

**MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
MAY 11, 2021**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Anderson, Gwenia Fiskevold Gould, Tonya Prim, Bethany Wesley, Tim Faver, Don Heinonen, and Wendy Kvale

MEMBERS ABSENT:

COUNCIL & BOARD REPRESENTATIVE: Dan Jourdain

CITY STAFF & OTHERS: Marcia Larson, Park and Recreation Director, Bobbi Karpinski, Deputy City Clerk, Josh Peterson, Executive Director Visit Bemidji, Brady Laudon, Assistant Director Visit Bemidji.

CALL TO ORDER:

Tonya Prim called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m.

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA:

No amendments were made

APPROVAL OF APRIL 13, 2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Heinonen, to approve the April 13, 2021 Meeting Minutes as written. Motion carried.

VISIT BEMIDJI REQUEST – HASHTAG SIGN

Visit Bemidji has requested permission to place the #BEMIDJI monument in Paul Bunyan Park from May 27, 2021 through August 8, 2021. As event restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are being lifted more events are happening and the monument has been requested in various locations throughout the community. Peterson explains the advertising and momentum of the monument has made a huge impact not only locally but statewide in boosting the presence of our community.

Jourdain reports from the council's perspective, concerns of safety and drainages issue in the plaza. Commission members also expressed concerns that this will encourage more foot traffic in this area as well. Larson stated the construction zone is unknown at this time and if it becomes an issue we ask Visit Bemidji to move it, which Peterson agreed to.

Larson presented the topic to the Public Arts Commission and received comments revolving around the permanence of the monument. The Arts Commission appreciated being asked as part of their role is to take into consideration the aesthetics of the entire area.

Larson stated the Parks and Recreation Commission has the authority to approve this request. However, with previous concerns and discussions surrounding this monument, it may be wise to allow for the Council to ask questions, provide input and have final approval.

Motion by Faver, seconded by Heinonen to forward the recommendation to the allow placement of the #Bemidji Monument in Paul Bunyan Park from May 27, 2021 to August 8, 2021 to the council and be placed on the consent agenda for final approval. Motion passed unanimously.

COMMERCIAL OPERATOR PERMIT

Larson provided background information stating over the years community members tend to conduct a wide variety of commercial activities within the parks which the current ordinance doesn't allow it. Several years ago staff had noticed an uptick in these types of for profit activities. However, staff didn't see the need to move forward with licensing and permits as enforcement and other concerns created issues. Recently, COVID-19 has changed the amount of outdoor activities and the number of requests to use the parks has increased as well.

Staff has discussed issues surrounding this such as scheduling, user conflict, using the parks to create a profit, issuing permits, enforcement, additional wear and tear on the parks and have since started to research how other cities are managing these issues as they are not unique to Bemidji. The questions for the commission is how do encourage people to use the parks allowing these activities to exist and pay for the additional work it creates.

Larson continued by stating that we know people are doing these activities now and are not asking. Staff is looking for direction on how to handle these situation where people are trying to follow procedure and those who are not.

Consensus of the commission is to continue the conversation, exploring options in response to the increased use of the public parks and facilities. Observe park use over the next couple of months, keep track of calls, continuing researching other cities and see if there is interest from the community too. Look at a possible policies and procedures and issuance of permits. Larson noted any fees would need to be set by city council after we recommend them along with the policy. If ordinances need to be amended a discussion with the City attorney would need to take place.

PAUL BUNYAN PARK/PLAZA/PAUL AND BABE

Larson reported Rob Jensen of Jensen Conservation will begin work starting Thursday, May 13, 2021 on Paul and Babe stating the weather has held up the project. An insurance claim has been submitted and a detective is handling the case for the damage to Paul's arm. No time frame on the completion until the Jensen is able to assess how much damage occurred.

Discussion of the drainage issues in the plaza continues looking to see if anyone can be held accountable for it. The city attorney is looking at the design and intent of the construction project and what impacts were tied directly to Babe. Difficulties lie in trying to track who is responsible six years later, what the statute of limitations are and the cost involved in finding out who would be responsible.

COMMISSIONER UPDATES

Bethany Wesley reported the Tourist Information Center (TIC) committee met and agreed to re-open the building sharing costs equally between Visit Bemidji and the City. The goal is to be open around Memorial weekend. Larson stated the recruitment process has begun along with looking

for volunteers to supplement paid staff. Wesley stated discussions will continue for additional uses and if money should be invested for next summer to do rentals out of the building.

Larson stated she is working with the Sustainability office at BSU seeking 10 bikes to be available at the TIC for rentals yet this summer.

DIRECTORS UPDATE

Larson stated the council approved the quote for North Country Park and staff will meet with Frenzel Construction to discuss the timeline of construction. She also met with an eagle scout last week and will be planning a build day soon.

The Park and Recreation Department has taken over the special event applications and working through the constant changes in COVID-19 restrictions.

Larson updated the commission on staffing stating. Aaron Weeks has started as the Parks Superintendent, he is excited to be here and will hopefully be able to come to the next meeting to meet everyone. Amber Reisetter, Parks Programming and Special Events assistant has started in the Recreation Department and seasonal staffing is a concern as the parks department is very short staffed and there is the concern about meeting the expectations for look and feel of the parks.

Next meeting June 8, 2021 will take place at Diamond Point Park.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Fiskevold Gould , seconded by Anderson, to adjourn the meeting at 6:12 p.m.
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Bobbi Karpinski
Deputy City Clerk