



**Minutes
Minnetonka Park Board
Wednesday, January 4, 2023**

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Park board members present: James Durbin, Chris Gabler, David Ingraham, Ben Jacobs, Katie Semersky, Isabelle Stroh. Excused: Corey Beyersdorf and Chris Walick.

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

Chair Gabler called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

3. Reports from Staff

There were none.

4. Approval of Minutes

Semersky moved, Durbin seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of Oct. 5, 2022 as submitted. Jacobs abstained. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

5. Citizens wishing to discuss items not on the agenda

John Mirocha from The Friends of Minnetonka Parks gave a presentation on work completed in 2022 and their work plan for 2023.

Gabler questioned what their organization's plan is to remain relevant over the next few years.

Mirocha replied that the community has an interest and there is a great sense of satisfaction on working in the parks. The friends did a YouTube video that is posted on their webpage and it asked people why they volunteer. Their replies were that they like to work, like working with people and they are self-motivated.

Stroh asked what their plan is on recruiting students from the surrounding high schools.

Mirocha thought the high school students contacted Natural Resources Manager Leslie Yetka with some questions and the link was made that way.

Marie Versen requested putting pickleball lines on tennis courts after they get resurfaced to make pickleball more available to beginners and families. Pickleball is the best way to get exercise without knowing it, a great way to meet new people and it's a good way to have the community come together. Some issues about Lone Lake Park is that it is always busy because it draws people in from everywhere, people end up waiting a long time for their turn, the level of play has gotten so intense and that environment makes it hard for

beginners and families to participate. The tennis courts at Junction Park are scheduled to be resurfaced soon and she suggested painting pickleball lines. The court would be around two feet short but she thought that would be great for beginners and families. People could purchase their own nets and bring them to the park. Junction Park has a parking lot that holds 10 vehicles and there are few homes that are close to the courts so she thought that would be a good place to try it.

Ingraham thought he just saw an email about public meetings for Junction Park and one other park for pickleball.

Recreation Director Kelly O'Dea responded that ironically this is in the information items tonight. Linner and Junction Parks are the two parks that have tennis courts that are scheduled for resurfacing. We are planning on having neighborhood meetings for both parks on January 24. Notices will go out to the neighborhood probably next week.

Versen wasn't aware that you will be talking about it.

O'Dea said it was very ironic that you are here tonight because we had that in the packet. Historically we haven't put pickleball courts in neighborhood parks mostly because of the noise and parking. The park board and the city council have said that staff should look into having pickleball courts at some neighborhood parks. If there is only one court, there probably won't be a lot of people there and we probably won't get some advanced players. The plan is to meet with the neighborhoods to see if there are different layouts for resurfacing the tennis courts to put in pickleball courts.

Versen said she has measured it and it will work.

O'Dea said we just have to figure out what works best in some locations because it is always nice to have multi-use facilities.

Versen said her neighbors want to play pickleball but feel as though they can't go to Lone Lake Park due to their abilities. She thought it would be fun for neighborhoods to have more pick-up games.

O'Dea said our plan is to send out notices next week to people within 500-600 feet of the park and then have a neighborhood meeting so people can discuss it.

Durbin said it is interesting to hear what you said about Lone Lake Park. We knew it was going to be popular. He thought we built the courts right at Lone Lake Park. There are noise complaints but he feels it's ok to have noise at parks. There are some silent parks and there are some parks that are going to have a lot of activity and noise. He was against creating a pickleball court that is two feet short, he suggested putting in a regulation size court.

6. Special Matters

There were none.

7. Business Items

A. Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

O'Dea gave the report.

Jacobs nominated Walick.

Durbin mentioned that Walick has missed three park board meetings this year and thought they may want to consider that.

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to approve Walick as park board chair.
Durbin abstained. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Ingraham moved, Semersky seconded a motion to approve Jacobs as vice-chair. Durbin abstained. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

B. Review of 2022 Farmers Market Operations

Recreation Superintendent Ann Davy gave the report.

Ingraham questioned if the produce market bucks are funded through the city.

Davy answered that they are funded through the Department of Agriculture.

Durbin thought it will be interesting to see what happens the first year of the farmers market at Ridgedale Commons. It might take a while for people to migrate to the new location but maybe you can get a different population. He wouldn't worry too much if the numbers aren't as successful as past years because they will be.

Jacobs asked if the space at Ridgedale Commons is similar to the Ice Arena parking lot.

Davy replied that we aren't really sure. Bonnie Hannah-Powers, the former manager of the farmer's market put together a layout and she thought we could get pretty close to the same amount of vendors. The one issue this year will be that vendors can't sell out of their vehicles because they can't drive into the space. That is a little bit of a hiccup and we are curious to see how well that is going to work.

Semersky questioned if they kept their extra inventory in their vehicles.

Davy responded yes. There are a couple different spaces that we could use at the new location. There is kind of the winding patio area and there is a grassy area that can kind of be overflow from the main plaza area.

Ingraham asked if the market is allowed to use any of the adjacent parking spaces next to the park.

Davy replied that vendors can't sell out of their vehicles from those spaces; it has to be done in the park.

Jacobs thought they talked about the vendors doing an exit survey last year. He questioned if we did one and if there was any information on that. He also wondered if there was a high turnover since there were 20 returning vendors and 30 new vendors.

Davy commented that staff did do a survey last year. We aren't having a high turnover and people actually seek out our market. At the winter market she heard this is kind of the place to be. We got really good feedback and she anticipates that there is still going to be a lot of interest in participating.

Gabler asked why they are moving the market to Ridgedale Commons.

Davy responded that it has always been kind of tricky having it at the ice arena parking lot. That is due to parking being an issue when there is a popular band playing during Music in the Park, the ice arena offers programs in the evenings, and people don't like walking down the hill to the market.

C. Review of 2022 Shady Oak Beach Operations

Aquatics and Inclusion Services Manager Megan Mulligan gave the report.

Durbin thought it was ingenious that the city paid for lifeguard training because you are competing with every beach and pool in the west metro. He worries that the lifeguards are now free agents so they could go anywhere. He questioned how staff planned on keeping these employees.

Mulligan answered that in order to get paid training, lifeguards had to commit to working the whole season. She also allows lifeguards to work up to 48 hours a week versus 40. A lot of places cap their summer positions at 40 hours. Returning staff get a pay increase, which is a step system so they will get a step up in pay from last year. We provide sunscreen, which is important for lifeguards. Based off staff feedback, they love working there because of the friendships they make, being able to work outside and that Shady Oak Beach is a great place. She hears that from probably 100 percent of the staff.

Durbin asked when training can start for new lifeguards. He also wondered if they do pool training first or what the training process is.

Mulligan said they do the full lifeguard certification which is about 32 hours in the pool, there is an additional waterfront certification that's an extra five to six hours and then there is Shady Oak Beach specific certification. They try to get that done in May but it's a little bit harder with school schedules. That is why the end of May and June are really important times for training. When school ends is usually the same week the beach opens and we kind of have trouble with that. Last year, Minnetonka and Hopkins schools didn't end until around June 9 so they had to train all of the new lifeguards at the end of June to get them ready for the July schedule.

Durbin added that with the unguarded hours, sometimes people don't realize that and they just drop off their kids at the beach. They might just assume that there are lifeguards there. Staff can advertise it but that doesn't mean that people are actually looking at it. Sometimes the absence of feedback doesn't mean that people don't care. Shady Oak Beach is always a cool place to go. It's a solid Minnetonka and Hopkins partnership.

Semersky asked if the operating cost was budgeted or if that was typical.

O'Dea said it is fairly typical. The cost to run that program is not a breakeven, we definitely have to spend money. This year, he thought the expenditures were a little bit

higher due to staff levels and competing with St. Louis Park and Edina. The additional expenditures could be due to paying lifeguards 16 to 17 dollars an hour.

Stroh asked what happens in August when people start leaving for college. Do you train more lifeguards for the August season?

Mulligan replied that is why we close early and don't stay open until Labor Day; all of our staff are essentially gone by mid-August. Since she has been there, they haven't really ran into the issue because they schedule the whole summer out. Everyone is aware of their schedule so there is room to kind of plan ahead if we need extra lifeguards on shift. They can work with a skeleton lifeguard staff but they would have to work a little longer hours. Since she has been here, it hasn't been an issue with people leaving the first two weeks in August. We've stayed open fully with lifeguards all the way until the end of the season.

Ingraham wondered because this is a joint Minnetonka and Hopkins program if Minnetonka absorbs the operating loss or if that is a shared loss.

O'Dea said the total budget is shared with Hopkins, two-thirds from Minnetonka and one-third from Hopkins.

Ingraham asked if this is our share of the loss for the total program.

O'Dea said yes.

Ingraham asked if the attendance numbers for 2018 and 2019 correct.

O'Dea thought that was due to our software because we've changed the way we count passes.

8. Park Board Member Reports

Gabler thanked staff for the last eight years and he doesn't think people realize how hard you work. Everything that staff brings forward and the information they received is as professional as any organization he has worked with and better than 95 percent of them. He appreciated the other members who served because it's a big commitment but it's also rewarding. Minnetonka should be proud of what we have for parks, the services and the programming we offer. It's been fun, thank you very much.

Durbin said he was told that this was the fun board and commission to serve on and it was a lot of fun. He really appreciated the work staff puts in to give them information and help them make really good decisions. Looking back at the past six years, we have done a lot of really cool things for the city. His pet peeve was recycling in the parks and he thanks Street and Park Operations Manager Darin Ellingson for doing that so he could retire from the board. Serving with other people from Minnetonka was a lot of fun and it was a great way to meet people. He is still friends with people who aren't currently on the board which he thought was really cool. Thanks for the opportunity.

O'Dea thanked both of them and appreciated their service. A couple of years ago when COVID hit, we really found out how important parks and trails were in Minnetonka. The work you do is important and he appreciates it.

Ingraham thanked Gabler and Durbin because he has learned a lot about what is going on here and appreciated their service. One of his pet peeves is this situation with dogs in our parks. The POST Plan survey showed that 20 percent of all of our residents responded they don't feel safe in the parks because of dogs. We get increasingly more negative interactions taking place probably because they are getting more use. He requested scheduling a review of our leash law ordinance. In the western suburbs, we are the only one that doesn't have a clear ordinance saying dogs must be leashed.

O'Dea commented that he has been communicating with Ingraham as well as Park and Trail Project Manager Matt Kumka who will be in charge of the Purgatory Park Master Plan. Initially staff was thinking that plan would lead into the existing conditions out there and they would hear about the issues with dogs. Ingraham's request is to maybe push this up a couple months. What we are talking about is the park ordinance, which would go through the park board and then go to the city council. He is also anticipating that we would want to have a fair amount of community engagement because this is probably somewhat of a hot topic. The question is, do we want to push this up a couple of months or do we wait for the Purgatory Park Master Plan knowing the dog issue will come up probably mid-study.

Gabler suggested tackling it sooner rather than later. He sees a lot of posts on Nextdoor about dogs at Purgatory Park.

Ingraham added that a lot of the issue is dog owners. Purgatory Park gets the most baggage but it could be in any park. Purgatory Park has a solution potentially to redirect all the dogs if we can do that and get an actual dog park. However, that wouldn't change the fact that people are still using the trails without a clear understanding of what is expected from their dog.

Gabler thought you would get a lot more buy-in if the issue was dealt with early as you are going into Master Planning. He is gathering from people that it is everywhere, not just at Purgatory Park.

Jacobs said it will take time because it's a big change.

Durbin said Ingraham gave a really good break down about this at the joint meeting. Ingraham has voiced his concern and he is going to keep it up. We historically haven't dealt with this very well for like 20 years so it's probably time we need to. There are multiple staff members that would need to be involved and it's almost bringing that kind of meeting together so they can discuss it internally.

Ingraham commented that he is looking for clarification on who would be involved. With his review of the city code, so far the only place he has found reference to dogs and dog

leashing is under park regulations. One would think the police would be part of it and enforcing it. Starting with the park board is probably the right place to start and then we can involve the police if needed.

O'Dea said the last time we reviewed the park regulations, which included issues with animals was in 2017. Every department in the city had a representative go over the regulations and they suggested changes. That was more of a clean-up and the language probably hasn't been changed in years. This would be changing one of the rules so it would be a little different than cleaning up the language. There are probably going to be a lot of dog owners who feel as though they like it the way it is and maybe are opposed to change.

Ingraham replied that it could be very loud but you would be surprised by how many dog owners will be supportive of a change to make it clear.

Assistant Recreation Director Sara Woeste questioned Ingraham if he would like a review of the ordinance and be more educated or if he wanted a decision made.

Ingraham responded that he is ready to propose that we eliminate off-leash unless it is a true off-leash designated area. Purgatory Park doesn't really fit that because the areas that they need to be leashed are adjacent to the unleashed areas. That is an unusual situation because it's not an isolated area that you can avoid. People are even letting their dogs bolt out of the back of the vehicles in the parking lots. He has gone through all the western suburban cities and there is no other city that has voice command, they all clearly designate that dogs must be leashed at all times.

Semersky asked if cities near us have designated dog parks.

Ingraham replied that not all of them have them. Edina and Eden Prairie reference that dogs have to be on a leash unless it is in a designated dog area. He doesn't believe that Excelsior has a dog park but they clearly say that you can't have an animal unleashed at any time.

Semersky thought they needed education on the topic regarding the current situation. It sounds like our scope would be focused on the park regulations or park ordinance. If there is other written language within the city, she would like to see that and go over everything together.

Durbin said when they talked about the inception of Ridgedale Commons, there was a special breakout group that had a representative from the park board, representative from the city council, city manager, assistant city manager, recreation staff and community development staff. That group just talked and started hashing everything out and he would recommend doing that. His recommendation is that the city manager should put together a monthly meeting and bring a park board member, city council member or anybody else of interest on a board to start working through this because it is going to take a year.

Ingraham responded to Woeste's question and said that he has reviewed police stats, everything on the website and what neighboring cities do. Our parks are a real treasure and if one in five residents say they don't feel safe in the parks because of dogs, to him that is a call to action. He recognizes that we can change the language but it's up the owner to follow the rules. It would at least make a statement by the city that we take this seriously and maybe he would stop getting letters forwarded to him from people with good justifying reasons to why this should be changed. He would feel good knowing that we are taking some action to move forward on something.

Woeste responded that staff does want to address this ordinance. We can either deal with this as a dog only issue in the next three months or deal with it during the Purgatory Park Master Plan in the next six months. During the Purgatory Park Master Plan, we are going to get a lot of feedback because it will go through a public process and the feedback will likely say that there is a dog issue. If the outcome is that the public wants a fenced in dog park, then we think there needs to be a change to the ordinance. That allows us to say that they are getting something but we are taking away something. The real issue is at Purgatory Park so we'll go through that process and then you can review the ordinance.

Ingraham replied that an alternative could be to have it paralleled. We could build a dog park but then also change the leash law ordinance.

Woeste said we would look at the ordinance overall.

O'Dea added that staff will bring some education about this in February. They can look at the park regulations and he believes animal control is also included. He also suggested staff talk to Kumka to see if there is a way to move the dog topic into the first part of the Purgatory Park Master Plan process. That might shift it a month or two earlier.

Ingraham thought that was a good approach. He encouraged people to scan Nextdoor and look at the dog comments. It's remarkable how most of the feedback he was reading is from dog owners; they do not want to walk their dog in a park anymore. They gave examples about how their dog was attacked in a park. The Nextdoor commentary tends to be dog owners that are trying to be in the leashed areas but they are being harassed by loose dogs.

Semersky said it is easy to do searches in Nextdoor so it shouldn't be too hard to find.

O'Dea asked if there is anything we can do right now to help the issue out at Purgatory Park.

Semersky commented that her son had a map but he didn't know what maintained and unmaintained were. Maybe there could be a map that is easier to read and is clearer where dogs have to be leashed or unleashed.

Ingraham commented that there are portions of the park where maintained areas are right next to unmaintained areas. An example is if you were entering the park from Stadola Road

and you go over the bridge, the next quarter to a third of a mile has the maintained trail within 20 feet of the unmaintained trails. That is asking a lot of an off-leash dog in the unmaintained area not to go into the maintained area when it sees another dog there. If you ran a fence along the edge of that trail, it would at least avoid dogs bolting out of there.

Durbin asked if community service officers or other staff go out to Purgatory Park to educate people. A lot of people might not even understand that something is wrong.

O'Dea said they are out there but he doesn't know how often and how much they are educating. They struggle in certain areas because they don't know if it is maintained or not and it is a grey area. They are just trying to figure out the best approach, timing and the best way to tackle it.

9. Information Items

Winter-Spring Program Registration

Woeste gave the report.

Burwell Spooktacular

Woeste gave the report.

Neighborhood Meetings Scheduled

O'Dea discussed the neighborhood meetings under "Citizens Wishing to Discuss Something not on the Agenda."

10. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

O'Dea gave the report.

11. Adjournment

Jacobs moved, Durbin seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:48 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Kline

Kathy Kline
Recreation Administrative Coordinator