

**PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey Park and Recreation Commission conducted a regular meeting on August 10, 2017, at the Lake Itasca Trailhead, 15700 Okapi Street NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Commission Members Present: Chair Shane Bennett
 Commissioner Russell Bayer
 Commissioner Jennifer Leistico
 Commissioner Brandon Sis
 Commissioner Jon Trappen

Commission Members Absent: Commissioner Andrew Fyten (excused)
 Commissioner Charles Tchuinkwa

Also Present: Parks & Asst. Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood
 Lydia Major, LHB Consultant
 Bruce Jacobsen, Consultant

INTRODUCTION OF LAKE ITASCA TRAILHEAD

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood gave a brief background of the Lake Itasca Trailhead, where the meeting was being held. The Trailhead is within a 1,200-acre conservation development, and the trail corridor was mapped out as part of the original Northfork Planned Unit Development agreement. This conservation area is preserved in perpetuity, which is a great achievement for the City of Ramsey.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated there was concern and opposition from residents of the Northfork neighborhood regarding the trail development. After the trail was completed, residents of the neighborhood connected to the trail from the south contacted the City to say how much they enjoyed having it in their neighborhood, and thanked the City for its conception and development.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the area in which the Commission was holding their meeting is also within a 7-acre area that is designated to be developed into a 'Monarch Trail'. Lake Itasca, and adjoin areas is an area of great beauty, surrounded by a forest succession from the wetland, with aspen succession to mature Oaks.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bennett welcomed the meeting attendees to Lake Itasca Trailhead. He called the Park and Recreation Commission Meeting to order at 6:36 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Commissioner Trappen, seconded by Commissioner Sis, to approve the Park and Recreation Commission meeting agenda as presented.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chair Bennett, Commissioners Trappen, Sis, Bayer, Leistico. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioners Fyten, Tchuinkwa

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Leistico, seconded by Commissioner Bayer, to approve the following Park and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting Minutes:

- 1) Park and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting Minutes dated June 8, 2017.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chair Bennett, Commissioners Leistico, Bayer, Sis, and Trappen. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioners Fyten, Tchuinkwa.

5. COMMISSION BUSINESS

5.01: Follow-Up on Visioning Exercise and Discuss Objectives – Parks Master Plan

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the City Council kicked off its Master Parks and Trail Plan visioning exercise at its June Regular Meeting, and reviewed goals and objectives related to Chapter 10 of the Comprehensive Plan. He added the Master Plan exercise and Comprehensive Plan are occurring simultaneously and are very similar, so it makes sense to work on them at the same time. He noted City Staff are seeking consensus from the Park and Recreation Commission on elements of the larger Master Plan exercise. He introduced Bruce Jacobson, a consultant from the University of Minnesota, and invited him to address the Commission.

Mr. Jacobson stated the City of Ramsey's original Master Plan included a well-connected park system that would highlight the character and natural assets of the City's parks and trails. He added, in preparation for the Master Plan exercise, the initial statements in the Master Plan have been expanded and refined for the Commission's consideration, and will end up becoming a front piece for the document, casting the overall vision for the City's Master Parks and Trail Plan.

Mr. Jacobson stated first item for discussion is the Visions and Objectives Statement. He added the concept of maintaining the rural character of the area has come up repeatedly. He noted there will be plenty of time to review and check back in as the plan coalesces over the next few months, and any comments or feedback can be directed to Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood.

Chair Bennett stated he read through the packet and looked at the slides, and he likes the additions. He added it expands upon several of the key points and has a good feel to it.

Mr. Jacobson stated it is just a beginning but hopefully will end up being something the City can use to give residents a chance to respond to the concepts.

Mr. Jacobson stated the second item for discussion is the key word exercise, and he read many of the words that the Commission had talked about, including safety, inspirational, diversity, playful, fundable, beautiful, connected, nature-full. He added it is not necessary to focus on making the list shorter, but to try to tease out what are the primary concepts and goals that should be inherent in the Parks and Trail system.

Mr. Jacobson stated the third item relates to the concept of taking the one-word ideas and expanding them into objective statements. He added this is the first step in making the Master Plan a cohesive and formal document, and he encourages the creation of a “top ten list”. He gave a few examples:

Connected = improved connectivity

Beautiful = promote natural beauty

Natural = preservation of natural resources

Fundable = Cost effective design

Playful – fun and diverse recreational activities

Accessible – ensure that everyone can enjoy

Used – updated programming that people want

Mr. Jacobson stated the challenge is to find a balance within the plan that makes it unique – expressing the goals and objectives that are important to the residents of Ramsey.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated goals and objectives are often seen as interchangeable, but there are also specific strategies necessary to achieve them. He added, for instance, the preservation of natural areas is an important goal, but it transcends Parks and Recreation and relates to the overall goals for the City as expressed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated, related to the cost-effective category, a Capital Improvement Plan is being developed to include bonding and other financing tools. He stressed the importance of being specific about how to achieve goals and objectives, and how far the City might want to go in terms of Park Dedication and how much it can impact new development.

Lydia Major, LHB Consulting, stated the list of objectives may seem vague, but they are useful for making future decisions about things that are not anticipated.

Mr. Jacobson stressed the importance of keeping in mind that this is a starting point, and a way to tease out the crucial threads that tell a story that is unique to Ramsey, by creating a powerful statement about what the Master Parks and Trail Plan is setting out to accomplish.

Chair Bennett asked whether formal action is required.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the Commission can continue to refine and develop the key points of the Master Plan, and consider ways of reconciling these concepts with the Comprehensive Plan.

5.02: Approve Parks and Recreation Master Plan Survey

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated Master Plan survey was disseminated for Commissioners to complete and provide comments. The goal is to get feedback related to the survey, and any other comments that the Commissioners might have. He added only three Commissioners took the survey. He stressed the importance of having all seven Commissioners complete the survey.

Ms. Major, who is administering the survey, stated she will be going on vacation on August 21, and she would like to close the survey that day.

Chair Bennett stated the survey was written well, and some of the questions could be expanded, so it forced me to make difficult choices. He added there was a good mix of activities. He noted, on the first page, there no option to select that you have lived in Ramsey for 12 years.

Ms. Major said an internal goal can be set about how many people we want to respond to the survey. She added a good variety of respondents is important, rather than a majority from a specific group who will all have the same responses. She stressed the importance of keeping in mind that it is a statistically invalid survey. She noted the survey is long and very specific, and it would be better if it could be shortened and answers could be more general.

Commissioner Bayer asked whether Item 10 could have a map with parks locations, as some residents might not know where parks are, or what they are called. He added the list of parks is long, and some parks are on it twice.

Chair Bennett requested the addition of an open field, "Other", for residents who might call a park something other than its official name.

Commissioner Sis stated the list of parks does not appear to be in any order.

Commissioner Leistico stated she thinks there is actually two lists, in alphabetical order, back to back.

Ms. Major agreed to consolidate the two lists and remove duplicates. She asked whether any activities or programs should be included.

Chair Bennett stated the survey should instruct residents to pick three activities, which forces them to prioritize.

Commissioner Sis stated he likes the inclusion of geocaching.

Ms. Major stated that is a very cost-effective activity.

Commissioner Sis asked whether trails along roads can be included. He added he was looking for a trail that runs through Brookfield, but it is not listed.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated he has not seen the survey, but they could probably be included as a category. He agreed to provide a list of trails data for inclusion on the survey.

Commissioner Sis stated question 28 is difficult, as it is not easy to project what parks and trails amenities will be available in 2028.

Ms. Major stated that question is asked several times in different ways, to tease out where priorities lie, and get people thinking about different things, and providing answers based on personal preference.

Chair Bennett asked that the Commissioners all complete the survey by August 21, 2017. He added no other action is required.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated Ms. Major described the survey as not being statistically valid, since anyone can take it. He added a statistically valid City-wide survey is conducted every 2 years, so the timing is very appropriate.

5.03: Discuss Park's Precedent Plan Comparisons

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated this discussion will help develop the format and content of the Master Plan, as well as the concepts and complexity as it relates to community engagement. Stakeholders and venues will be identified, and the Commission should make sure to ask the right questions of the right people, and get a good cross section of the community.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated City Staff will have intercept Boards at Thursday's concert at The Draw. He hopes to reach the demographic groups of older residents as well as young families.

Ms. Major stated the community engagement plan will facilitate ways for the Commission to include residents in the engagement process. She added she will use the plan to record what she has learned from the Commission, and provide results for evaluation. She noted no matter how much the City Council and Commissions engage, how the survey is advertised, how many events and open houses are held, there will be someone who says they didn't know about it. She noted the City can have a record of all the opportunities for public engagement.

Ms. Major continued, regarding engagement targets and tools, she wants to understand who needs to be reached and what needs to be learned, and then tools and schedule can be formalized. She added broad categories of people to engage would include organizations, businesses, and government entities, and specific people within those categories would be residents, participants, and members. She asked the Commissioners who they would like to reach.

Chair Bennett stated sports groups are a good place to start as they are one of the most vocal groups. He added Ramsey's two sports organizations are Northern Lights Soccer Club and Anoka Ramsey Athletic Association. He noted he and Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood connect with their leadership often.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated Police and Fire representatives are included on the list. Police participation is obviously relevant and he interacts with his colleagues in the Police Department regularly. He added he can attend their department meetings, and get their feedback about parks safety and residents' perceptions of safety.

Ms. Major stated it is beneficial to meet with the Police Chief or whoever is in charge of Parks Safety, to ask what they see that can be done differently or any changes they think are necessary.

Commissioner Sis asked whether neighboring communities could be contacted to see what they have in place.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that is usually done at the City Staff level, and the draft Comprehensive Plan is required to be sent to neighboring communities for comment and feedback.

Commissioner Sis asked how to draw people out if they are homebound, to get their opinions, and get feedback from both park users and non-users.

Ms. Major stated that is one of the hardest things to get in any community. Residents with access to a computer can be reached via social media, but those that don't have access to a computer, it is almost impossible. She added sometimes cities can reach them through delivery of meals, or

social services. She noted, however, there is a cost-benefit ratio – obviously their opinion matters, but it can be costly.

Mr. Jacobson stated churches and groceries stores might be a good place to capture them.

Commissioner Bayer stated he does not get responses from residents in certain demographics when he tries to reach out to residents via social media.

Ms. Major stated it is difficult to reach demographics that are relationship-driven. The Commission should determine whether those targets are key to improving how the parks system works, and use techniques and relationships to reach them. She stressed that it is unrealistic to expect to have a full response from them.

Commissioner Trappen stated Homeowner's Associations could be a good resource.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood agreed that is an excellent idea, as there are probably 30 or more Associations in Ramsey.

Ms. Major asked whether there is a Homeowner's Association contact list.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood agreed to provide that to Ms. Major, although some contacts are property managers who are not onsite.

Ms. Major asked about social services providers.

Commissioner Trappen stated church groups might be a resource.

Chair Bennett stated there are a few predominant church communities in Ramsey.

Mr. Jacobson asked whether there are other youth organizations that are not sports-related.

Chair Bennett stated the Lions Club sponsors many community events.

Commissioner Trappen stated there is a local 4H chapter.

Ms. Leistico stated the Girl Scouts are a good place to start, she added she is a troop leader and they have monthly meetings. She added her troop uses Central Park for their meetings, and she offered to be a contact.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated troops and their members are often recognized at City meetings. He added Scout Troops will have ideas about what they want from the City's parks that would be different than the responses a church group would provide.

Ms. Major stated sometimes at community events she uses giant rolls of paper and crayons or markers, and have kids draw out what they want to see in parks. She added that brings up a lot of great ideas.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated maybe Commissioner Leistico's Troop could be a pilot group, and provide them with a blank map of the City for the Troop to populate with their ideas for future parks amenities.

Ms. Major stated she has Happy Days as an event on the calendar for public interaction. She asked whether there are other local events.

Chair Bennett stated the EDA-sponsored Business Expo was held in April 2017. He added the Police Department holds a safety camp every summer in June for 2nd and 3rd graders that always has great attendance by parents as well as kids.

Commissioner Trappen stated health clubs might be considered.

Chair Bennett stated the challenge is to find residents who have limited mobility. He asked whether Coborn's grocery store is a possibility, or Acapulco Restaurant.

Ms. Major stated restaurants are not generally successful, but libraries work the best.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated City Hall lobby would be a good location for a booth, near the License Bureau, where residents often wait for appointments. He added it could be set up for 4-5 weeks.

Commissioner Sis stated pamphlets could be placed in "little free libraries" throughout the City.

Commissioner Leistico stated the two schools have back-to-school open houses, where there will be a lot of residents.

Ms. Major stated it is difficult to get into classrooms and cafeterias.

Chair Bennett stated Ramsey Elementary has a Family Night that is basically a school picnic, and they might be a little more flexible with allowing an information booth.

Commissioner Sis stated day care providers are a good resource.

Ms. Major asked how they could be reached.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated there is a local Moms Group that would be a good group to connect with, as well as the City's "Adopt-a-Spot" program.

Ms. Major stated it would be helpful to have the Commissioners act as Ambassadors for this initiative, to create more awareness. She added residents respond more when they feel they have a personal connection.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the Commissioners can get the survey out to everyone they know. He added the more responses the survey has, the more credibility the data will hold. He noted it would be disappointing to invest in the process and survey preparation and analysis, but not get adequate responses. He expressed concern that that would be waste of resources.

Commissioner Sis stated another good idea is to reach out to real estate agents in the area, who have an interest in finding out what potential residents want to see in the community.

Ms. Major stated she will provide the precedent plans by email with links, so the Commissioners can begin to make some judgments about their preference. She requested that the Commissioners respond to five different plans, so she can create a template for review next month.

Chair Bennett stated he went through the plans, and he felt some of them were too long. He added one plan was only 18 pages, but it was too fluffy, and he appreciates a good mixture of visual graphics. He noted he felt that in general many of them expressed the same points, although one plan felt more personal and unique, and he liked the terminology that was used. He thinks that was the Apple Valley document.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated some elements of the plan require an executive summary or syllabus, so it is not necessary to read the whole narrative.

5.04: Review Concept Plan for 175-Unit Market Rate Apartment in The COR: Case of Inland Group

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated four development concepts are being presented for consideration for a 4-5 story apartment building. He added Concept Plan C includes 1st floor indoor parking, and that is the developer's preferred option. He noted the preferred concept plan is favorable as it will increase available parking on Sunwood Drive and within the COR corridor, and opens access to municipal areas.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood requested that the Commissioners review the proposed concepts and contact him to provide feedback or if they have any questions. He added he hopes to have a consensus from the Park and Recreation Commission on this issue. He noted City Staff intends to reach out to Ramsey's Boards and Commissions early in the process to obtain comments and feedback.

Chair Bennett stated he does not think it would be ideal to have the proposed athletic center close to Anytime Fitness on Sunwood Drive. He added it might not be a problem, but it is something to consider.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood referred to a Dutch word meaning “shared use”, that describes mechanical barriers that can be lowered across roadways to create open public spaces for outdoor events.

Chair Bennett stated he really likes the idea of a brew pub with direct pedestrian access to the municipal plaza.

5.05: Recommend 2017 Parks Capital Improvement Project(s) – Priority Trail Connections

1. Trott Brook Boardwalk Project

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated a boardwalk trail segment proposed for the Trott Brook Trail system is a recurring Capital Improvement issue. He added City Staff has sought State funding for this project for two years, but requests have been denied as the Trott Brook Trail does not provide a connection to the Regional trail system. He noted the proposed project includes boardwalk, two areas of blacktop at either end of the boardwalk, and a parking area for trail users. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated City Staff advises that the Park and Trails Commission recommend the Trott Brook Boardwalk project to the City Council for their consideration and approval at a project cost not to exceed \$300,000.

2. Neighborhood Trail Link

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated City Staff is requesting consideration of a trail link at the northwest corner of the COR between 149th Lane and 149th Avenue. The trail will provide pedestrian access for the neighborhood to the amenities at the COR as well as making a connection for residents of both areas.

City Staff would draft a letter to be sent to residents of the COR and the benefitting neighborhood providing details and a map depicting the proposed trail connection.

Commissioner Sis asked whether City Staff have determined if there is a need for the trail connection, and if it will be used by residents.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated it is difficult to accurately predict how much the trail will be used. He added the trail connection will improve connectivity within the community, which is an imperative that has been identified in the City’s Strategic Plan. He noted connecting the two neighborhoods seems like a worthwhile return on investment.

Chair Bennett stated the trail connection will also provide pedestrian access to public spaces in the COR for residents who would otherwise have to drive there.

Commissioner Bayer asked for clarification regarding the letter received by City Staff from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. He asked if City Staff have re-applied for funding for the project.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated funding for these types of projects is usually granted to communities that have more opportunities for ensuring regional trail connectivity.

Motion by Commissioner Bayer, seconded by Commissioner Leistico, to forward the following recommendations to the City Council:

1. Recommend City Council approval of the Trott Brook Boardwalk Trail Project at a cost not to exceed \$300,000.
2. Recommend that the City Council direct City Staff to issue notification to benefitting neighborhoods of a potential trail connection at the northwest corner of the COR.

Further discussion: Chair Bennett asked whether the use of funding for the Trott Brook Boardwalk trail project will reduce available funding for future projects. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated funding requirements for future projects are difficult to estimate. He added this expenditure should be viewed as a positive step toward regional trail connectivity and the benefits it will bring to the whole community, rather than a potential cause for lack of funding for future projects.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Chair Bennett, Commissioners Bayer, Leistico, Sis, and Trappen. Voting No: None. Absent: Commissioners Fyten and Tchuinkwa.

6. COMMISSION/STAFF INPUT

6.01: Mayors for Monarchs Pledge

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the City of Ramsey has pledged its commitment to the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors for Monarchs initiative, in which cities and communities take steps to restore habitat for monarch butterflies and pollinators, and provide information for residents about the Monarch butterfly. The location for the project is the Lake Itasca Trailhead, where this meeting is taking place. The project plans include wildflower and native plant restoration, made possible by a funding grant of approximately \$5,000 from the Minnesota Fish and Wildlife division of the Department of Natural Resources.

6.02: Commission Representation at Happy Days

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the City of Ramsey's festival, Happy Days, will be held Saturday, September 9, 2017. He added Happy Days will be a great opportunity for the Park and Recreation Commissioners to interact with residents and get feedback and comments on what aspects of parks and trails are important to them.

Chair Bennett stated he would send out an email request to the Commissioners to come up with a schedule of coverage for Happy Days. He added he and Vice-Chair Logan represented the Commission at last year's Happy Days celebration and it was a lot of fun.

Commissioner Sis asked whether the Commissioners would need to be there all day.

Chair Bennett stated everything is wrapped up by early afternoon, and Commissioners could plan on taking a shift during a 3-4 hour time frame. He reiterated that he would send out the details.

6.03: Ballfields 3-4 at Alpine Park

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated the Park and Recreation Commission recommended the renovation of Ballfields 3 and 4 at Alpine Park. City Staff has met with construction companies, and they have indicated that the necessary renovations can be completed for less than \$44,000, which will provide leftover funds for the replacement of the storage shed on site. Approval can be recommended to the City Council if the Commission has no objections.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Sis, seconded by Commissioner Trappen, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried.

The Park and Recreation Commission meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark Riverblood
Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent

Drafted by Mary Mullen
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.