

**MINUTES
PARKS & TRAILS COMMISSION MEETING
NOVEMBER 10, 2020**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Anderson, Don Heinonen, Wendy Kvale, and Tonya Prim

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tim Faver

COUNCIL & BOARD REPRESENTATIVE:

CITY STAFF & OTHERS: Audrey Thayer, Dan Jourdain, Marcia Larson, Jamie Anderson, and Lolly Randall

CALL TO ORDER:

Wendy Kvale called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

The commissioners introduced themselves to new City Councilor elect Audrey Thayer.

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA: No amendments were made.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 13, 2020 MEETING MINUTES:

Motion by Heinonen, seconded by Prim, to approve the October 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes as written. Motion carried.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT UPDATE:

Jamie Anderson, Recreation Coordinator, presented the annual recreation update through a slideshow presentation. Jamie summarized the shift in programming from in person to virtual and “on your own/household” programs as a result of the Covid pandemic. These changes included using social media to communicate with the community and recreation program users, creating videos to instruct how to use the parks in a safe manner, and programming virtual runs and challenges. The biggest adjustment was changing in person kids-in-motion day camps to rec on the go boxes. This gave parents and participants a box of fun activities and programs to do at home or in the park. This program ran for 13 weeks over the summer. The fall and winter rec on the go boxes have been changed based on feedback from participants and include activities kids can do on their own without adult assistance. There have been more family programs and activities that can be done in the parks or at home. Currently working on reading programs and nature programs. There were some free activities at several parks this year. Visit Bemidji partnered with the Recreation Department to create videos promoting the parks and recreation programming in a safe and responsible manner highlighting Covid-19 guidances. Yoga was the only in person program offered this year as it could be implemented in a socially distance and safe manner for participants.

Park and Recreation has presented at two virtual conferences this year. Jamie is attending meetings to gather ideas how to safely do programs during the covid pandemic.

This year the Recreation Department is working on sponsorship packets and will be catered towards the programming with Covid 19. The Department purchased the rec on the go van and

hired a full time programming assistant and continues working on the need for a recreation facility. Jamie reviewed some of the future programs and reviewed the fundraisers that were successful this year. The recreation calendars are now available for purchase.

Jamie explained the esport program. Paul Bunyan communications will help sponsor the event. This program provides a safe and monitored platform for kids to play video/computer games.

The strategic plan will be looked at again in December.

COVID-UPDATES

Distance Learning Care Survey

The Recreation Department is considering the communities need for child care/distance learning care if the school district switches to full distance learning which seems likely based on the rise in covid cases. Marcia met with the school district to determine the timeline, need, and if the school district was interested in a partnership. As a result, a Learning Care Survey was sent to parents and was posted on the Recreation Facebook. The survey results confirmed there is a need for childcare for K -5th grade if schools go to full distant learning. Discussed options at the Sanford Event Center to see if there could be programming done there. Marcia submitted a pre-application to the northwest MN foundation for possible grant funding for this program.

Discussed the difference with this program versus the program the school district holds for essential workers if schools go to full distant learning. Discussed if Human Services funding through the County could be used by participants. Regulations are different for the Recreation Department compared to a child care center. Looking at a two tier pricing for this program to make it more affordable. The city is just providing assistance to the teachers/schools and space for students. The capacity would be pods up to 15 people, including staff.

Warming Houses/Outdoor Rinks

Marcia is working on the preparedness plan to open the outdoor rinks and warming houses. Trying to extend the hours for the rinks and to flood them sooner than in the past. Marcia reviewed the plan with a drawing of City Park. The warming house would only hold 17 people and they would have to wear masks so looking at adding outdoor seating. There would be one entrance and one exit to the warming house. The preparedness plan would include cleaning of surfaces and restrooms but would not open the concessions. The plan also includes utilizing the picnic shelter where people could put on their skates so they wouldn't need to go into the warming house.

Nymore outdoor rink is more challenging because the warming house is smaller and can only hold 11 people. Will need to place more benches outdoors. If the public does not adhere to the preparedness plans, the warming houses will need to be closed but they can still use the outdoor rinks.

North Country Park trails will be marked for snow shoeing. The winter disc golf course is up and the Montebello ski trails will also be available.

Discussed using the lake for ice rink. Marcia discourages taking city equipment out onto the lake. The lakeside parks are heavily used for other activities. Discussed putting a rink at Cameron Park once the restroom building there is replaced.

Budgets

Marcia reviewed the Recreation Department budget. It is revenue and tax based, the Recreation Department goal is mainly financed with revenue. This year the recreation budget is running at a \$15,000 deficit because the revenue has been so low.

The Parks and Forestry budget is separate from the Recreation department budget. There was savings in personnel cost but some of the operating supplies were the same due to covid. The liability insurance was \$20,000 over. Budget will be over around \$55,000 between both departments.

Discussed the job duties of parks seasonal staff. They do upkeep in the parks that require non-skilled job assignments. Discussed using the CEP program or other similar programs.

NATURAL PLAYGROUND

Project Update

Marcia gave an update on the natural playground. The Eagle Scout, Aaron Heger has completed his bridges, the trails have been installed, and the native seeding was completed. Construction documents are done and once financing is in place, the project will be reviewed by City Council and placed for out for bids.

COMMISSIONER UPDATES

Wendy Kvale questioned the black debris that has washed up along south shore. Marcia stated that it is most likely wood chips and debris/silt. In spring staff removes the wood debris from the beach but there isn't much that can be done with it. Mostly it washes back into the lake.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Mountain View Estates

Marcia explained the Mountain View Estates is a project that Mitch Ratio is developing and it includes park space with amenities. Marcia will provide a map/location at the next meeting. The project time frame is within five years. There are trails in the development, looking at a sledding hill, warming house and a play field. They are working with a landscape architect from Karvako Engineering.

Policies

The City Assistant City Attorney is still reviewing the Advertising and Sponsorship policies. Once their review is complete, they will come back to the Parks & Recreation Commission.

Commission Recruitment/Appointments

Marcia reached out to Gwenia Fiskevold Gould, who had submitted an application previously, and she is still interested in joining the Parks & Recreation Commission. The City Clerk has made some of the recommended changes to the online application and openings will be posted on the City's website and Facebook.

Motion by Heinonen, seconded by Prim, to approve Gewnia Fiskevold Gould's application to the Parks & Recreation Commission Board. Motion carried.

Marcia will take this to the City council for approval at their November 16th meeting.

Signage

Marcia discussed the Bemidji hashtag sign that is located at Paul Bunyan Park. This sign was purchased and placed by Visit Bemidji. This is a temporary sign and will move around the community. The Parks Department has not heard negative comments, just more questions as to who paid for it and if it is placed permanently. The Commission discussed the temporary location and that they noted people taking photos at the park on the sign. The Commission discussed if the sign is proposed to be permanent in Paul Bunyan Park, it needs to come back for a discussion/approval.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Prim, seconded by Anderson, to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Lolly Randall
Administrative Assistant