

2.05: Consider Master Parks Plan Guiding Policy on Balance of Community and Neighborhood Parks and Smaller Pocket/Mini Parks

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood reviewed the staff report. He stated that the City often gets requests for new park equipment but there are limited funds. He provided examples of some smaller parks with limited or outdated park equipment and also of larger community parks that are connected to nearby developments through trail corridors. He stated that the policy question for the Council and Commission would be how to spend the park dedication funds, whether smaller parks should continue or whether focus should be given to larger community parks with connectivity to developments. He also provided examples of developments which have paid park dedication funds and also have greenspace areas and smaller parks within their developments that were fully funded and maintained by the developer/association.

Parks Commissioner Trappen stated that he has lived in Ramsey for six years and really enjoys the trails. He stated that rather than building a small park they could build a trail that would reach a larger park and thus would create a better trail system and less park equipment to maintain.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that it is not just the initial cost for a small playground but also the operating costs which include ongoing maintenance and replacement of damaged equipment.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he would like to know more about Outlot C on the Capstone project, specifically what the developer is proposed to contribute.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that it is a moving target as discussions continue. He noted that the total development costs including land would be around \$300,000. He stated that the total park dedication credit the developer is requesting is \$482,000 which would include those development costs as well as the greenway contribution. He stated that the total for park and trail dedication for all the lots would be \$1,100,000 in today's dollars.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that once built out there will be over 1,000 people living in that development and they will need a park. He stated that he would support the reduction in park dedication.

Councilmember Shryock stated that the long-term policy on parks planning has been community parks and noted that Itasca Park has been on the radar for a long time. She stated that the community parks are used more and differently than the traditional parks that people grew up with. She noted that people often have some play equipment in their yard and therefore the smaller parks are not often used as much. She stated that she also would not want to set precedent for the future.

Councilmember Johns echoed and agreed with the comments from Councilmember Shryock. She stated that the policy as drafted benefits the community as a whole and therefore the dollars

from development should continue to be focused on community parks and trail connection rather than small pocket parks.

Councilmember Williams stated that Snake Park is the only park accessible to her home and the only way she can access the park is by walking ¼ mile along Highway 47. She stated that it is essential that the entire community has access to the facilities without driving. She stated that there are parks without safe crossings to community parks. She stated that while the far north portion of the community is more developed, the rest of the community should not be left out. She stated that it is time as the community grows to review how traffic patterns have changed and identify areas that can bring the community together as there are large portions of the community that are not being served by the resources today.

Parks Commissioner Sis noted that his development did not receive a pocket park and he felt conflicted as he felt he would value a park in his neighborhood. He stated that now that he has joined the Commission he can see the value in focusing efforts on community parks. He stated that he would not let his children walk alone to nearby parks and therefore he can see the benefit in larger community parks with more amenities.

Councilmember Kuzma stated that he understands the big picture but noted that there are two separate issues. He recognized that there is limited funding on the big picture. He noted that the developer is willing to contribute a third of the funds necessary for a park and this is an opportunity to get this small park built. He believed that each opportunity should be reviewed on its own merits.

Mayor Strommen appreciated the separation of the two issues. She noted that sometimes there are things that do not fit into the mold. She noted that this development is on another magnitude because of its size. She stated that she agreed with the comments of Councilmember Williams that people need to have access to parks and she values that. She stated that there is a balance somewhere because there is a value to the large regional parks but there is also need sometimes for smaller parks.

Councilmember Riley stated that he has received a number of emails asking why a park is not being built in the development near the old municipal center. He agreed that this is a much larger development that needs a park. He stated that he would support a reduction in park dedication but perhaps not a dollar to dollar match. He stated that as Ramsey continues to be developed the needs of the City will change, noting that this development is different than any other development in Ramsey.

Parks Commission Chair Bennett stated that this is a different issue because the developer wants this park in their development because it is an amenity. He questioned whether the overall community would have good access to the park within this development. He stated that he won't argue that this would be a great spot for a park but he was unsure that going against the policy would set the City up for the future. He noted that if these parks need to be maintained by the City there would be additional operations costs as well. He stated that if the funds are used in this manner that takes away from addressing issues at other existing parks in the City that serve other neighborhoods.

Councilmember Shryock asked the density of this development compared to other developments that have constructed and maintain their own playgrounds at their own costs.

Mayor Strommen noted that the market has changed since the older plats were approved and therefore the economics should also be considered.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that there are just a few weeks to sort out this issue with the developer and therefore he was hoping for a strong consensus to help guide this. He asked if the City would be responsible for this in terms of park dedication credit or future maintenance. He stated that if the park was going to be park dedication credit funded then perhaps the park should be made more unique. He stated that if the park is on the greenway corridor that could bring other people in from other neighborhoods. He stated that people are not going to travel to reach a neighborhood park that looks just like theirs.

Parks Commission Chair Bennett stated that he has heard over and over the comment that people want the parks to have every amenity and that cannot occur if the City continues to pursue pocket parks. He stated that while this looks great, the City has to be careful to go against its own policy.

Mayor Strommen stated that the policy is important and maybe if there is a unique opportunity, such as a homeowners' association with a dense development, perhaps there is an opportunity to carve something out that would not give dollar to dollar credit towards park dedication but would give credit for unique options.

Parks and Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that perhaps the City could offer half the development costs of the park with park dedication credit and the homeowners association would provide long-term maintenance for a nature based park. He noted that could be an interim policy until the long-term policy is reviewed.

City Administrator Ulrich noted that the City does give credit for trails and if the park area is open and accessible to trail users, perhaps a credit could be negotiated. He stated that bathrooms would be reserved for large community programs.

Parks Commissioner Trappen stated that he lives in a neighborhood where the lots vary in size from one acre to three acres and therefore it could take a lot of space to service a large number of homes compared to this denser development that would serve a lot of people. He stated that perhaps the idea of density could be considered in a long-term policy discussion.

It was the consensus of the Council to create an interim exception that would allow for negotiations on this development case for a trail system and trail wayside park area that would be accessible and inviting.