



**Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the
Minnetonka Park Board and City Council
Wednesday, December 7, 2022**

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Park Board Members Present: Korey Beyersdorf, James Durbin, Chris Gabler, David Ingraham, Ben Jacobs, Katie Semersky, Isabelle Stroh and Chris Walick.

Council Members Present: Mayor Brad Wiersum, Deb Calvert, Brian Kirk, Rebecca Schack, Kimberly Wilburn. Excused: Bradley Schaeppi, Kissy Coakley.

Staff members in attendance: Mike Funk, Moranda Dammann, Darin Ellingson, Corrine Heine, Jesse Izquierdo, Kathy Kline, Matt Kumka, Kelly O'Dea, Sara Woeste and Leslie Yetka.

Chair Gabler called the meeting to order at 6:29 p.m.

3. Special Matters

Recreation Director Kelly O'Dea thanked everyone for attending the meeting this evening, as it was rescheduled from November. The Friends of Minnetonka Parks couldn't attend tonight due to a conflict, but they emailed all park board and council members' updates on work they have been doing in our park system. Staff really appreciated the work they have done.

4. Business Items

A. Skate Park Feasibility Update

Park and Trail Project Manager Matt Kumka gave the report.

Jacob Halsne and Jeff McMenimen from Damon Farber gave a presentation on the skate park feasibility study report. This included information on progress, background, site selection, site analysis and their next steps.

Kirk questioned since the Glen Lake option had two locations, if there would be an age difference between the two locations; similar to playgrounds having preschool and youth play areas. He asked if there would be any benefit to having an age appropriate site.

Kumka responded that what he understands about current, modern practice for skate park design is that they can support a variety of skill levels from entry level skaters all the way to older folks who grew up skating and want to get back out there. They are designed in a way that they can support a wide range of users on the same feature.

Halsne added that there could be one area that is very challenging but nearby, there could be a feature that is a lot more approachable. The Glen Lake site is a smaller parcel so there is an opportunity to have a unique difference between the two areas.

Kirk said his mind was thinking about big kids running over little kids, however, the skill aspect is important too.

Gabler asked what options four and five were.

Kumka replied that he is going to have to look at the full feasibility study to get a sense of all of the options. Halsne went through the information pretty quickly but the report gives a lot of characteristics for each site and it explains how they sort of fell out of the top three. There were a lot of discussions about how many sites they take to a concept level; ultimately they decided on those three. Kumka suggested looking at the other sites to see what their drawbacks were and what their positives were.

Durbin thought it would be interesting to see the concept of how the two skate areas would connect at Glen Lake so skaters wouldn't have to navigate through the parking lot. He asked if staff was going to demolish or suggest demolishing the Glen Lake Activity Center.

Stroh asked if the playground at Glen Lake has a lot of traffic.

Kumka replied that they will have to take a closer look at the usage numbers there. He lives nearby and doesn't see it utilized all that much. Staff wouldn't want to remove an amenity and not replace it somewhere nearby. They will have to look into relocating that playground and serving that user base.

Ingraham thought the playground is used a fair amount. It's generally used during games because you see younger kids get offloaded there.

Schack appreciated this really fascinating process, she thought the analysis was really cool and she looked forward to reading the full study. Where we have the density of development in the community is in southeast corner in Opus. Hopefully we get grants but if there's potential for park dedication fees being used for this project, she thinks we need to be sensitive to that from a location perspective.

Calvert had that same thought.

City Manager Mike Funk questioned if there have been studies or analysis on skateboard parks and how far families, young adults or children are willing to travel to skate parks. It is important that we have the connectivity with sidewalks and trails. There is also the question in terms of density on where you put it to make sure you are capturing the most amount of young folks and families as you can.

Kumka said the Minneapolis Park Board put together a wonderful skate park design study that looked at some of those questions. It depends on their age and if they are biking, if bike trails are available, or if they can safely walk to the park, etc. Kumka believes there are users that would be driven there by their parents. There is also a key demographic which is the fairly new independent teen that would be willing to jump on their bike and travel a bit of a distance to meet up with their friends and skate for a few hours. If they

have good connectivity, which our trails program is establishing, he thinks they could get kids coming from fairly far distances.

Jacobs asked what the collaboration is like with the City of Hopkins and the pavilion at Shady Oak. He also wondered what the collaboration would be like with the school.

Kumka answered that the pavilion at Shady Oak is a little confusing because we don't maintain the site and it would be trickier to coordinate. A certain drawback in terms of the coordination with Hopkins would be necessary if we were to deem that a site worth looking at closer. With the school, the key thing is that we currently maintain the ice rinks. We would have to enter into an agreement that we would be changing the use and changing our park programming to remove the ice skating rink in favor of a skateboard park. This is the first public viewing of this list of potential sites, so we would begin those conversations after this.

O'Dea said we do have a relationship with the City of Hopkins. We have a joint recreation department so we already work closely with them; he thinks they are a good partner. He thought we also have a good relationship with Hopkins School District. We've established those relationships but we would have to come to an agreement with either one of those if we were to choose those sites.

Wiersum commented that the pictures kind of point out that our current skate park is rather rudimentary and it could use some updating. He asked where they could look to see some of the latest and greatest skate parks in the region; similar to what they are intending on proposing.

Halsne thought the newest, latest and greatest in the area is the Shoreview Skate Park. That one is very nice and designed by a world-class skate park builder. He also recommended Elliot Skate Plaza in Minneapolis, which was built in recent years.

Kumka said the trend with these parks is that it's not so much a paved area where obstacles are dropped down, which is our current condition. They are doing a lot of innovation with concrete and the flowing nature of these concrete features. That way you can get long lines to skate and there are less obstacles in a flat space so people can be more artistic.

Wiersum said his takeaway was that some of those designs looked similar to snowboarding courses you would see on the X Games or the Olympics. Doing some of those moves on a skateboard would be pretty cool.

Durbin requested at the next presentation to include some details, photos and even videos of kids using these two similar skate parks. On the park board tour, they visited Eden Prairie and that was really cool. He has driven by the other skate parks but hasn't been able to stop at them. One thing he has noticed is that skateboard parks are populating when they look newer, but at Glen Lake, he has only seen one or two kids there in seven or eight years. He thought if it was newer and more modern it would be used a lot more frequently.

Kumka liked the idea of a video and seeing it in action.

Ingraham mentioned that at the last meeting, there was a possibility of taking out the equipment that is dangerous at the current site and doing a half-pipe idea. He wondered if that was still a quick fix for that site.

Kumka replied that staff has talked internally about what it would take to budget and build a temporary ramp essentially, but no decision has been made yet. We do need to revisit the safety issue out there and make sure it's at least not a hazard.

Ingraham was curious about the process because it sort of felt like they are on the road with this already. He questioned if there was a step where they kind of decide the use of those dollars relative to other possible uses; given it is a significant investment.

Gabler thought the process felt similar to the mountain bike trail, such as, a group of Minnetonka High School students presented in front of the park board. The project took a while but if you look at what the city has based on that, he thinks it's wonderful.

Wilburn was concerned with the Glen Lake site and having increased bicycle traffic coming from the south and having to cross Excelsior Blvd. She wondered what that would look like and whether we would need to have signals put in for safer crossing.

Kumka replied that staff would need to study how people would actually be getting to this site and where the safest crossings are. Between the Gold Nugget and the grocery store there is a flashed crossing. However, staff would need to study more closely where they would expect traffic to be coming from and make sure they don't have people crossing the road in improper spots. In the design phase, staff would need to study the parking, additional amenities and bathrooms to see what the impact of those sorts of things would be.

Durbin thought it felt parallel to what they did with the mountain biking project because of the excitement and feasibility in trying to see if something can work. They learned a lot about public engagement, being methodical and not rushing things knowing that public input and support are critical. He questioned if the park board has taken a vote to recommend this to city council yet. He believes this is possible and better than some ideas that have come to them but he recommends not rushing it.

Gabler spent a lot of time in Eden Prairie last year near the skate park for softball practices. He talked to some of the kids there and what impressed him was how respectful they were of the park and how much pride they took in the park. There was no garbage laying around the park or parking lot. He was impressed on how they treated it like it was their own.

Semersky explained that she regularly drives by the skate park in Eden Prairie and it is busy three seasons out of the year. It stuns her that it is a three season sport and not a one season sport.

O'Dea commented that this is in our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and we've brought that to the park board. The CIP gets presented to the park board in March or April and then it moves onto the city council. Staff has had this in there so we kind of got your blessing on approving the feasibility study. Since the 2023 CIP has been approved, some of the design has been approved too. In 2024, it is funded in our CIP in the Community Investment Fund but that doesn't mean things could change.

Walick added that one of the things mentioned in the plan was community outreach. They discovered with the mountain bike trail that community outreach was exceptionally important along with using various methods of it to get people's feedback. Make sure to give this its due diligence because people like to feel heard.

B. Park Habitat Restoration & Maintenance Plans

Natural Resources Manager Leslie Yetka and Kumka gave the report.

Schack commented that the completed work is noticeable and people have commented on it. In the matter of a very short amount of time, it is remarkable and she thinks more has been accomplished than she thought would be at this point. Schack thought the GIS feature was fantastic. The police department and community development have rolled it out and it has been very helpful for them as representatives to help folks understand what is going on. She thought this would be a wonderful application for the community to hopefully have access to.

Durbin seconded the GIS dashboard. You have to be able to show progress and if it is tooting your own horn, it is tooting your own horn. It also reduces staff having to answer a lot of questions because people can look at the data themselves in a very useable format.

Semersky asked how many parks will have restoration and management plans in the next year.

Kumka replied that staff will be tackling Purgatory Park and Hilloway Park this winter. We are trying not to overdo it and do too much.

Yetka said the current CIP does have a list by year of which parks are anticipated over the next five years. She explained that we can take this template and apply it to other parks we are working on. All of the parks where they are actively working should have a plan eventually. We want to put a lot of emphasis on the high-priority parks because they tend to be bigger and more complex. They have more people involved so they want to make sure they get this process and template correct. Then they can apply it to those bigger parks and use pieces of it on our smaller parks as they go.

Semersky added that it will be easier to replicate once you have it.

Calvert thought this approach was sensible and there was a lot of potential. It is a huge undertaking for your staff. She liked the use of technology and that staff is coming up with an actual process that is scalable and they can use elsewhere. She liked the criteria and is really excited to see what we are able to do. She's hoping this will become a template not just for us but for surrounding communities.

Calvert also mentioned that Purgatory Park has basically remnant prairie and when we talk about plant communities, we are really talking about habitat. The thing that drives her crazy in the way we talk about restoration is plant communities, but that's not what all of it is so she hopes we keep that in mind as we are doing this to raise awareness. She thinks there are species that some of the friends groups are particularly interested in making sure that we are supporting as we do this. When we are talking about reestablishing plant communities, there are some plant communities that they were happy with. She was

hoping that we can use plant communities that are truly native and will support native animal species and really create habitat that has not been able to sustain itself. We don't have the same environment that we did in pre-European settlement times so there aren't any buffalos and things to disturb the soil in the right ways, but maybe just try to recreate what we can to the best of our ability.

Calvert liked the work plan and that staff wanted to be flexible but try to stick with their basic goals. You never know what the future is going to bring and what grant monies are going to come your way.

Kirk thought it was brilliant and it was a nice presentation. He really appreciated the positive feedback received from the friends group and thought their engagement will be very important. One of the big concerns that comes up at Purgatory Park is the informal dog run that exists out there. He is curious how staff will handle things when the restoration efforts suddenly collide with current use.

Kumka explained that our process moving forward is that these restoration management plans are established for each park before we revisit the traditional master planning process. That would tackle things like active restoration or in Purgatory Park's case, a dog park. Once we have Purgatory Park's restoration and management plan set, we are going to start the master planning process. We are going to be looking at securing a consultant and doing a master planning process at Purgatory Park in 2023. That would tackle things like trails, parking, memorial benches, other human infrastructure and a dog park being a potentially controversial factor there.

Ingraham echoed the comments on the quality of the plan and just the general amount of collaboration that has been going on with natural resources and the various friends groups. He has sat in on a couple of the stewardship zoom calls and he has toured with some of the friend leaders for various parks. He thinks it's a significant improvement over the last couple of years in terms of the amount of cooperation and collaboration.

Ingraham continued that he would be remiss if he didn't also bring up the dog issue. He thinks several of you have been copied on emails from homeowners in the Purgatory Park area, one of them whom was attacked in her own home by an off-leash dog. We've talked a little bit at the park board meetings about the leash law because our current leash law is a little strange. If you read it, pets are not permitted on any developed areas, parks and trails. So if you walk your dog on-leash on a trail, based on the leash law commentary under animal control on our website you are violating that leash law. On the other hand, you can have your dog off-leash as long as it is under voice control anywhere in the city. Ingraham thought it would be a good thing to look at updating the leash law to make it more understandable. He recognizes that it's all about the dog owner and what the owner does. Ingraham is a dog owner who has his dog on a leash; if his dog is approached by an off-leashed dog, he can't respond that our leash law requires them to have their dog on a leash because of the way it is worded. One out of five responses to the POST Plan survey indicated they don't feel safe in the parks because of off-leash dogs. Also, the police department averages two calls a week for leash issues with dogs. He's not sure what the process is for updating it but he thought it was something we really should be looking at.

Wiersum thanked Ingraham for his comment and thought the leash law deserves to be looked at based on Ingraham's description. He thought Yetka and Kumka's presentation

was great and the dashboard is an outstanding tool. He has heard that we are doing a great job with the friends groups and it has been a long path but they are a real asset to our community and we are thankful they are there. Wiersum questioned if we have enough volunteers or if there are things staff could do to encourage more volunteers to get more done. He walked through Meadow Park the other day with one of the park stewards and he saw all the buckthorn that has been removed and thought it looked fantastic. When we got the POST Plan, it was troubling to him that so much of the great land that we have in Minnetonka is degraded and disturbed. We think it is beautiful but it's not really as beautiful in the way we would like it. Wiersum used to have a cabin in northern Wisconsin that had an association. Once a year, they would have a work day where they would plant trees, remove invasive species, etc. He wondered in terms of recruiting people to volunteer, if they had a Minnetonka Parks Day where literally hundreds of people came together as a community to volunteer in parks, if that would present potential recruits down the line. He wondered if staff thought they had enough volunteers or what their thoughts were on recruiting volunteers to do some of the bold things being talked about here.

Yetka said they could always use more volunteers. She would say volunteerism is up because of our friends groups. They are hosting more events that staff is helping them host in our parks. They are doing recruitments and are talking to people as they are using the parks. We have a new Minnetonka High School Environmental Club that has become active in our parks. Staff also routinely gets calls from different church groups or scouting groups who want to participate. Volunteerism as a whole is up and people are recognizing that there are opportunities. There is certainly more they can do though so having a volunteer day or having a more robust outreach effort for volunteerism is something that is definitely on their radar. Behind the scenes, they are developing some trainings so if they do get volunteers, they have trainings available for them to learn the skills they need to be successful in volunteering in our parks. They are putting in some of that groundwork to make it available to attract new volunteers. She thinks a volunteer day is great and is something they can put on their list of things to think about. Staff will certainly be continuing to try and find other ways try and recruit volunteers.

Wiersum thanked and congratulated Yetka because it is clear that the volunteerism in our parks is really working and is significant.

Yetka added that a nice feature from the dashboard is they should know the volunteer efforts, number of hours and the number of events. Those are all things that would be posted and they can see the numbers change in real time.

Kumka said the nature of the volunteerism is hopefully going to change from the buckthorn removal work to more sowing of native seed mixes or potential monitoring efforts in the parks such as: pollinator counts, bird counts, etc...

Durbin asked if we would consider having a volunteer day or weekend that is adjacent to earth day every year.

C. 2023 Projects Update

O'Dea gave the report.

Wilburn asked staff if they could look into having more accessible equipment for people with disabilities when they are looking at replacing playground equipment.

O'Dea responded that it is something they can look into and it is one of the lenses that staff looks at when replacing equipment. A group came to us a couple of years ago and asked that similar question. Now, when staff puts in new playground equipment, they make sure to look at the accessibility.

Kirk said technically ADA allows for shredded rubber but he questioned if we do poured-in-place.

Ellingson replied that we only have two parks that have poured rubber. There is a little bit of poured rubber at Sunrise Ridge Park and then with the upgrade at Meadow Park this year, we did a large poured rubber area around the 2-5 year olds play equipment. Aside from that, the wood mulch and the rubber mulches are technically considered accessible if you have a ramp to get from a sidewalk onto the fiber and it's a smooth transition. It is a little more challenging but technically it meets accessibility.

Kirk commented that it adds almost \$80,000 - \$100,000 to a project when you do poured-in-place, but he thought if we had a few of them that it may lift our accessibility.

Durbin asked if staff knew why there was so much difficulty with supply chain issues on the Ridgedale Commons project. He questioned if they didn't order in time or if they thought it didn't take as long as it did for supplies to come in. Durbin thought this was maybe a learned lesson for upcoming projects so it doesn't take as long and it can end a little bit closer to what was predicted.

O'Dea replied that they were aware of some supply chain issues but something that happened early in the project might've bumped three or four things down the line and the impact was definitely felt. An example of something else that happened was that they thought the lead time for electrical was three months and it ended up being six months. Ordering the standard ticket items were fine but the big ticket items and the unique items were backordered. As far as future projects, they will work with IT and building staff and look through plans to see if there is something they can identify early so they can get a head start on those.

Durbin thought of it as a contracting issue and suggested having penalties or rewards for finishing on time. That could motivate contractors to beat expectations or at the minimum meet expectations. He just thought of having something to push things along because this project has been in construction for way too long.

O'Dea replied that staff did not do that with his project. The scary part would be that the contractor may inflate their original price because they know that there are these issues.

Calvert mentioned in the current environment, half of the time, one of the reasons projects don't get finished is because they can't get the materials. Sometimes it isn't getting the work done and other times it's a supply chain issue that the contractor doesn't have control over. They are at the mercy of supply chain and inflation just like everybody else.

Funk commented that when you look at our plans for next year, remember that Yetka and Kumka are from a natural resources perspective and O'Dea and the recreation staff are more from the active side of it. From a budgeting standpoint, last year staff really looked into making sure that in our budgets and in our CIP, we separated out our more active costs to parks with playground equipment and some of those items compared to more of the passive side of our parks with natural resources. Before they got into the natural resources master planning, staff heard concerns about how much money the city was dedicating to more of the passive side of parks. From a budgetary standpoint, it was hard to differentiate that. Finance Director Darin Nelson looked at our CIP and he was flagging and tracking things differently so we could be more transparent in the sense of how much the city dedicates towards the active side of our parks versus the passive side. Staff now has that built in and he really appreciated all their comments in support for the upcoming work and making sure we have the dedicated funding to roll it out. All those three pieces came together last year and he thought you will see that work come to fruition.

Kirk thought one comment they still hear from the friends is that it takes both sides of the table when it comes to the heavy lifting.

D. Lone Lake Park Multi-Use Mountain Bike Trail Metrics

Assistant Recreation Director Sara Woeste gave the report on metrics.

Recreation Program Manager Jesse Izquierdo gave general trail updates.

Durbin thanked staff for the presentation but he thought they came to an agreement last year that they didn't need all this data collected. Their concern was that it took up too much of staff's time. He wanted to open that up for discussion because he didn't want to waste staff's time if there wasn't a requirement to do it.

Woeste mentioned that they don't usually make formal decisions at this meeting because it is more of a study session. Staff heard that feedback last year but they felt it was appropriate to do a report for at least another year. Staff will discuss whether they need to make any kind of formal recommendation on not giving this report in the future.

Durbin asked if there is a formal requirement to do this report.

Woeste explained that it was part of the approval process. Technically we would need to have some kind of action.

Durbin thought it should be an agenda item after staff discusses it so they can put a stop to it.

Wiersum remembered during the approval process, councilmember Mike Happe from Ward 3 made the comment, "nobody on the council wants to wreck the park." He then recommended taking a look at it every year to demonstrate that we are not wrecking the park with a bike trail. He thinks the report still has a role but would agree that after three or four years, it's not something that they need to continue with in as much detail.

Gabler thought what happens is that you get asked for the data when you don't have it, and you don't know when it's going to happen.

Calvert added that there are still community members who weren't happy about the trail being put in and they are still paying attention and communicating with the council. To the point that if we don't have the data, that's the data that they will ask for. They have read the agreements and they have memorized every work agreement, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). They are going to hold our feet to the fire if we don't do what we agreed to at the beginning but she totally agrees. As we get more comfortable, people will see that it is being handled responsibly. She thinks the need for this will diminish; there are probably certain data sets that we will still want to collect over time but some of this will get a little easier.

Ingraham complimented the volunteer effort. He hikes at Lone Lake Park usually three times a week and he is always impressed with how much work is put into maintaining the trail and improving the surrounding evasive species. Sometimes he comes across a limb that has fallen and it has already been taken care of by the next day. It is a great asset and all the hard work is really paying off.

Calvert noticed that our friends of mountain biking are still very engaged. She questioned how this year's volunteer hours compared to previous years. She was impressed with the number of hours the first year and thought it was almost twice as much as this year.

Woeste replied that last year we reported about a 1,000 hours of trail maintenance hours and 530 hours in restoration. However, we had construction in there and we were out there a lot.

Izquierdo reminded everyone that the three months leading up to the construction, groups were out there twice a week removing buckthorn from the corridor in order to expedite the building of the trail. When they actually built the mountain bike trail, they had volunteers out there four days a week, Monday through Thursday so it was consistent.

Calvert complimented staff on actually keeping track of which kinds of invasives are popping up and which ones are being kept at bay, such as stickseed. It was problematic but they're taking care of it. She thinks there is some value in being able to show that they were popping up and they were getting rid of it for these first few years. It's helpful for people read on page three that stickseed abundance was up but it was extensively pulled by MORC and staff.

Gabler said for the mountain bike folks, in his opinion, this is what the model of a public/private partnership should look like. He thought other communities could learn a lot by looking at how this was done.

Wiersum thanked everyone and thought the report was done well. He appreciated the opportunity to meet with the park board and the council. It's very impressive to hear how much work gets done in our parks by volunteers. As we look at amenities in our parks, only a small percentage of people use a skate park for a city of our size. However, we can't just have amenities that appeal to everyone, we want to have diverse amenities that appeal to small segments of our population because it contributes to the livability of our community. Our community survey gives us very high scores on livability. At the council meeting on Monday night, they listened to residents say that they are spending too much money, however, it is very gratifying to know that we are actually investing in our community and we are benefiting the lives of so many residents. He is proud of what we have done and thanked staff, volunteers and park board for doing a phenomenal job.

O'Dea thanked Durbin and Gabler who will be coming off the park board at the end of January. Durbin served six years and Gabler served eight years. They have been on the park board during slow and crazy times and we really appreciate your service.

5. Adjournment

Walick moved, Jacobs seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Kline

Kathy Kline
Recreation Administrative Coordinator