

**MINUTES  
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING  
DECEMBER 14, 2021**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tom Anderson, Tim Faver, Don Heinonen, and Tonya Prim

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Bethany Wesley and Gwenia Fiskevold Gould

**COUNCIL & BOARD REPRESENTATIVE:** Dan Jourdain

**CITY STAFF & OTHERS:** Joe Czapiewski, Jillian Reiner - via Zoom, CT Marhula, Ted Will, Andrea Kent, 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 NOVEMBER 9, 2021 SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES AND  
DECEMBER 2, 2021 MEETING MINUTES:**

**Motion by Faver, seconded by Anderson, to approve the November 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes and the December 2, 2021 Special Meeting Minutes as written. Motion carried.**

**2022 MEETING SCHEDULE**

Director Larson explained that there are three Parks and Recreation meeting dates (February 9, 2022, August 9, 2022, and November 8, 2022) that conflict with election dates. Discussed moving the February and August meetings to another date because there will most likely be business to address and remove the November meeting from the 2022 schedule.

**Motion by Faver, seconded by Heinonen, to move February's meeting to Tuesday, February 1, 2022 and move August's meeting to Tuesday, August 3, 2022, and remove the November meeting from the 2022 schedule. Motion carried.**

**RIDGEWAY NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE**

Director Larson explained that she and Commissioners Tonya Prim and Bethany Wesley met with CT Marhula and Ted Will to discuss adding additional amenities at North County Park such as a splash pad and a community center. They informed CT and Ted that the Parks & Recreation Commission is planning on conducting a public engagement meeting as part of the process to develop an updated Strategic Parks and Recreation Planning Document.

CT Marhula, Ted Will, and Andrea Kent were in attendance at the meeting to address the Parks & Recreation Commissioners. Andrea Kent, from the Boys and Girls Club, explained that she, Ted Will and CT Marhula are a part of a small group of Rotary Club members that have formed the

Rotary Neighborhood Initiative (RNI). Their efforts are to connect with the Ridgeway residence and build community connections with outreach programs. Andrea stated that they are interested in creating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Parks & Recreation Department to work together on creating and developing North Country Park. Andrea stated that before talking to the entire Rotary Club, they needed to know if the Parks & Recreation Commission was even interested in a MOU.

CT Marhula asked the Parks and Recreation Commissioners to direct Director Larson to go out for an RFP for one or two splash pads with one being located at North Country Park. CT stated that this group needed an RFP for a splash pad to take to their donors when requesting financial donations for the project. He stated that they have a tentative agreement with the owner of the trailer park located on 30<sup>th</sup> Street, to put in a double wide trailer that can be used by the RNI, or law enforcement, or the Park's Department, whichever would be appropriate. CT stated that his group would also like to see a community center built. He said that there is someone working on getting a grant to place a safety shelter from tornadoes at the trailer park and maybe it could also be used as a community center.

Ted Will discussed the high crime rate in the Ridgewood Apartment neighborhood. He explained that Sanford Health provided the Rotary Club with an apartment in the complex and they have been using it to develop communication in the neighborhood. Ted stated that he would like a community center built in North Country Park. Ted mentioned that he also would like to see a COP house program that is run by the Police Department. He stated they have them in St. Paul and St. Cloud to help to decrease crime in neighborhoods. Ted is planning to visit one of these COP houses and learn more about how they work. They would like space in the park to build on.

Commissioner Fiskevold Gould sent an email sharing her thoughts on the information supplied by the RNI group. Her email will be filed in the records with these minutes.

The Commissioners agreed on the importance of working with the RNI project and want to see them at the table when developing the strategic plan.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION**

Joe Czapiewski of JFC Strategies reviewed the process for citizen engagement and some of the tools that will be used. Joe introduced Jillian Reiner who is a Landscape Architect with Hagstrom Engineering. She has been working with Joe for the past five years and has significant parks planning experience in Minnesota.

Joe stated that the RFP was for an Equity Based Strategic Plan and he asked the Commissioners what equity meant to them in regard to the Strategic Park and Recreation plan. Some ideas shared were that everyone has a voice, that the plan is inclusive. It is important to address how to reach the people who don't attend community based meetings, how to reach the underserved. Commissioners expressed concern that they want this process to be thorough because they do not want to end up with another situation that happened at the plaza at Paul Bunyan Park. Discussed using an incentive program to get people to participate in surveys, identify barriers that keep people from using the parks and/or the programs. Equity is something that has to continually be strived for. The plan can identify ways or actions to improve equity in service delivery and access to parks and facilities. Discussion included scholarships, inclusion of minorities in programs and access to facilities.

Commissioners asked Joe how to do the public meeting or open house to ensure participation. This is typically held farther into the plan but may want to move it more towards the front of the process. Joe explained that the in-person open house model is virtually over, especially with Covid. Joe suggests using technology to create surveys to get real answers. Discussed using social pin point program in this process. Using partners like Bi-cap, Boys and Girls Club, put posters at the Ridgeway apartments that have a QR code that could be scanned and take people to a survey. Joe stated that once this information is gathered, it is easier to create focus groups.

Discussed the two focus groups – one is the current users groups/events and the other group is people who have not participated either in programs or using the parks. Commissioners agreed using social media is an ideal way to access more people. Discussed having park ambassadors for each park and they can help reach out to those living in the park's neighborhood. Discussed providing food at the meetings as an incentive to attend as well as holding meetings in convenient locations and/or providing transportation or childcare.

Discussed some of the items/questions that would be on the survey. Some of those include:

- Knowledge of the parks, do they use the park – why/why not.
- Who they use the park with, family or friends.
- How they use the park, trending uses.
- What amenities would they like to see in the park, what are their interest such as ice skating, sledding, etc., expectations.
- How they get to the park.
- Ask questions about specific parks - what amenities did they enjoy or not enjoy at that park.
- What communication type works in getting information to people about recreation programs.

Joe suggested setting a time in early January to look at the service tools that will be used to capture the necessary information on the surveys. It was decided to hold this meeting after the regular meeting on January 11, 2022.

## **DIRECTOR UPDATE**

Director Larson informed the Commissioners that the City Council will be approving budgets at their December 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. There is an MOU on the table between Visit Bemidji and the City regarding the TIC. City Council discussed the ARP – American Rescue Plan and there is some interest in funding some park projects. Discussed lighting at the dog park in Nymore. Vista North Association is interested in a dog park at North Country Park and they are willing to contribute to the costs. The new fishing pier was delivered today and it will replace the old fishing pier at Paul Bunyan Park. It was a partnership with the DNR. Looking for warming house attendants.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Heinonen, seconded by Faver, to adjourn the meeting at 6:15 p.m. Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,

Lolly Randall  
Administrative Assistant