in the Parks Capital Improvement Plan and what the outcome goal was for that plan.

Parks and Recreation Manager Czech noted that a big part of it was to get some ideas and directions on Southshore Park and to get an update on the City's facilities to determine if they were meeting the needs of the residents. He stated that he felt that there would end up being a lot of community outreach associated with that in order to get input.

Commissioner Garske noted that the \$40,000 in the budget for this item would not cover a holistic new Master Plan.

Parks and Recreation Manager Czech explained that they will essentially take the old plan and update it and would not start from scratch.

Chair Wenner asked if the plan was to hire contractors to do this update.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech confirmed that they would plan to hire contractors for the updates.

Chair Wenner asked if there was also a past discussion about using a certain amount of the money to put together a survey or some other type of community outreach.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech explained that would all be part of the Master Plan process and assured the Commission that they would be updated on the process along the way.

Chair Wenner stated that she felt that they would want to start this in the spring in order to capture people in the area during different usage times. She asked if the Commission needed to formalize the process for gathering input from the community.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech suggested holding off on that until they find a consultant.

Commissioner Garske stated that one of his thoughts on their work plan was to find a way to put pickleball to rest.

Chair Wenner asked if the new Cathcart Park playground equipment would be installed in 2025.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that yesterday, Commissioner Hirner had presented to the Council and one of the discussion points from that meeting was a desire to take another look at the CIP because they were not sure that Cathcart should actually be a priority. He stated that the Council did approve the CIP so he was still trying to navigate whether this was something that came from the full Council or just an individual. He clarified that currently, it was in the current CIP budget for 2025.

Chair Wenner noted that she did not think the playground equipment at Cathcart Park was that bad.

Commissioner Garske admitted that this was something he was torn on, but noted that he understood that Cathcart had not been upgraded in a long time but he felt that Freeman Park's main playground needed an update because of the amount of use it has. He asked if the Council

discussion was whether Cathcart Park should get the funds or whether the funds should be spent on a new playground.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech noted that the CIP currently listed it as the playground at Cathcart but believed that if there was a consensus among the Commission that, for example, the funds should be spent at Freeman, they could bring that request to the Council. He noted that the Cathcart playground was installed in August of 1995.

Council Liaison Gorham arrived at the meeting.

Chair Wenner explained that they were currently discussing the Work Plan for 2025 and she had asked staff to provide them with the Council's goals and missions in order for the Park Commission to be able to align their work under that umbrella.

Council Liaison Gorham noted that one of the items that came up for discussion yesterday was the \$200,000 for Cathcart Park playground equipment. He noted that he was on the Park Commission in 2017 and that item was on the CIP and kept getting pushed back and asked about the current condition of the equipment.

Commissioner Garske stated that he felt it depended on which portion of the playground you were looking at and gave the example of the swing set area that was kind of in disrepair.

Council Liaison Gorham asked what kind of attention the hockey rink needed and asked about the \$150,000 included in the CIP.

Commissioner Garske stated that he believed that Public Works Director Morreim was planning to take some of the fencing from Badger Park and replace some of the fencing behind the boards.

Chair Wenner noted that she believed the \$150,000 in the CIP had been pushed to 2030.

Commissioner Garske stated that he believed that was to replace the boards.

Council Liaison Gorham explained that when he thinks of features in the park system, he thinks about the ice rink at Cathcart which he felt was more popular than the Cathcart playground area. He noted that he had played pickleball last summer at Cathcart and noted that the tennis courts were in rough shape. He explained that the reason they went to Cathcart was because they had tried to go to Badger and people had set up shop and were not intending to leave anytime soon. He asked what the plan would be for the \$200,000, if they chose not to do the playground at Cathcart and noted that he assumed that this plan was a result of the prioritization done by the Commission.

Chair Wenner stated that it had originally been \$175,000, but having noted that it was installed in 1995, she felt it was probably due for this even though her initial thought was whether the City should spend that kind of money.

Council Liaison Gorham asked if the public had asked for this or if there had been any kind of public outcry.

Chair Wenner stated that she was not sure if people were calling for this or not and explained that they do not really have a system where they get public input for things like that unless they are at a table at an event and someone brings it up.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he also had not really heard anything brought up about this. He stated that updating the Parks Master Plan was also in the CIP for this year and the Commission had briefly discussed going through that process which should bring in more community feedback and input.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that he was not sure \$40,000 would be enough to actually do anything with the Parks Master Plan and brought up the point that Southshore Park was essentially the first thing people see when they enter the City and suggested that they may want to use some of the money to actually design something for Southshore.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that in 2028 they have \$90,000 allocated for a Southshore reconstruction project and \$350,000 in 2029. He noted that whatever comes out of this Parks Master Plan would essentially begin the design phase prior to 2028.

The Commission discussed various ideas of how Southshore may be able to be used in the future and the importance of getting feedback from the community.

Commissioner Garske stated that he felt the discussion regarding the different ideas for the use of Southshore Park summed up the need for an updated Parks Master Plan.

Chair Wenner stated that she was confused because they had said the \$40,000 was going to be used to hire contractors to update the Parks Master Plan for all the City parks and asked if it was also intended to include community outreach for Southshore Park and creation of a new Parks Master Plan.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that the master planning process was all encompassing and would include updating the current Parks Master Plan.

Commissioner Garske stated that he thought the intent had been to combine the Parks Master Plan holistic view and with the Shoreshore plan.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he believes the last time the Parks Master Plan had been updated was in 2012.

Chair Wenner noted that there were a lot of things included in that plan that had not been completed and there was public outcry when the residents saw them and thought the City may be doing some of them.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that when they had discussed the CIP last July, the intent had been to update the current Parks Master Plans and encompass Southshore within that planning and reiterated that with that process, there would typically be some community outreach in order to develop those plans.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that he felt what Park and Recreation Manager Czech had just described would be a two-year process and would cost more than \$40,000. He asked if this was a topic that was planned to be discussed at the upcoming Council retreat.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he did not believe this was included as a topic of discussion for the Council retreat.

Council Liaison Gorham suggested that if it was not discussed at the retreat that it be an agenda item at a regular Council meeting in order to get feedback from the Council.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he felt it would most likely be a topic for discussion at a Council Work Session in order to garner their input.

Council Liaison Gorham asked when the Park Commission would begin their plans to utilize the \$200,000 for Cathcart Park based on the current CIP plans.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that it would just take place sometime this year.

Chair Wenner noted that Park and Recreation Manager Czech would be taking information from their discussion and putting together a proposed 2025 Work Plan for the Commission that he would bring back for their consideration. She stated that she wanted to make a few comments on the current CIP and explained that one of the things that has been difficult for the Commission is that they do this in July as part of the budget process. She suggested that they have a meeting earlier in the year to talk about the budget, other possible funding sources, overlapping with Public Works, and the athletic contracts. She stated that her thought would be that for every meeting they would be able to have that budget in front of them so they would have that information in their heads at each meeting.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech noted that the CIP was a working document that laid out a 10-year plan.

Chair Wenner stated that many Commissioners have a hard time getting their heads around different budgets and what they can actually impact. She stated that she had never seen any brainstorming happen about any other possible funding streams, for example, sponsorships, fundraisers, grants, or legacy bricks. She reiterated that she would like the Commission to be able to have a budget and finance discussion earlier in the year.

Commissioner Bahneman asked if there was someone on staff who researched grant writing and noted that she felt it was a specific talent.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech explained that this duty, in general, fell on staff.

Commissioner Garske asked if Park and Recreation Manager Czech was looking for input on timelines and planning for the year or just about the topics that they wanted to discuss.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that if the Commission had ideas on when they felt things should be discussed, he would be interested in that kind of feedback.

Commissioner Garske stated that he felt staff did a great job, but asked if they needed support or additional discussion around things like education and events that they run. He asked if those kinds of things should be added to the Work Plan in order to be able to have meaningful discussions about how they can support staff for these events. He stated that he would also like to see generating park funds included somewhere in their Work Plan.

Chair Wenner noted that she would not mind writing a grant because that was something within her purview.

Commissioner Garske noted that for the events in the park, he was not sure what Park and Recreation Manager Czech's capacity was but shared an example of a visit to Florida where they had an 'Art in the Park' event. He asked if there was interest or if they had the capacity to have some brainstorming sessions on possible events or educational activities that the City could hold in their parks. He explained that if they did not have the capacity for it, he didn't think they should take the time to discuss those ideas. He clarified that he, as a Commissioner, would not be running this type of programming or event and did not want to overextend staff.

Chair Wenner stated that she agreed and noted that she felt the City's programming had been an abysmal failure. She stated that she would love to have input and share ideas for different children's programming and noted that she could even do some type of environmental programming for different seasons. She suggested that the Commission add education programming into their Work Plan.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he felt this was something where they would need some guidance from the Council on their vision for the overall Parks Department and whether programming was something that they saw as beneficial.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that one of the things that frustrated him as a long-time Planning Commissioner was with the divide between the Council vision and what they actually did. He stated that he felt that it was very disjointed and one of his hopes in now serving on the City Council was that there would be more connection. He suggested that perhaps instead of bringing the proposed Work Plan to the Council at a regular meeting, they bring it to a Work Session for a more thorough and less rigid type of discussion. He stated that he felt having a discussion like this with a new Council, getting to know each other, and also having a discussion about priorities would be a good idea to do before the Work Plan as a way to get on the same page about priorities.

Chair Wenner asked if the Commission could schedule a Work Session meeting with the Council.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that at the next City Council meeting he would bring this up for discussion.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that he would also bring it up with City Administrator Nevinski about the possibility of scheduling this as a Work Session topic.

Chair Wenner noted that one of the Commission's responsibilities was laid out that they submit comments to the Planning Commission on things like proposed subdivisions. She explained that at her first meeting, there was this type of discussion and she did not vote because she had pulled up all the things in the Comprehensive Plan about how the City should be sustaining topography and old-growth trees. She stated that for the last two years, she has been wondering how she was supposed to tell them that she did not agree with what was happening and whether she was supposed to even have that kind of input or power.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that he felt that the City would want to do something smaller, aesthetically, at Cathcart.

Chair Wenner asked if the Park Tours went under the CIP on their Work Plan. She noted that they had discussed the possibility of spreading them out over several months for scheduling purposes and asked if that would still be possible or if they could hold them on non-meeting dates as a work session.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech explained that park tours was one of the questions he had for the Commission. He stated that in his experience, park tours are not really an annual thing in other cities. He asked for the Commission's opinion and noted that he thought the tours this past year were kind of a way for them to hear about all the negatives on the parks even though there are a lot of positive things happening. He stated that he did think it ended up being very valuable because they were able to get a giant list that the maintenance team was now working through. He stated that he felt the Park Commission should routinely be out in the parks checking them out and not just waiting for the park tour.

Chair Wenner suggested that Public Works do park tours for the neighborhood and collect information and then the Park Commission could be invited to come along. She stated that it felt like the Commission was doing less inspecting and more just listening to Public Works tell them what was going on which she felt was a bit redundant. She noted that she felt that public input would be more important than Commission input.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech cautioned that they should be careful of adding more to everyone's plate, including adding more dates to do tours or having Public Works provide additional tours.

Commissioner Garske explained that he liked the idea of having a rotating schedule where they were not touring every City park on an annual basis. He stated that once the Parks Master Plan was updated, he liked the idea of spending a meeting at the different parks in order to discuss possible options for them. He reiterated that he did not believe it was necessary to tour every park, every year.

Chair Wenner stated that she agreed that they did not need to tour each park every year and suggested that perhaps they could just tour the ones that were coming up in the next few years for budget items.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that if they were updating the Parks Master Plan, he felt that having the whole Council there to have eyes on the parks would also be beneficial.

Chair Wenner stated that she felt doing the park tours sometimes ended up being a momentum killer for things the Commission was getting done because then they had to take time out from their regular work to go on the tours.

Council Liaison Gorham suggested that since they were updating the Parks Master Plan this year, the park tours could happen separately, outside of the regular meeting schedule as part of prep for the Parks Master Plan.

Chair Wenner stated that she had also thought that the Commission could go tour one specific park each month, but in pairs, and then could report back to the full Commission.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that staff could develop inventory sheets for each park that Commissioners to use to check conditions and make notes on what they saw.

Chair Wenner stated that she felt this would also be helpful for when they look at the natural areas and stated that she felt these areas could also be visited independently and then provide a report afterward.

Council Liaison Gorham asked if Smithtown Ponds was officially part of the City's trail network.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that the trail goes through the area and connects from the LRT to Smithtown Road and explained that there were currently two memorial benches in that location.

Chair Wenner stated that the main thing she wanted to talk about with relation to the Work Plan was the IPM, since the Council had given them oversight of this in April of 2023. She stated that she felt that the Commission was still struggling to get all the information that they needed and gave the example of Greener Blade coming to spray at Freeman Park and then there was a room full of angry residents, but the Commission did not know anything about it. She explained that they did not know what chemicals were in there which concerned her because she felt like they were not doing their due diligence. She stated that the Commission is supposed to do oversight and review the plan for ongoing compliance and accountability and was also supposed to be consider planned maintenance works in parks/provide feedback on an annual basis. She stated that Public Works Director Morreim had given the Commission an update on this, but that seemed like they were getting updates from the people that they were supposed to be monitoring. She suggested that the Commission start a reporting process and do the report every year. She explained that she would be happy to work with City staff to get this started by getting an overview of things like all the chemicals used in all the parks so they can have that information in one place. She stated that as part of the IPM plan, in addition to cutting back on harmful pesticides, they are supposed to be planting flowers for bees and designating bee-safe areas. She stated that she knows that the City has those areas, but they are not accounted for at this point in time. She explained that she felt it would be helpful to have a mapping tool and include it in the report and make it public. She acknowledged that this would be something that would be difficult to do by sitting in their chambers and suggested that perhaps one or two Commissioners could take the reporting and interviews that would need to take place every year. She asked if the SCEC fee structure was in the purview of the Commission.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech acknowledged that they needed some direction from the Council.

Chair Wenner stated that, in her opinion, that could be removed from the Commission's Work Plan. She stated that she also felt it would be helpful for the Commission to have information about the athletic contracts, such as who the City had agreements with and how this may affect their budget, but was not sure it needed to be included within their Work Plan. She stated that she would like to see something on their Work Plan that formalized how they get their public input and a clearer definition of what the Commission's role is for community outreach.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that a lot of what he heard the Commission saying would be able to solve when they have new Commissioner onboarding handbooks in place.

Chair Wenner noted that she had found the Shorewood Park Commission Goal Statement and read it aloud to the Commission which was from August 1996 and explained that she felt that it should be updated.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that would most likely be a Council discussion.

Council Liaison Gorham asked about the Commission's role related to IPM and explained that he was not aware that the Commission had such a central role in its oversight.

Chair Wenner explained that it was a brand new responsibility in 2023 and then they ended up a brand-new Public Works Director and City Administrator. She stated that the Commission has been asking for advice on how they were supposed to do this which has been an ongoing process. She explained that she was looking at the April 10, 2023, City Council meeting where they revised Chapter 202 containing the Park Commission responsibilities, and then at the Council Retreat they directed staff to assign the Park Commission as the reviewing body for the IPM.

Council Liaison Gorham stated that he did not want the Commission thinking that they were set up for failure with the IPM oversight and believes that they could have further discussion on that and make sure that the Commission has the necessary tools to do this work.

Chair Wenner stated that she would like to know if the Council felt it would be a good idea to have the kind of report she had described earlier and reiterated that Public Works has been telling the Commission what they have been doing rather than the Commission monitoring them.

Council Liaison Gorham noted that the IPM was something that he had worked on before he left the Council in 2022 and felt that the Council serving since that time wanted the Park Commission to lead the process, but it sounded like they had not provided enough of a structure ahead of time. He stated that he felt that the Commission could go ahead and write up the report and felt it would be fair to point out that they were getting information, after the fact, from Public Works. He stated that he felt it would be fair to point out that the Commission had been tasked with this but instead of being engaged in the process were simply receiving reports.

Commissioner Bahneman stated that to be fair to Public Works, she wondered if all the changes have made it unclear to everyone how things were actually supposed to be going.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech explained that he would take this input back to City staff and try to get a clear understanding of what the expectations actually were.

Chair Wenner noted that she felt that they did have a strong IPM maintenance plan in place, but noted that, for example, they do not hear from Davey Tree, and do not know what they were doing, for example, with their treatment for Emerald Ash Borer.

Council Liaison Gorham asked if Public Works Director Morreim was the one who did all the ordering for the products and directed staff on what to do to.

Chair Wenner stated that she believed he would be the one that would do that but, would not be involved in what Davey Tree or Greener Blade was doing or using.

Park and Recreation Manager Czech stated that it was clear that the Commission needed more clarification and structure surrounding their duties related to the IPM.

B. 2025 Arctic Fever Event Preview

Parks and Recreation Manager Czech stated that Arctic Fever would be taking place on January 17, 2025, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the SCEC. He noted that traditionally it has been a two-day event that included outdoor activities at Freeman Park, but with the lack of snow, they had to cancel that portion of the event. He stated that it was unfortunate because this year, the City had partnered with Minnetonka Community Ed to do their family chase which he had been hoping would drum up excitement for the event. He gave a brief overview of the events planned for the diminished event and noted that the title sponsor for the event was Lucky's Station and also had Gold Level sponsors with Bolton & Menk and the Excelsior American Legion Post 259 and Bronze Level sponsors that included Mediacom and New Horizon Academy. He stated that the City took over the coloring contest and submissions would be on display at the event in order for people to vote on their favorite and explained that the winning entry would have their art printed on the 2026 Arctic Fever materials. He explained that the City had also introduced a 'Name a Snowplow Contest' and noted that submissions can only be submitted at Arctic Fever. He noted that voting on the City website for the winner submission will be done from January 20 through January 31, 2025, and the winner would have the opportunity to have their picture taken with the plow and also enjoy a ride in it. He noted that the City of Tonka Bay would also be hosting some Arctic Fever events on January 18, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Country Club Lanes.

5. OLD BUSINESS

6. STAFF AND LIAISON REPORTS / UPDATES

A. City Council

Council Liaison Gorham gave a brief overview of the discussion and decisions made at the January 13, 2025 Council meeting.

B. Staff

Park and Recreation Manager Czech noted that the Council had approved the Field Use Policy at last night's meeting and it was being sent out to the associations. He stated that the City's warming houses were up and running again.

7. ADJOURN

Commissioner Garske moved to adjourn the Park Commission Meeting of January 14, 2025 at 8:35 p.m., Commissioner Bahneman seconded the motion. Motion carried 3-0.