

MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
NOVEMBER 9, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Gwenia Fiskevold Gould, Don Heinonen, Tonya Prim, and Bethany Wesley

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tom Anderson, Tim Faver

COUNCIL & BOARD REPRESENTATIVE: Dan Jourdain

CITY STAFF & OTHERS: Bob Whelan, Kate Steffens, Marcia Larson, Aaron Weeks, and Lolly Randall

CALL TO ORDER:

Tonya Prim called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA:

No amendments were made.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 12, 2021 MEETING MINUTES:

Motion by Heinonen, seconded by Wesley, to approve the October 12, 2021 Meeting Minutes as written. Motion carried.

BEMIDJI PICKLEBALL ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION

Bob Whelan and Kate Steffens, members of the Bemidji Pickleball Association, shared their vision for pickleball in Bemidji. The Association helped with the purchase, installation, and take down of the screens around the pickleball courts at Algoma Park. They shared a brief video that helps people get an idea of what pickleball is. The video showed the variety of ages playing the game and several players gave a little testimony of how they enjoy it and the benefits they've gained from playing. It is a game that can be played without injury and that is why many older folks enjoy playing pickleball. It started as a game for retirees but has become more popular among all ages. It is a game that is played across the country, there are pros and tournaments now. It is an easy game to learn and is now played in the elementary physical education.

There are 85 members in the Bemidji Pickleball Association of all different ages and they have many families also playing. They feel they have outgrown the facility at Algoma Park and stated there is a lot of maintenance that needs to be done on the courts.

They are looking for a home that would accommodate their needs of an indoor and outdoor facility. They would like to start with 8 courts because this would allow them to hold tournaments. They believe holding tournaments would also help the city financially.

They are willing to pay \$250,000 to build the courts and provide fencing but they need a home to put the courts and believe that the city needs to own the facility. The facility needs to include

restrooms and have adequate parking. They would like to break ground on a new facility next spring. They could continue to use the 6 courts at Algoma Park and once the new facility is complete, they can work on fixing these courts. They think Algoma would work but they also suggested repurposing the baseball field at North Country Park since that park already has restrooms and parking. At some point, they would like an indoor facility to play pickleball year round. They are also considering location at the proposed Wellness Center if that is built.

Discussed if there is enough room at Algoma to build more courts and put in a restroom facility and adequate parking lot. A concept plan was designed for building these amenities at Algoma Park but the funding is not available. There is also a concept plan for North Country Park that included tennis courts, again there was no funding for it.

Discussed that they play on the 6 courts when weather is good and they are played on from 6pm until 8pm. and there are people waiting to get on the court. There are other groups that play in the morning into the afternoon. Most players play every day when the weather is nice.

They asked what the next step would be and the Commissioner stated that they will be working on the strategic plan and will definitely consider their requests but a strategic park plan needs to be developed first. All agreed they appreciated the partnership especially the financial piece.

Discussed that the city would be responsible for the maintenance of the courts. They believe that the city could hold tournaments and make money that would help finance the maintenance costs. This would also allow the city to keep the courts available to the general public.

Tournaments could run once a year or monthly if the facility was the correct size.

DIRECTOR UPDATES

Director Larson explained that due the higher than expected cost of the one proposal for strategic planning services that a Request for Proposals should be drafted and sent out to consultants local and statewide as well as posted. The RFP will be sent out this week and a special Parks & Recreation Commission meeting can be scheduled at the end of November/beginning of December with the Commission's recommendation going to City Council in December for final action.

Staffing – Director Larson shared that the department is looking to hire seasonal/part-time help.

Halloween events were very successful.

Grants – Director Larson submitted a grant request to Beltrami County Development Fund Grant Program to finance rental equipment including surrey bicycles and side by side recumbent bikes. The Recreation Department submitted a pre-application to Bernicks for rental ice skates and was invited for the full application process.

There is still an opening for a Parks and Recreation Commissioner.

Commissioner Wesley volunteered to help Jamie, Recreation Coordinator, on November 21st for the Birthday Party at the TIC and dress up as Babe.

PARKS DEPARTMENT UPDATE – AARON WEEKS

Parks Superintendent Weeks gave an update on the Lake Boulevard project. He is working on getting a grant to help cover the costs to restore the area. He is still working with Lions Club and plans to hire the Conservation Corp again to remove the buckthorn. The plan is to bring back the trail and include signage which the Historical Center is helping with this. Superintendent Weeks would like to change the name old Indian trail. He is also working on getting tree grants for the other parks.

The art benches are going to be placed on the bump outs along T.H. 197 and one at Paul Bunyan Park. There are a total of six benches.

COMMISSIONER UPDATES

Commissioner Fiskevold Gould inquired about putting lights up at the Nymore Dog Park or parking lot. Director Larson said that there is not any power at that end of the park so anticipates it would be an expensive project, but will follow up on costs as this has been brought up by others. She stated that there is not any power at the south shore marina either and that area could benefit from lighting as well.

Director Larson will thank the Bemidji Pickleball Association for coming to the meeting and that they will be included in the process when the Commission begins the strategic planning process.

Discussed the use of the baseball field at North Country Park and that it is getting more use and there has been discussion on tournament games in the upcoming seasons.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Fiskevold Gould, seconded by Heinonen, to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m.
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Lolly Randall
Administrative Assistant