



**Minutes  
Minnetonka Park Board  
Wednesday, December 1, 2021**

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call**

Park Board Members Present: James Durbin, Chris Gabler, David Ingraham, Ben Jacobs and Katie Semersky. Excused: Korey Beyersdorf and Chris Walick. Absent: Elliot Berman.

Staff members in attendance: Kathy Kline, Kelly O'Dea, Sara Woeste and Leslie Yetka.

Gabler called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

**3. Reports from Staff**

Recreation Director, Kelly O'Dea reported there was an addenda.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Ingraham moved, Jacobs seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of Oct. 6, 2021 as submitted. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Jacobs moved, Semersky seconded a motion to approve the joint meeting minutes of Nov. 3, 2021 as submitted. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

**5. Citizens wishing to discuss items not on the agenda**

There were none.

**6. Special Matters**

There were none.

**7. Business Items**

**A. Natural Resources Overview**

Natural Resources Manager, Leslie Yetka gave the report.

Ingraham asked what percentage of the natural resources staff budget is in the development review, inspection and compliance area.

Yetka replied that there is one dedicated full-time person for review and compliance work. There is an additional position where part of it is involved in inspections. There really are no funds that are expended on compliance work because it's primarily staff time. Most

expenses that are used in the operating budget are primarily allocated towards habitat stewardship and forestry.

Ingraham asked if the restoration activity falls under habitat stewardship.

Yetka responded that it does.

Durbin asked what city has nine or more natural resources staff in Minnesota? Does a larger city such as St. Paul or Duluth? Minnetonka puts in a lot of effort towards it and it shows how much we are really trying as a city and how important it is.

#### **B. Natural Resources Master Plan**

Yetka and Fred Rozumalski, Landscape Architect from Barr Engineering gave the report.

Semersky appreciated all the time and energy that staff gave towards all the feedback. This presentation boosted her confidence about Minnetonka being a leader in natural resources in our geographical area; whether it is the budget, having a 20 year plan or having people committed to it. She noticed that the Natural Resources Plan starts right away with goals and objectives and doesn't have that overarching mission or vision statement. She questioned if we should have a bold statement about being a leader in our mission or vision statement; then tying it together with the POST Plan so they might have similar language. It could be an overarching statement that ties them together and shows that this is something that really differentiates Minnetonka from other cities in the area and we are committed to it.

Jacobs complimented staff for putting in a lot of work addressing the feedback and making people feel heard.

Ingraham agreed that there were a lot of comments and staff was very responsive to them. The number of comments received also represented the level of interest our residents have in the parks and natural spaces. He thinks the outlined plan is good and he understands the prioritization of which parks get which kind of effort and all the scientific aspects of it. For him, the big gap goes back to the Appendix B table in the summary, which shows the cost by acre. It would help him know how much they can do, given the budget today. He thought he heard them say there is about \$200,000 that goes towards restoration, which is about 10 percent of the budget. Over five years, that is \$1,000,000 so looking at the chart, we could do at least 220 acres for the first five years. He would like to look at that closer because of the comments from the really interested community members. There is an expectation that our parks and natural spaces are in bad shape. He doesn't think they are as bad as what was pictured but there is a gap between what the average person in the community thinks and what people who know about it thinks. He would feel better knowing that right now the budget can accomplish this much and with another "x" dollars we could do this much more. He has a feeling that the current budget is certainly better than others but it's still not enough to accomplish the degree of change that he thinks some of the community would really desire. It is kind of hinted at throughout the document with references to, "with additional funding we could do this." He would feel a lot better knowing what they can actually accomplish now, how much more it would take, how they would advocate for that and when they would do that because we are coming up on the budgeting cycle. He's assuming that if council approves this in December that it is already into the 2023 budgeting cycle.

Yetka answered that it is hard to pin down costs in a Master Plan. The reason why the second chart has pluses and minuses is because we can't really put a cost to those right now. Staff will be able to do that as they go through their budgeting process. The intent is to show where there may be additional resources needed. In terms of the habitat restoration piece, there is cost to maintain areas and costs to restore areas and those are two different levels of effort. Think of the Cullen Nature Preserve as a restoration right now. We are doing basically two years of really intensive restoration and the budget we have is about \$90,000 and a lot of that is grant funding. After the initial intensive restoration, you get into the annual maintenance. As of 2022, we have about \$200,000 for maintenance of what we have right now and that will cover a lot of this already. For instance, under maintain natural areas, years one through five, the estimated cost is \$108,000 and those are high-level planning dollars. We are funding that level already. We are just wanting to make sure that we are doing it in the right areas that fits our goals. It's about prioritizing where we are putting our efforts so it aligns with the plan. If there are costs that are typically more such as contractors coming in, those costs are where we are probably going to see a need to have additional resources whether it is through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) or our existing operating budget. Typically it has been through our existing operating budget but there may be a reason why it should be in the CIP, such as knowing how much money we may need for five years. Right now we manage about 310 acres with the funds that we have using contractor costs, volunteers and the ICW crew. We are already maintaining that so that is why initially the next five years, there is going to be some costs needed but a lot of this we can accomplish by just redirecting and refocusing our efforts.

Ingraham replied that there are enough hints in the plan that say additional resources could be valuable. He can tell from reading the comments from a lot of people that they have similar questions about how much can actually get done. People think this is an ambitious plan for the resources that we have. We really have a fair amount of resources but he doesn't think people really understand how those are being deployed and how much we can actually expect to see measurably change in a period of time. Yetka mentioned the volunteers and how we rely on them. He thinks staff should invest in making sure they keep the volunteers engaged and focused because the more they are involved, they will have more of an effort and desire to do things. If they are not utilized, then they go away and get disenfranchised. Ingraham also asked what happened at the Excelsior Boulevard fire station. Several people made comments that the city needs to walk the talk. It sounds like a lot of non-native petunias were planted and people got upset. He thinks it is a legitimate question if different city properties are not adhering to what they think is the right plant.

Yetka replied that the fire station was brought to their attention. What happened was that there was some landscaping that was reinstalled. It doesn't trigger any kind of permits so the ordinances don't kick in. She knows there was a concern about a particular landscaping grass, an ornamental grass that was planted. It's non-native but there was a concern that it could spread into the natural areas, however, there is very little chance that it will. She confirmed with Rozumalski that it was the silver banner grass *Miscanthus* and it is a non-rhizomatous variety that won't self-seed into the natural area. She doesn't personally know what else was planted there but they did use a pretty fairly common landscaping ornamental grass because of the aesthetics and the look of it. That does happen even when we have development happening and they work with landscapers and they have an approved landscaping plan. Our ordinance requires a certain percentage of

plants that support pollinators for instance but beyond that they can choose to use ornamental plants, cultivars they are called. That is not something that they limit on private property.

Ingraham really appreciated the hard work and he thinks it is a great plan. His comments emphasized anything we can do to help amplify your efforts.

Durbin really likes the plan. Somewhere early in the presentation, it said this is a 10 to 20 year plan but he recommended just putting 20 because it is bracketed that way and it might cause confusion. He thinks this is interesting because these are plans on what they think is going to be best practices in 20 years. Durbin referenced Ingraham talking about advocating and he thinks there is probably enough advocating to the city council, the people who are going to allocate the budget. It will be interesting to see how those opportunities come up with operating budgets and augmenting it with CIP money when an opportunity arises. He thinks while they are on the board, they'll be very cognizant of that. All sorts of things can affect the budget such as dealing with contractors and inflation. You may think an amount is going to do what you want but then you end up falling short. Durbin mentions that these are estimates and he isn't really sure if they will be in the ballpark once they go out past five years. It is too hard to predict what is going on. He doesn't really pay much attention to it except for the money keeps increasing and it gets to be a very large sum. He really liked how the plan has come together and he is ready for the next step.

Gabler mentioned that high-density housing is what they are doing with the potential expansion of population. That lot with a huge yard and nice house could be an apartment building and 40 percent of that could be a parking lot. How do you mitigate a heat island effect when you have something like that potentially happening?

Rozumalski replied that there are a couple ways. The first way is through the roofing material. There are white reflective roofing materials and there are also green roofs that actually really absorb heat and do a lot to manage storm water and it can even support pollinators. Secondly, looking at the amount of parking that is required for city ordinances. In commercial developments, maybe you don't need as many parking stalls because people are shopping online more and they can become green spaces. Third, there are a number of techniques through other technologies. There are systems that are a problem for growing trees in urban areas because there is not enough soil and roots can't reach under the pavement, it is all compacted. However, there are systems that allow soil under the pavement with structures that support the pavement so it's not crumbling and the roots can get under them.

Gabler asked what a low quality tree is. He questioned if it is a species or just a tree that's ready to come down.

Rozumalski replied that it is a judgement. It could be a tree that is damaged or diseased or it could be someone's opinion. An example is that some people think that softwoods are lower quality just because they are going to break in the wind and are shorter lived. An oak can live 300 years so if you want an investment, get a nice sturdy hardwood that is going to last a long time. He would consider that a higher quality tree.

Durbin added that oak trees grow really slow so you can't just invest in those. Some of those softer wood trees may be rated as a lower quality tree but you have to have

something growing. There has to be some kind of balance but when he hears, “we are going to have this beautiful oak savanna” he wonders about it because he knows those trees grow really slow. He gets the investment in the oak trees but that is very forward thinking, like 50-60 years in the future. We also have to maintain a beautiful canopy, something that is producing the oxygen in the interim. He likes birch and maple trees and is a defender of the wimpy trees.

Rozumalski commented that diversity is good. The one thing he would promote is native trees versus non-native because they support so many insects and the food web. Native insects and birds are not adaptive so they don't feed off of non-native trees. He also challenged Durbin's comment about oaks growing slowly. About 15-20 years ago, they planted all the trees from the big oak tree down to rink B at the Minnetonka Ice Arena. There was nothing there but now you can't see the hockey rink anymore on that side because they grew up. Oaks grow slowly but not super slowly.

Durbin added that he appreciated the diversity in planting trees from so many presentations given by the city forester and natural resources. If that one type of tree they are planting gets some kind of disease, it could wipe them all out. He is aware that they can't just have their one favorite tree in their yard or commercial space.

Yetka wanted to clarify that in the natural resources division, they try not to use the word low quality or high quality and give judgmental values to them. They feel all trees have benefits, some more than others.

Durbin moved, Jacobs seconded a motion to recommend the natural resources master plan as-is for adoption. All voted “yes.” Motion carried.

#### C. POST Plan – System Plan Goals & Initiatives (DRAFT)

Assistant Recreation Director, Sara Woeste gave the report. Below is the feedback from the park board.

##### **Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency:**

There was no feedback.

##### **Connections to Parks and Trails:**

Semersky recommended keeping the word expand instead of consider under the first bullet point because that one has such a strong community interest. Also, every other bullet point has very action-oriented verbs.

Durbin asked what the definition of a trail was under the first bullet point.

Woeste replied that she left it broad because there are a lot of different types of trails in our system.

Durbin wanted to clarify that we aren't talking about the 80 ranked formal trails.

Woeste responded that we are talking about trails inside the parks.

Durbin's recommendation is to include "inside the parks" in that sentence. He also wondered why we want more trails in the parks.

Woeste answered that it came from the public engagement. In general, people are wanting more trails.

Durbin is supportive of real trails that are thought of before they are employed. If the goal is to make it a more formal and thought of system, he is completely on board with that.

Woeste commented that anything in this plan would go through the city and would become a city project.

Ingraham added that they know more trails will be put in because the desire is there. The public wants trails and there are certain groups that are nervous about trails because of the natural areas. The mountain bike trail at Lone Lake Park was a huge problem for a lot of people. What he found interesting is that Lone Lake Park had a ton of informal trails up and down that ridgeline under the water tower. They are almost gone now and that is because people are using the maintained mountain bike trail for walking. He likes the informal trails at Purgatory Park but from a natural resources perspective, it is a natural disaster because of the erosion. He thinks that quality trails that are thought out have a positive impact in terms of residents and users getting out in the parks and protecting the parks. One really good trail is better than 10 informal trails.

Durbin thought maybe use the words formal trail rather than informal trail. He agrees with Ingraham that a well thought out formal trail would be used. It doesn't need to be paved or have rock on it but it needs to be well thought of for erosion control.

Jacobs thinks he would use the word develop instead of consider. If you say that we are going to expand the trails, it could scare people. If you say develop more formal trails in the parks, it makes it known that there is a thought process of getting these formal trails versus all the informal trails that are damaging different areas.

**Community Health and Wellness:**

There was no feedback.

**Equity and Inclusion:**

There was no feedback.

**Excellence and Innovation:**

Durbin thought that we are putting some really specific things under the initiatives in a high-level document such as a ninja warrior playground. It just seems like in a high-level document we are almost saying that these items will be put in. Can we back it up one level and describe what cool amenities could be put in a park? This sounds like we have to put in an off-leash dog park because it is under the initiatives.

Jacobs added that someone could come back and say that they never got the ninja warrior playground.

Woeste replied that they heard this specific feedback when they went out to the public. This may be an appropriate place to put the word consider if you are going to include them in the document. Another way to word it is “as you are planning future parks and amenities, these arose during the public comment period during the POST Plan planning.”

Durbin understands that but this is the community feedback for 2021. Somebody is going to invent something in the future that is going to be so cool, but it won't be in this plan. Those things are absent from this high-level document because they haven't been invented yet. These things did arise in the community feedback but there should be a huge disclaimer saying it is the 2021 feedback because some of these things might not be popular in five years.

Ingraham sat in the TAC group and he thinks the consultants were trying to be respectful of the input the community gave. Maybe word it as, “consider the following improvements and suggestions by residents.” He can see some of these happening whether it is now or 30 years from now. An example is the community gardens, it's probably a good idea unless we stop growing food. We aren't going to say that we are going to do all of these but we are going to say that people expressed interest in these things. He thinks it is beneficial to reflect what they heard and say we are taking it under consideration.

Durbin thinks they are great ideas but he doesn't think they belong in a high-level document because it says initiatives.

Ingraham said the initiative is to consider feedback that was received by residents. He thinks the initiative is to consider what they are suggesting, not to do those things.

Durbin agreed but thought this almost sounds like we are committing to these items being put on the agenda to be discussed in park board meetings.

Ingraham didn't interpret it like that.

Durbin commented that was his opinion and it very well could be wrong but he thinks it is too much in the weeds. He's not saying that any of these things are good or bad, but he thinks it looks like we are agreeing to these things being agenda items for park board meetings without anybody really presenting it.

Gabler thinks it is high-level and comes from the community. He added that you can have improvements mentioned such as community feedback. People like to see their suggestion or project in print. It doesn't say it is going to happen but we are letting people know that it was heard and it can be talked about in the future if people want to suggest it.

O'Dea asked if maybe we said something about current local trends and give a few examples. He understands the concern about things possibly changing but we still want to note that we are addressing and listening to the feedback.

Woeste added that they did hear trends and they have been looked at and were presented at the November meeting. However, these trends were specific to Minnetonka residents and visitors that they spoke to. She thinks they could change the language there if it indicated that it was feedback given by residents or by visitors of our current park system during the time of the planning.

Durbin said the outdoor water park or dog park was not put in here and we all know that it always comes up. They are examples but there is inclusion and there is exclusion so he would just be cognizant of that.

Semersky commented that when she did her pre-reading, she read the purpose of the POST Plan and there is a phrase at the end of it that is all about doing it in a cost-effective manner. She would say that theme didn't come through in all the initiatives and maybe it should be incorporated a bit. The city does a great job offering free events and she questioned if they should do more reduced cost events for people who need it.

Ingraham thought this was a really good document and that staff did a great job responding to feedback and input. He really likes the yellow highlights on the bullets because it really showed that linkage between the two plans.

Durbin asked if that can be formalized, because they do dovetail together. The effort has been put in there so we might as well show that there is that relationship. He thought that was really cool.

## **8. Park Board Member Reports**

There were none.

## **9. Information Items**

### **Burwell Spooktacular**

O'Dea gave the report.

### **Farmers Market**

O'Dea gave the report.

Durbin thinks the farmers market will be even bigger in 2022. He thinks it is one of the really cool things we do in Minnetonka and other cities are doing it too. The Spooktacular event was genius and he has always been impressed with that. It is something that we can do because we have a Burwell House and not everybody has one. He can't wait to see the next cool type of event that Minnetonka does because everyone we do is so popular. Even if the weather is bad, they are a lot of fun for families to do. It's not just about Summer Fest, these ones that are in the shoulder seasons or the winter are just as wonderful.

## **10. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items**

O'Dea gave the report.

## **11. Adjournment**

Jacobs moved, Semersky seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.



Respectfully submitted,

*Kathy Kline*

Kathy Kline  
Recreation Administrative Coordinator