

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

The Ramsey Park and Recreation Commission conducted a regular meeting on October 14, 2021, at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

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

Commission Members Absent: Commissioner Justin Loss

Also Present: City Council Liaison Ryan Heineman
 Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Mark Riverblood

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Bennett called the Park and Recreation Commission meeting to order at 6:42 p.m.

2. CITIZEN INPUT

Muriel Hassis, 15491 Yakima Court NW, stated that she is a dog owner. She stated that Ramsey has beautiful parks and is aware of the two dog parks that are connected by a fence. She commented on the experience of bringing a small dog to the dog park location, often being overrun by larger dogs. She believed that small dogs need a place to run away from the larger dogs. She stated that she was told that the dog park was divided into two areas, one for large dogs and one for small dogs, but that is not what is occurring. She stated that she has let her dog off-leash at other parks/areas. She stated that she has visited dog parks in other communities and the areas are separated into areas for small dogs and large dogs. She commented that the problem could be solved by signage, allocating one area for large dogs and one area for small dogs.

Chair Bennett thanked the resident for her input. He noted that the Commission has discussed potentially splitting the areas and stated that it was unfortunate that people are not controlling their dogs. He stated that originally the dog park was one area that was extended earlier this year to address usage. He noted that the intention was not to have two separate areas but to provide more space. He stated that the Commission can further discussion the possibility of splitting the areas by size.

Commissioner Sis noted that was part of the discussion when the dog park was expanded. He agreed that the Commission could further discuss whether the areas should be marked with signage or whether a third area is created for small dogs.

Councilmember Heineman stated that perhaps if a third area is added, the fence could be lowered to discourage larger dogs from going into that area. He noted that another option would be to split the second area to add the space for smaller dogs. He stated that as an owner of a larger breed dog, he would be discouraged to bring them into an area with a smaller fence as they could jump out.

Chair Bennett stated that the Commission could also review what is being done in other communities.

Commissioner Walker asked if the areas could simply be designated, one for small dogs and one for large dogs in order to solve the problem while the Commission further discusses the issue.

Commissioner Sis asked if there is an external gate on the second area to allow access/exit.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that there are multiple gates to allow access and exit. He stated that a third dog park is schedule in the CIP to be considered in November and agreed that smaller fencing could help to prevent large dogs from going into a small dog area. He stated that unfortunately there will always people that do not follow the rules. He stated that perhaps having the small dog park closer to the downtown area, as apartment dwellers are more likely to have small dogs. He stated that the leash law in Ramsey does not say your dog must be on a leash, only that you must have control over your dog. He stated that someone must still have control of their animal, even if using the off-leash area.

Chair Bennett commented that if the third off-leash area is going to be reviewed at the next meeting, perhaps the current structure is reviewed as well in order to reevaluate that segregation. He stated that he wants to understand entry and exit in the other areas in addition to the main entrance/exit area.

Councilmember Heineman stated that signage would be a benefit. He stated that perhaps a low-cost solution for the time being would be to install signage and have lower gates as that should be enough to discourage large dog owners from letting their dog into that area.

Ms. Hassis stated that in the dog parks in other communities the fencing is all the same height with one gate for the large dog area and one gate for the small dog area and then signage. She stated that most people are aware of the weight of their dogs and follow the signs. She stated that the signage should be sufficient.

Commissioner Sis stated that perhaps they start with signage to divide the two areas between dog size. He stated that he would not include a weight as a large dog can be timid.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that staff could do that. He noted that the resident that requested the second area has a timid dog and expressed that the need was for an area for more timid dogs.

Chair Bennett agreed that is why he believes an overview of the existing dog park would make sense. He stated that they could begin with an attempt to use signage until the matter could be fully discussed by the Commission.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that staff could follow that consensus and bring the matter forward on the November agenda. He commented that there are many vacant parks in the community that can be used with dogs. He also noted that hockey rinks are also a good area for dogs.

Commissioner Walker asked if there could be anything done immediately rather than waiting for the next meeting.

Commissioner Barten explained that the second area was created in response to another issue that exists. He stated that situation also needs to continue to be considered.

Commissioner Leistico commented that they need to make all the voices matter rather than providing immediate action on a resident request, as previous residents have brought forward different requests.

Chair Bennett stated that signage is something that could be worked on right away, identifying the space for more timid dogs. He stated that it is important to find a solution that will work for all users in a long-term manner rather than continuing to respond to the most recent resident comment.

Commissioner Leistico stated that the previous resident that provided input and brought forward the request for the expansion of the dog park had spoken with other users and provided that information to the City.

Commissioner Walker referenced the hockey rinks at Central Park, which has boards up and could be used for dogs to be off-leash.

Ms. Hassis commented that she should not have to go to another location, and it should be the owners of the more aggressive dogs that use the hockey rinks.

Chair Bennett stated that the Commission is going to discuss the issue and find a solution that works for all users but if there is a concern from the resident for the safety of her dog, she can take her dog to the other area in the meantime.

Ms. Hassis stated that the action should be to split the existing dog park area into one area for large dogs and one area for small dogs and the additional discussion could be the space to use for the more timid large dogs. She provided input on the breeds of dogs that have caused issues with her small dog.

Commissioner Leistico commented that the suggestion for the hockey rink use was to provide an immediate solution for the resident.

Commissioner Walker explained that would be a spot where the resident could take her dog right now to provide a solution.

Ms. Hassis commented that she will be aware of the option but asked how other small dog owners would be aware of this option.

Councilmember Heineman stated that there are two parts at the dog park, one designated for more timid dogs. He asked if the resident would be okay splitting the areas into one area for large/energetic dogs and the other for small/timid dogs.

Ms. Hassis stated that she would have to see it proven that large timid dogs would be okay with her smaller dog.

Councilmember Heineman explained that other residents have brought forward requests in the past and had to wait for a response and an additional area to be designated for timid dogs. He stated that this would follow a similar pattern, where the Commission needs time to discuss and respond. He noted that the hockey rink was a suggestion of where the resident could have their dog off-leash for the time being while the issue is being further discussed.

Commissioner Walker stated that he is simply attempting to provide a solution for this resident's dog while the matter is being discussed in attempt to resolve the issue for all small dog owners.

Chair Bennett explained that it will take time for the Commission to discuss the matter and action to occur and the hockey rink was a suggestion for the resident to do if they are concerned for the safety of their dog today.

Ms. Hassis stated that perhaps a sign could be installed alerting other small dog owners to this suggestion.

Commissioner Barten stated that anyone watching the meeting would now be aware of the option as well.

Ms. Hassis stated that she appreciates the time of the Commission and hopes this issue can be solved for small dog owners.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

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

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

4. APPROVE MINUTES

4.01: Approve Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

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

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

5. COMMISSION BUSINESS

5.01: Recommend Park Dedication for Trott Brook Crossing

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that the preliminary plat has been proposed for Trott Brook Crossing, which has been discussed at various levels over the past year. He stated that the Park Commission provided guideline type recommendations related to Park Dedication and Trail Fees. He stated that the plat proposed is similar to the original plat proposed, incorporating some changes suggested through previous review and public input with includes a reduction in the number of lots. He stated that the area under the powerlines is only being considered at a rate of 50 percent because it is not buildable area. He explained that recommendation was suggested by the Commission during its last review. He provided additional information on the need for a community park identified through previous work of the Commission. He stated that those residents within Brookfield would also be served by this park land. He stated that a bridge and boardwalk could also be used to provide additional connections for residents. He summarized the Park Dedication direction proposed using the input from the Commission in its last review.

Chair Bennett asked if the financial calculations proposed are consistent with the City's current fee schedule.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that the calculations are consistent with the City's current fee schedule, policy, past practices, and would also provide a solution to the need for a community park in that area. He stated that the balance of cash due from the developer with each phase of development would be paid into the Park Trust Fund and would be used for future park improvements in that park.

Commissioner Walker asked for input on the area that would need to be mowed.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that they are working on the concept plan to determine which areas would be turf, trail, parking, etc. He stated that several acres would be mowed athletic fields and other areas would be mowed. He provided additional details on the City's policy to not mow all areas within a park. He noted that additional concepts would come forward for the Commission to discuss, such as an orchard and other uses.

Commissioner Walker asked if there is an estimated cost on the renovation of the barns.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that they do not yet have that report. He recognized that it would be a substantial cost and those concepts would be included in the next phase. He stated that the improvements would then be worked into the long-term capital improvements for the park.

Commissioner Sis referenced the estimated park size of 23.06 acres and asked if that calculation includes wetlands.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that the wetland area is included in that total acreage.

Commissioner Sis asked if it is common to accept wetland as part of a park area.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that the City has done that a lot as the wetland area is used for different recreational activities and wildlife. He commented that land credit is not provided for that wetland area, therefore it would in essence provide additional space for public use without cost.

Motion by Commissioner Barten, seconded by Commissioner Sis, to recommend to the City Council that Park Dedication and Trail Fees for the Trott Brook Crossing shall be satisfied by a combination of land, cash and credit for certain park and trail improvements as specified within the case.

Further discussion: Commissioner Walker stated that at the last meeting there was a different development request for a project building in rural Ramsey. He stated that he also would not support this project as it is not supported the residents in rural Ramsey. He stated that he also does not support accepting a park without the full scope of costs being known.

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

5.02: Recommend No Charges for 2022 Park Development Fees

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that each year the City Council adopts a resolution approving the fees and charges for the next year, which relates to all City and development fees. He stated that the Commission therefore provides a review and recommendation related to Park Dedication in anticipation of the review of the Council. He provided background on the purpose and intent of park dedication. He explained that the Park Dedication ensures that the new parks and trails that will be needed to support new residents, is funded by the developers to ensure that existing residents are not burdened with that expense. He explained the factors that are considered when reviewing the rates each year, including comparison with other communities. He stated that staff is not recommending an increase to park dedication fees for 2022.

Commissioner Sis asked the last time park dedication was increased.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood replied that a small adjustment to round out the numbers was made in 2018, which became effective in 2019.

Motion by Commissioner Sis, seconded by Commissioner Barten, to recommend to City Council maintaining Park Dedication and Trail Fees at the existing rates, for 2022, to include the residential per unit fees – and including the per acre rates for the commercial/industrial subdivision of land.

Further discussion: Commissioner Walker asked why the fees have not been raised in the past three years, noting that everything costs more money now than it did three years ago. He referenced the anticipated future needs, using the example of the dog park discussions. He commented that real estate value continues to increase, and the fees should increase in a relative manner. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that the City Council also provides input and the desire to welcome certain developments. He stated that the Commission can make a different recommendation for the Park Dedication rates related to residential development. Commissioner Sis stated that while the cost of playground equipment and other materials has increased, he believed that there was a decrease in the cost of paving this past year. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided additional clarity on the difference in costs and actual costs for paving and trails. He also provided explanation on the use of charitable gambling funds. Chair Bennett stated that there were previous concerns expressed that if the City was not competitive in terms of fees, Ramsey would not be competitive in terms of development opportunity. Commissioner Walker asked for information on the rates of other communities. Chair Bennett replied that Ramsey was slightly below some cities previously but ended up rating fairly competitively. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that action could be tabled on this matter with clear direction for what the Commission would like to review at the November meeting, which would still be on schedule for the Council review prior to the end of the year. He stated that typically Ramsey has ranked slightly below the median for development fees as the Council has desired to remain competitive. He stated that the rates will vary and provided the example of Anoka, which is almost built out and therefore may have higher rates, and Nowthen which has low rates because there is comparatively less development. Commissioner Sis asked if staff would have sufficient time to bring this matter back in November and then forward to the Council to remain on schedule. Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that there should not be an issue.

Commissioner Sis withdrew his motion to allow for further exploration and discussion.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood asked for input on what information the Commission would like to review at the November meeting.

Commissioner Sis stated that he would like to see the rates of comparable communities.

Commissioner Barten stated that he would be interested in Elk River, Otsego, and Rogers.

Commissioner Walker mentioned Coon Rapids. Blaine was also mentioned.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood stated that staff would review the neighboring communities and would also review five cities of comparable population in different areas of the metro.

Commissioner Leistico asked if there would be a manner to determine if the actual costs are being covered in the rates. She agreed with the statement of Commissioner Walker that everything has increased in cost in the past three years and wanted to ensure that the City's costs are covered in attempt to meet the future desires of the park system.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood commented that would be a large task. He noted that perhaps the review of comparable communities would be sufficient. He stated that the greater the development fees are, the more it encourages a developer to push back on other items or use lesser quality materials in order to make up that cost. He recognized the balance between finding the right development fees to support quality development. He explained that each community has fees setup in a different manner and require different things as part of development, therefore the Commission should be aware that it is not an apples-to-apples comparison. He noted that some cities also have municipal liquor stores that provide revenue directly to their park system.

Commissioner Walker asked if the Commission could receive some of that information earlier than normal to allow more time for review.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that could be done once the information is gathered in a rough format, with the more complete information and explanation provided in the Commission packet. He reminded the Commission that while it is nice to have the comparison information, the fee cannot be setup based on the rates of other communities as there has to be a nexus between the fee and the actual needs of the community for that purpose.

Chair Bennett noted that the Commission meeting for November will be held one week later than normal, which provides additional time for that information to be provided and reviewed.

6. COMMISSION/STAFF INPUT

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood provided an update on recent and upcoming City events. He reported that the playground replacement policy was adopted by the City Council. He highlighted vacant positions within City staff. He advised of the November Commission meeting date and the items that would appear on the agenda.

Commissioner Walker asked if Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood has spoken with the City Council about the lack of applicants for vacant staff positions. He stated that fast food rates of pay continue to increase and perhaps the Council should consider increasing pay as well.

Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent Riverblood confirmed that employee related issues and retention are an item of discussion with the City Council. He stated that the Council is aware that wages and benefits attract employees, along with a quality workplace. He commented that there is a labor shortage in every industry at this time

7. ADJOURNMENT

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

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

The Park and Recreation Commission meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Riverblood
Parks & Assistant Public Works Superintendent

Drafted by Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.