

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

The Ramsey Park and Recreation Commission conducted a regular meeting on November 18, 2021, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Commission Members Present:      Vice Chair Brandon Sis  
                                                 Commissioner Nathan Barten  
                                                 Commissioner Jennifer Leistico  
                                                 Commissioner Justin Loss  
                                                 Commissioner Dean Olson  
                                                 Commissioner Brian Walker

Commission Members Absent:      Chair Shane Bennett

Also Present:                              City Council Liaison Alternate Debra Musgrove  
                                                 Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood

**1.      CALL TO ORDER**

Acting Chair Sis called the Park and Recreation Commission meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**2.      CITIZEN INPUT**

None.

**3.      APPROVE AGENDA**

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

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Chair Sis; Commissioners Leistico, Loss, Barten, Olson, and Walker. Voting No: None. Absent: Chair Bennett.

**4.      APPROVE MINUTES**

**4.01:   Approve Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes**

Acting Chair Sis noted on page four Commissioner Loss was noted as seconding a motion but he was not present at the meeting so staff will verify the recording to determine the appropriate

Commission member. He stated on page six, Item 5.02, it should state, "...recommend no charges changes..."

Motion by Commissioner Barten, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to approve the following Park and Recreation Commission Regular Meeting Minutes as amended:

- Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes date October 14, 2021

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Chair Sis; Commissioners Barten, Walker, Leistico, Loss, and Olson. Voting No: None. Absent: Chair Bennett.

## **5. COMMISSION BUSINESS**

### **5.01: Consider the 2022-2031 Parks Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan**

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood explained that the CIP allows the City to plan for improvements and the ability to coordinate with other projects, such as including a sidewalk or trail with a road project. He noted that things listed in the last year of the plan are often placeholders and unfunded. He noted that some of those projects often move forward in conjunction with development, such as Pearson Park. He reviewed the projects shown for 2022 including the priority and other factors.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the boardwalk would connect to the existing boardwalk.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that there is not a boardwalk in this area. He explained that the boardwalk they talked about at the Public Works Committee was at Trott Brook, whereas this would be for Lake Itasca. He noted that it is the same trail system but a different location and boardwalk. He reviewed the trail connections proposed within the CIP, noting the segments that will continue to be opportunity/development driven.

Acting Chair Sis asked if there were any trails in the adjacent community that would connect to a potential trail segment.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided additional details on the trail connections and recreation opportunities in Elk River.

Commissioner Barten noted that currently the only way to get from Andre to Elk River by bicycle is via Highway 10, therefore that trail would be helpful.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood continued to review the proposed projects on the CIP.

Acting Chair Sis asked if there has been any conversation with the athletic association to determine if they would be interested in cosponsoring one of the aeration projects through their outdoors program.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that he has not spoken with the entity about aeration but did discuss the possibility of collaborating on programming. He noted that they are working with Anoka County to host an ice fishing program this winter at Sunfish Lake.

Commissioner Olson asked if the DNR stocks Sunfish Lake and whether it would be more attractive to the DNR if the water body were aerated.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that the DNR will not stock areas like this that have poor or no fish reproduction with no public boat access. He stated that the City can buy fish or pay the DNR to stock fish.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that the item has been on the CIP for many years and asked why this item has not moved forward.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that all the projects take time to develop. He stated that the CIP has a lot of worthy projects, but it takes time to develop and create plans and specifications. He recognized the staffing shortages and changes he has experienced in his department.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if there would be a large cost difference in having a consultant develop the plans.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that there is still staff time used to work with a consultant. He stated that he is unsure of a consultant that has done that type of project but believed there is probably one out there. He noted that hopefully an aerator would be able to use solar power.

Councilmember Musgrove suggested reaching out to the Anoka Conservation District (ACD) to find recommendations for consultants.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that he could reach out to ACD staff and perhaps they would have a recommendation on a contractor.

Commissioner Walker stated several months ago he requested for a breakdown on how \$1,500,000 is budgeted for park maintenance. He stated that he has not seen those numbers, therefore it is hard for him to approve a CIP when he is unsure of the cost to maintain what the City already has. He stated that he would not support a new boardwalk until he is aware of the current maintenance costs. He referenced the next case related to Park Dedication fees and noted that he supports \$4,400 as that falls in line with similar cities such as Andover and Blaine.

Commissioner Walker left the meeting.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood commented that the City budget is available online, which includes the park department line items. He provided additional details on potential aeration equipment that could be used.

Commissioner Loss asked if people would still be able to ice fish on Sunfish Lake if an aerator is installed.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that would be part of the design process. He believed that newer systems would not create open water but stated that signage would still be posted to alert to possible thin ice. He stated that he would prefer to find a system that does not create thin ice. He continued to review projects within the CIP. He noted that the playground replacement policy has also been included within the CIP and reflectively shows one playground replacement per year. He noted that although streetscape is not technically a park element, park staff maintains that asset and therefore that has been included in the CIP as well.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that as described, the City would pay to plant the trees, which would normally be provided through development. She asked if the City would want to attempt to be reimbursed through development.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that he would propose to use TIF funds. He noted that TIF and other City programs are sometimes used to encourage development and therefore this would be similar in that the trees would already be planted and growing in the right place. He stated that the public would benefit by traffic calming and beautification, the land price would potentially increase, and the developer would not need to pay for the trees.

Councilmember Musgrove commented that she would want to ensure that Ramsey residents that would in essence pay for the trees would be reimbursed.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided additional explanation on how TIF is generated, noting that it is not property tax dollars, and how the City can use those funds.

Acting Chair Sis asked if that side would also receive sidewalk.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that side would eventually have sidewalks when development occurs, but that would not be a part of the tree planting project.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if that project would cover some of the trees within the existing planted area that have not survived.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that those would be replaced through regular maintenance activity. He noted that one was blocking a pedestrian crossing sign and will not be replaced. He provided details on a potential disc golf course and second off-leash area, which are new additions.

Councilmember Musgrove provided input on the potential location for an off-leash area, landscaping and questioned whether the site is within the wellhead protection area.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that he did not believe that a dog park would have an impact on the wellhead protection area.

Commissioner Olson stated that he supports the idea for another off-leash area. He noted that the area within The COR is very busy with many apartment buildings and therefore it would be helpful to have an off-leash area as an additional amenity within The COR.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood commented that many of the dogs are pausing on the streetscape and killing the flowers and shrubs. He noted that having an off-leash area off Veterans Drive might curb that behavior and improve the condition of the streetscape.

Acting Chair Sis proposed moving that project up in the CIP because of the need and interest in that project.

Commissioner Olson agreed that it would be helpful to have the off-leash area before replacing trees and other landscaping.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that completes the projects proposed for 2022 along with the new additions. He noted that all the projects included within the CIP would still need to come forward for individual consideration and approval.

Commissioner Loss stated that it would be great to have aeration in Sunfish Lake. He stated that his children love water parks and splashpads and would love to see that project move forward as it would provide an amenity for residents and can bring in additional users as well. He stated that he would like to see movement on the water feature/splashpad feature.

Acting Chair Sis stated that in previous years they have discussed the earth work that would be needed for the water feature park [The Waterfront] and Municipal Park. He noted that perhaps that could occur with the boulevard improvements for Sunwood.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied the soil work is not a \$100,000 project and would be much more expensive. He stated that perhaps when soil is needed for the northwest area, it can be taken from that site. He noted that the City could proceed with the splashpad corner but cautioned against developing a splashpad with nothing around it. He stated that perhaps it would be helpful to bring back the waterfront and Municipal Plaza plans, and the presentation could include sequencing and potential funding.

Commissioner Loss asked if the apartments within The COR paid Park Dedication in cash and whether those funds would be used for Municipal Plaza and The Waterfront improvements.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that there is about \$5,000,000 in the park trust fund currently and improvements paid within The COR should be invested within that area. He confirmed that the Affinity, Aeon, and Sapphire projects all paid cash Park Dedication that should be used for Municipal Plaza and The Waterfront improvements.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if aeration of Sunfish would qualify for funding through the watershed. She explained that the WMO will receive legacy dollars to use within the Rum River watershed for water quality projects.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that he was pretty confident that it would not qualify as a standalone project. He noted that perhaps if it were combined with a stormwater project it could be a project eligible for a match. He noted that Sunfish Lake is unique because it is ground water without an inlet or outlet. He stated that only a very small portion of stormwater goes into Sunfish Lake. He commented that he would follow up with the appropriate City staff to determine if it would be a possibility.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if this is adopted and action is taken on the off-leash item tonight, would that impact the approval of the CIP.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood explained that the CIP is meant to be a fluid document and it is not uncommon for a project to move up or down based on opportunity.

Commissioner Walker returned.

Motion by Commissioner Leistico, seconded by Commissioner Olson, to recommend a 2022-2031 Parks Capital Improvement Plan to the City Council as presented.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Chair Sis; Commissioners Leistico, Olson, Barten, Loss, and Olson. Voting No: Commissioner Walker. Absent: Chair Bennett.

#### **5.02: Recommend 2022 Park Development Fees**

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood presented that the rates and charges were discussed in great detail at the October meeting, at which time the consensus was to continue the discussion tonight. He stated that he included the requested information showing comparison Park Dedication and Trail Fees from other communities.

Commissioner Walker commented that he believes that Ramsey fits more with Andover, Blaine and Champlin more than some of the other cities. He noted that fees have not been increased since 2018. He asked where these funds are collected.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that these funds go into the Park Trust Fund, which funds the parks' capital improvements. He stated that there are about \$30,000,000 in potential projects listed within the CIP and currently the Park Trust Fund has a balance of about \$5,000,000. He explained that each municipality charges park dedication in different ways. He noted that Elk River previously had higher Park Dedication Fees but also the city uses the revenue from its municipal liquor stores to fund park improvements. He stated that Elk River additionally uses franchise fees to fund road improvements and will also use its franchise fees to fund sidewalk and trail pavement improvements. He explained that the City cannot set its Park Dedication based on the rates of other communities and must set it accordingly to its planned park and trail improvements and projects.

Acting Chair Sis asked if the current fee structure would fund the projects included in the CIP with an estimated balance of \$30,000,000.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that would be difficult to determine conclusively, because it cannot be certain when and how properties will develop. He stated that estimates could be done based on the current zoning or projection growth.

Acting Chair Sis stated that the fee structure has to be based on reality and need and therefore he wondered whether there is a metric that would establish such a need.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that the need is the CIP. He stated that plan also includes a community center which is often a public/private partnership. He provided details on the interfund loan that was used to purchase properties within The COR. He stated that land sales are currently paying back that loan, but once that is paid off, staff would propose to use a majority of the land sales within The COR used for construction of Municipal Plaza and The Waterfront. He noted that another option would be to perhaps gain additional funding through referendum to support community desires, such as a community center to include other park needs.

Councilmember Musgrove asked if the Park Trust Funds must be used for new development.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that it is legal for the City to impose development fees, as every home permitted places new need on City infrastructure and facilities. He noted that some developments are already near larger city parks that meet that need. He explained that there needs to be a nexus between Park Dedication fees collected and how the funds are used. He stated that the trail system helps to provide that geographical connection to existing park features. He stated that the nexus is more important in The COR because of the density and need for additional outside space for apartment residents. He stated that when a city does not do a good job allocating park dedication dollars, there can be liability from developers that may take the city to court. He stated that the previous year they reviewed the 2021 and 2022 projects, which had a very good geographic distribution.

Commissioner Leistico asked if the City has the funding and projects identified but is lacking the manpower or labor to implement the projects. She noted that some of these projects are not that large in scale of funding but have remained on the list for years.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that people and funding is required for projects. He noted that the boardwalk project required a certain amount of time and energy to develop the plans and specifications along with the time needed to go through the proper Commissions for review. He stated that even when a contract is brought on for the project, staff still has oversight of the project and there needs to be ongoing maintenance. He noted that the Commission would probably be surprised to hear the amount of maintenance that is required for the dog park. He estimated that 30,000 dog waste bags are used throughout the city as an example. He stated that the larger the park and trail system grows, the more time and energy is needed for maintenance, therefore it is a balancing act.

Acting Chair Sis stated that the additional information that was requested has been provided, and asked the Commission on input on the direction it would like to take.

Commissioner Loss stated that it appears that Ramsey is lower than some communities, and also higher than some communities. He stated that given that the fees have not been increased in the past four years and the rate of inflation, he believed that an increase would not scare off potential developers. He stated that perhaps raising the fees by 10 or 15 percent would be appropriate.

Commissioner Leistico stated that she agrees that fees should increase because of inflation but questioned the reasoning for ten percent.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that he would not want to provide a recommendation on the fee rate. He stated that a five percent increase would equate to \$175 to the existing \$3,500 rate. He stated that perhaps the justification would be that a five percent increase would be reasonable. He stated that the last increase was in 2018 and therefore a five percent increase after four years may seem reasonable, and the increase would help to better fund the new projects within the CIP.

Commissioner Walker referenced the trail fee of \$1,000 and asked how that rates to other communities.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that each community handles that differently. He noted that some communities have separate trail fees, while others include that in Park Dedication as a whole. He noted that some cities build their own trails and sidewalks with road reconstructs and many require them to be built with the development. He provided examples where the City required the trail construction as part of a development.

Commissioner Walker stated that with \$30,000,000 in potential projects, he would like to see \$4,200 to \$4,400 for Park Dedication and leave Trail Fees at the current rate. He stated that perhaps Trail Fees are raised the following year.

Acting Chair Sis stated that he was unsure why there would be a need to stagger the increases.

Commissioner Walker commented that he is attempting to negotiate support for \$4,400.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that one rationale to that proposal would be that certain large landowners have deals with developers based on the anticipated development fees. He noted that raising the fees in a reasonable manner would not impact those pending sales.

Commissioner Loss asked if there is a reason there has not been an increase since 2018. He also asked if this recommendation would then go before the Council, that may or may not agree with the increase.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that the Council has the discretion to set the fees where it wants. He stated that the Council appreciates the work the Commission does in making a recommendation that reflects the community it represents. He stated that staff did not recommend any increase in attempt to continue to welcome new, quality development. He stated that raising development fees can slow development and therefore an increase has not been recommended for industrial or commercial park and trail fees for quite some

time. He stated that while residential development pays taxes, it does not necessarily pay its fair share for the demand it places on the system.

Commissioner Leistico stated that she would recommend that the Commission provide a motion in support of its needs and if the Council does not agree, it can make that choice.

Commissioner Walker asked if the fees are paid at the time of development per phase.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that respective development fees are paid at the time of final plat. He stated that preliminary plat provides entitlement to development the land and is typically when the purchase agreement is signed for the land. He stated that the final plat is the time the appropriate fees are paid.

Commissioner Walker provided a comparison between raising Park Dedication to \$4,400 and not increasing trail fees to raising both park and trail fees by 15 percent. He stated that he would like to see the City get the funds that it can. He noted that a proposed development near his home would have 347 lots which would generate \$1,500,000 in just park fees.

Commissioner Barten stated that if there was a five percent increase per year for the next four years that would be a park fee of \$4,254 in the fourth year. He stated that he could see the reasoning in increasing the Park Dedication in a larger amount this year but could also see the reasoning to split that over four years.

Commissioner Walker commented that there are pending developments for two properties in his area of the City and was unsure that fees could go up enough to make either one of those developers leave the project. He stated that there are not many areas within Ramsey that have that amount of land available to develop. He noted that a developer will pass the cost onto the new residents that purchase the homes.

Commissioner Loss stated that he would support an increase of 10 to 15 percent for Park Dedication. He stated that perhaps \$4,000 is the right number. He stated that he would agree to delay any increases to the trail fee if they are increasing the park dedication.

Commissioner Walker noted that there is no guarantee that the City Council will approve the increase the Commission recommends.

Councilmember Musgrove stated that some of the cities that have higher fees are more built out in order to capture what they can from remaining development. She stated that as Ramsey continues to develop and collect fees, it will reach a similar point. She stated that she was torn because there is a large bank of money available.

Acting Chair Sis recognized that there is a healthy balance but there are also large projects on the horizon that will need much more in funding.

Commissioner Walker commented that the balance is one sixth of the amount that would be needed to fund the projects within the CIP.

Commissioner Loss asked when the change in the fee would be implemented if an increase is recommended by the Commission and approved by the Council. He used the scenario of a development that is already in the works but has not yet paid the fees through final plat and asked if that development would then pay the new Park Dedication fee.

Acting Chair Sis explained that would be the case unless the development agreement specifies a specific amount for Park Dedication using the 2021 fee structure.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood clarified that the Park Trust Fund does not fund park maintenance as that is funded from the General Fund. He stated that whether the Council chooses to keep the Park Dedication fee as it is today, or raise it on the recommendation of the Commission, those fees would only be applicable for residential lots that are final platted in 2022. He stated that the City Council has completed the first reading of the ordinance related to the rates and fees for 2022, with no change to the Park Dedication fee. He stated that the Council will consider the second reading and adoption of the ordinance on December 14<sup>th</sup> and the recommendation from the Commission will be included in that presentation.

Acting Chair Sis stated that there does not seem to be consensus for keeping the rates as they are today, but there is question as to what the increase should be. He stated that ten percent seems to be the middle ground.

Motion by Commissioner Walker to recommend to City Council that Park Dedication and Trail Fees for 2022 be adjusted to \$4,400 per residential dwelling for Park Dedication and remain at \$1,000 per residential dwelling for trail fees.

Motion died for lack of second.

Motion by Commissioner Loss, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to recommend to City Council to increase Park Dedication and Trail Fees, for 2022, be adjusted to a rate of \$1,150 per residential unit for the Trail Fees and \$4,050 per residential unit for Park Dedication fees.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Chair Sis; Commissioners Loss, Walker, Barten, Leistico, and Olson. Voting No: None. Absent: Chair Bennett.

Councilmember Musgrove recognized that the fees have not been increased in a while and if the increase would have been a few percent each year, this would catch the fee up.

### **5.03: Off-Leash Area Consideration**

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that this was carried forward after the long discussion brought forth during citizen input at the October meeting. He stated that the request was to have an off-leash area dedicated for small dogs, therefore the Commission can consider that request or choose to do nothing.

Acting Chair Sis stated that there is already a separated area at the dog park, so they were to place a sign stating that the area is reserved for smaller or timid dogs, or they could continue to allow general access. He stated that he has not visited the park enough to view the conflict that was

described by the resident. He stated that the simple addition of a sign could be a way to move forward.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that he has concern with that the area would be oversized for that purpose. He stated that if a timid dog area is designated, that would require a level of self-policing. He stated that the problem seems to be that there are some people that are not controlling their large, rambunctious dog while others have small timid dogs that are perhaps not suited to that environment. He commented that there are many areas where dogs can be off leash in Ramsey other than the dog park. He liked the suggestion of Councilmember Heineman that if there is a small dog area in the future, it be done with a tiny fence so that it is clear that is what the area is intended for, as that would prevent large dogs. He stated that the original request was to increase the size of the dog park, which they did. He stated that there is a sign on the front gate that mentions behavior and people may or may not pay attention to it. He commented that signs are often ignored.

Commissioner Loss stated that he has two dogs, one medium and one large. He stated that he has never seen a small dog in the dedicated small dog area at the Coon Rapids dog park and that is the only dog park where he experienced a problem with other dogs. He stated that often the smaller dogs tend to be more aggressive. He stated that it was his understanding that the expansion of the dog park would be completely open, therefore he was surprised to see the fence between. He stated that he also likes the idea of adding another off-leash area in The COR. He commended the Commission for not making a kneejerk reaction and discussing the topic.

Commissioner Leistico agreed that switching the use for one request would not make sense. She also recognized the concern that dedicating one side of the dog park would be too much space for little dogs. She suggested leaving the issue alone at this time and moving forward on another off-leash area in The COR.

Commissioner Olson agreed that this discussion should be tabled, and the new off-leash area should be explored more. He noted that perhaps the new off-leash area could be split 70/30 between large and small dogs.

Commissioner Barten stated that he did some research on this topic and while some dog park designers prefer to split the area for small and large dogs, many have the main park with additional special use area like there is at the dog park. He agreed that leaving the park as is seems to be the best way to go.

Acting Chair Sis confirmed the consensus of the Commission to leave the dog park as is. He asked if the Commission would be interested in moving the second off-leash area up in priority. It was noted that it was planned for 2026. He stated that there is a demonstrable need within The COR and therefore planning for it to determine cost would seem reasonable. He believed the project should be moved to 2022.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood responded that he believes the \$20,000 estimate would seem reasonable.

Consensus of the Commission was to direct staff to develop the project cost and determine feasibility as time allows.

## **6. COMMISSION/STAFF INPUT**

### **6.01: Commission/Staff Input**

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood advised of upcoming holiday events. He stated that earlier this year the Commission recommended replacement of the Trott Brook boardwalk. He stated that the Public Works Committee recommended that the City Council approve the project and the Council will review that request at its next meeting on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## **7. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Commissioner Leistico, seconded by Commissioner Loss, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried. Voting Yes: Acting Chair Sis; Commissioners Leistico, Loss, Barten, Olson, and Walker. Voting No: None. Absent: Chair Bennett.

The Park and Recreation Commission meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Mark Riverblood  
Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent

Drafted by Amanda Staple  
*TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.*