



**Minutes  
Minnetonka Park Board  
Wednesday, February 1, 2023**

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call**

Park board members present: Ella DiLorenzo, Anne Hanley, David Ingraham, Ben Jacobs, Katie Semersky, Isabelle Stroh, Korey Beyersdorf and Chris Walick.

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

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

**3. Reports from Staff**

Recreation Director Kelly O'Dea introduced the new park board members Ella DiLorenzo and Anne Hanley. Both introduced themselves.

O'Dea commented that an addendum was sent out earlier stating that we are moving business item 7A to the March 1 meeting because our Park and Trail Planner is sick.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of Dec. 7, 2022 and Jan. 4, 2023 as submitted. Hanley and DiLorenzo abstained. 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. Skate Park Feasibility Final Study**

This item has been moved to the March 1, 2023 Minnetonka Park Board meeting.

**B. Natural Resource Division's 2023 Outreach, Education and Engagement Plan**

Program and Outreach Coordinator Christine Petersen gave the report.

Hanley asked how the buckthorn pickup is going to work.

Petersen replied that they are still finessing the program, but they are hoping people will attend the workshop about resilient yards which is done by Metro Blooms to get a sense of what they can accomplish. If they find that buckthorn is a key problem on their site, they will need to tackle that before they can do anything else. Staff can help prioritize that by providing buckthorn pick-up so they can spend their time on replanting or reseeding rather than managing a lot of buckthorn debris.

Walick commented that he's always amazed at the outreach and natural resources does. Out of all the cities he has lived in, Minnetonka has the best outreach and care for the community. He thanked the volunteers because they do so much for the city. He questioned if the Minnetonka High School Natural Resources Club was in contact with anybody from the city.

Petersen responded that the Natural Resources Club reached out to her last year about volunteering. At that time, they were busy getting the new volunteer management system going so she connected them with the bluebird volunteers. Then in the fall, they helped with the buckthorn removal in the parks. Staff realized that they had around 60 students on their mailing list and a lot of them are involved with the Vantage program. They have also been working with Associate Planner/Sustainability Coordinator Drew Ingvalson with our GreenStep Cities program and sustainability. They've also worked with Park and Trail Project Manager Matt Kumka to learn more about natural resources and master planning. She thought all these connections with the city are happening and the club formed specifically with the mission of supporting the natural resources program.

Walick liked the videos that were mentioned because his kid's love learning things and doing the activities that go with it. Kids love watching YouTube videos and he requested making videos to aim at the younger crowd so they can get more engaged. With his kids, if he shows them a five minute video on something, they will have a lot of questions after watching it. He feels like it would be a good learning platform for that younger age.

Petersen thought that was a good tip and it's something the high school students could possibly help with. This spring, the high school students are doing storm water education for grades four and five in all of the Minnetonka and Hopkins elementary schools. In addition, the high school students are going to visit two of the six Minnetonka elementary schools to deliver an activity related to pet waste. Such as the signs that are in the parks that were done in the past. You will see more of those in the parks in both English and Spanish. The high school students are also going to create an animated video to talk about the problems of pet waste to introduce the topic.

Walick asked when the high school students will be doing this.

Petersen replied that the school visits will be in March or April.

Semersky thanked Petersen for the summary. She asked if there are any challenges in her work that the park board should be aware of.

Petersen responded that engaging new audiences is the biggest challenge and trying to provide translated material so people can see the outreach in multiple languages. If we have the opportunity to network or take advantage of any of the connections we already have in the community through the schools or other places, we can bring awareness of

this to underserved populations. She is positive that there are people out there who would be interested in volunteering or participating in some of the stuff they do with technical assistance. Staff wants to bring in as many folks as possible and they always appreciate support on that.

Hanley noticed in the Mayors Monarch Pledge that there are quite a lot of things to be done this year. She questioned if staff needed help.

Petersen explained that there are 29 action steps and they pledged for all of them this year. In 2022, we pledged for 26 action steps and they achieved that. When she first started this, the first thing she did was look at the work that was already being done on the list. In the first year, they made 11 action steps and eight of them were already being done. Making people aware of this is helpful. If you are talking to the public, you can mention that we are going above and beyond because we value monarchs, pollinators and the habitat around them. July is Monarch and Pollinator Awareness Month, which is a great time to spread the word.

Ingraham thought this was very comprehensive and applauds them on all the work they do. He questioned how they are able to track engagement for online items such as webinars and videos.

Petersen replied that they can track online engagement to an extent. An example is that they have 3,300 subscribers to the natural resources e-newsletter; their open rate went up from 30 percent on average since she started doing this to 40 percent on average this year. They can track volunteer hours, YouTube page visits, who attends resilient yard workshops, who moves onto the next step and who requests a site consultation. There are some things that she can't possibly track. An example is how many people are doing activities for Monarch and Pollinator Awareness Month. She puts these activities on tables at the libraries or puts them on Minnetonka Matters.

Ingraham wondered if buckthorn that is picked up gets handled in a way that it doesn't go back out as mulch in people's yards.

Natural Resources Manager Leslie Yetka said people are able to bring it to our drop-off sites and it gets put into our large compost pile and then it gets chipped up. We don't separate stuff out so it does potentially get put into the mulch.

Street and Park Operations Manager Darin Ellingson said the buckthorn goes into the brush and gets ground up with all the brush that gets brought into the city. Currently, there is no market for getting the brush on the ground turned into mulch. All the mulch they grind gets hauled out and gets turned into compost. Composting pyrolysis generally gets hot enough that it kills the seeds. If it does get used for mulch, it's processed and gets double ground again, then it gets sorted, sized and colored and made into the colored mulch you would buy. A lot of the small stuff like berries gets sorted out and gets made into compost. It kind of gets handled in the process.

Ingraham questioned if staff feels ok about how it's disposed of.

Ellingson replied that people could get some from the small compost pile because it doesn't get sorted. For mulch, he isn't sure how much would be in a scoop.

## 8. Park Board Member Reports

There were none.

## 9. Information Items

### Pickleball Neighborhood Meetings

O'Dea gave the report.

### Overview of Minnetonka Dog/Leash Regulations

O'Dea gave the report.

Ellingson explained that in the park ordinance, dogs need to be on a leash in maintained areas. Maintained areas are where there is mowing, picnic shelters, parking lots, and on our formal trails. The only place dogs can be off-leash are on unmaintained areas. In the wide open areas dogs can be off-leash but they are supposed to be under voice command. Some dogs are under voice command and the owners do a good job but there are a lot of owners that don't do a good job. Staff receives calls about dogs running up on other dogs or people walking on the trails. At the last meeting there was a question asked about what the leash rules are throughout the city and Section 9 of the city code talks about that. With the Parks, Open Space and Trail System (POST) Plan, staff received a lot of comments through Minnetonka Matters. With the master planning at Purgatory Park, staff will be getting feedback from users and they will be looking to see if there is a possibility to have an off-leash dog park. It would be a designated area for dogs to be off-leash and then dogs would be required to be leashed everywhere else. In September the city council has an item on their study session calendar to discuss the leash laws throughout the city. Depending on the outcome of the Purgatory Park Master Plan and the city council study session, they might do a regulation update and a city ordinance update for off-leash pets.

O'Dea introduced Administrative Community Service Officer and Crime Prevention Specialist DeeAnn Bloom to present what the officers see out in the parks while they are enforcing.

Officer Bloom said she has been doing this for 23 years and off-leash dogs in the parks have always been a problem. She came to the park board previously regarding this but the only people that showed up to the park board meeting were people who wanted dogs' off-leash. A big problem that officers have when they write citations for off-leash dogs is that if anybody fights the citation in front of a judge, the judge will explain that there is no definitive area for off-leash dogs and there is no physical barrier that is delineating where the off-leash area is; then the citation will get thrown out. She gave examples of incidents that happened in parks where residents and/or their dogs were approached and they were afraid of off-leashed dogs. She also gave examples of when officers and residents were disrespected by off-leash dog owners. There are good people that have their dog's off-leash but there are others that are being blatantly bold and just blowing off the officers. It's very frustrating knowing that if officers write them a ticket and they go to court that it will just be thrown out. When she came to the park board years ago, she proposed to have one park or one area that was off-leash and everywhere else be leashed because it would make it easier for them to enforce. At the time, natural resources had a big concern with having one park that was

off-leash because all the dog feces would be in that one park. However, if you walk around any of the parks, people aren't picking up their dog's waste.

O'Dea commented that we don't have park police in Minnetonka. Community Service Officers (CSO) go out and monitor the parks and there are more than 50 parks.

Bloom explained that they have two full-time CSOs and four part-time CSOs usually. Currently, they have one full-time CSO because Bloom is now off the road and two part-time CSOs. The part-time CSOs are all going to school to be officers so they have to work around their schedules and they tend to be more evening and weekend hours. In the winter, they are not really able to get into the parks in the evenings because it is dark outside. There is one part-time CSO that works every weekend and he works during the day. It's not easy for them to enforce all that many parks right now so they focus primarily on Purgatory Park, Lone Lake Park and Big Willow Park. Jidana Park is a big problem area but it is very difficult for them to enforce. They can't drive into the park so they would have to get out of their vehicles to enforce it. If they got a call while they were in the park, they would have to hurry back to their vehicle and that makes things very difficult.

DiLorenzo said a lot of this is a bit reactionary like what do you do if you see a dog that is off-leash. On the preventative side, she is trying to figure out why people do not put a leash on their dog. She wonders if they just don't want to put a leash on them, they think their dog is well behaved, or they live in an apartment and don't have space for the dog. As a dog owner herself, she usually leashes her dog and she is trying to understand why people don't leash them. She questioned if there have been any reports where people have been injured by dogs.

Bloom answered that there have been incidents. Several years ago, a lady got knocked down and broke her arm. We've also had reports of people getting bitten by off-leash dogs. There have been incidents where an unleashed dog ran up to a leashed dog and they got into a scuffle, then the leashed dog got tangled around a person and they fell and got injured. As far as why it is happening, she thinks sometimes we get people who live in an apartment and just want a place to exercise their dog. She's also talked to people that live in Eden Prairie and they charge a fee for their dog park so they bring their dog to Purgatory Park so they don't have to pay. There is a group of people that go to Purgatory Park at a certain time of day and they socialize while their dogs play but they aren't paying any attention to their dogs.

DiLorenzo questioned how many dogs are run over or hurt. She wondered if people would be more encouraged to take action if you tell them they are putting their dog in harm's way. If they're personally invested, it may help if there was a campaign saying a leash is the safest way to walk your dog.

Bloom responded that it probably would help with the leash law on the streets but probably not in the parks because it's not really an issue there. There is more of an issue with dog versus dog in the parks. Somebody mentioned they have a reactive dog, which means they could be walking them on a leash and they are well behaved but then another dog comes up to them and they will get upset. She had an incident happen like this and the off-leash dog owner told the leashed reactive dog owner that they shouldn't be allowed to go to the park. Parks aren't meant to be like that and it's hard to explain it to people who believe it should be like that.

Semersky thanked Bloom for speaking and said her stories were incredibly helpful in helping her understand the issues and the enforcement; she never thought about people challenging enforcement. She thought that data would help strengthen the fact that we need to tweak our rules. She asked if we track the data on complaints, injuries or all of the things she has been referencing.

Bloom replied that we used to have that data when we had our own police dispatch. Now, all of the animal complaints are categorized under "animal" so you don't know if it is a dead raccoon on the road or a dog bite.

Ingraham commented that the police analyst ran a report of incidents that had the keyword "leash." We average about 100 a year so about two incidents per week that relate to a leash issue. He assumes those are likely off-leash and not leashed incidents. It has been consistent for the last five years.

Semersky suspected there are many people who don't get mad enough to call the police.

Bloom explained that those are calls generated through our dispatch. She also gets a lot of calls forwarded to her from the nonemergency police phone number.

Stroh thought in terms of preventative measures, making an entire park completely leashed would probably make people more reactive on how unfair that is for them or their particular situation. She asked about putting a temporary fence around portions that are already technically off-leash at Purgatory Park and some of the other bigger parks. Then you can see how people react once there is some kind of barrier. Having this set off-leash area could give it more of a legal backing so it won't immediately get overturned if people challenge it.

Ingraham commented that in Purgatory Park, the challenge is that you would only be fencing the maintained trails. Once you step off the limestone, you are in an unmaintained area and the dogs could be off-leash as long as the owner is in the immediate vicinity and the dog is under voice control. The challenge with Purgatory Park is that you literally have to have a corral around the maintained trail.

Walick added that the city council will take it up as a broader issue because there are a lot of heated opinions on both sides about it. He questioned if these are all things they would look at and make decisions on.

O'Dea responded that the city council decided that this was a topic they wanted to discuss at a September study session. He thought the plan was to grab more data when we have the Purgatory Park Master Plan. There is a lot of data already because of the POST Plan but staff thinks the Purgatory Master Plan will help enhance that data so they can figure out where to go from there. At the study session in September, no decisions would be made but they will probably give direction on where to take this topic.

Jacobs commented that September seems a long time away and asked if that was the quickest we could do anything. This is an issue and 20 percent of people that filled out the POST Plan survey said that. It's obviously an issue and is growing.

O'Dea replied that we can think about different ways to be proactive. The only thing we have done is put up some additional signs at Purgatory Park and Jidana Park, however, he's not sure people are paying attention to those. He thinks part of the problem is that there are

people who just aren't listening to anybody. There are also some people who really don't know if they are on maintained or unmaintained areas. We've heard that comment too from people who thought they were in an off-leashed area.

Jacobs said he doesn't want to brush it under the rug since this came up 10 years ago. It sounds like it we have a cultural problem.

O'Dea explained that the city council approved their study session calendar and this topic was set for September. He is hoping that the park board can discuss it a little bit before then so they have some information.

Ingraham is a dog owner, a dog lover and he loves having a dog off-leash but because of his current dog, he understands limitations of that with certain dogs. He also is really intune to all the feedback we get whether it's from the POST Plan, Nextdoor or reports similar to what was shared today. He wondered if the city council has heard the reports that were shared today. There are uniformed city employees being disrespected abundantly at Big Willow, Jidana and Purgatory parks. He thought Purgatory Park would be a solution for the city to ultimately say there is an off-leashed area at some point. The off-leash issue is an issue everywhere but it is the worst at Purgatory Park. More people responded to this as a concern for their safety in the parks than voted for most of our council members; not by the absolute numbers but by the census aspect of it. This survey was taken a year ago and 20 percent is a big number. There is going to be a study session in September, which means a change might be made by late 2024.

Jacobs added that it is an uphill battle.

Ingraham said it ultimately comes down to the dog owners. Not only would a judge say there isn't a designated area, you would have to be an attorney to read all of the subsections within the rules about what is or isn't considered the immediate vicinity. Even that doesn't matter because it comes down to the dog owners. If they are going to mouth off to officers, just imagine how they would treat the average person walking in the park. They are going to get worse feedback and he has experienced it. If the city council hasn't heard these reports from Bloom, they should because he finds it troubling to hear that two officers were disrespected in that way.

O'Dea replied that he can contact the city manager, who is in contact with the city council. He can see if there is anything they can do with the timing or if they have other suggestions.

Hanley asked if it is in the realm of possibility that the park board could start working on finding places to have off-leash dog parks. For example, she wondered if an outdoor hockey rink was big enough for an off-leash dog park. She heard a rumor that some of the hockey rinks are going to be taken apart because it's hard to maintain all of them.

Ingraham commented that as long as people can have their dog's off-leash in parks, they will go there instead of a hockey rink because there is more space for them to run.

Hanley thought if the city council said they were going to change the rules to match all the surrounding cities and be consistent then we should provide some off-leash areas. Hockey rinks probably aren't going to be the answer but somebody has to find a place to let the dogs run around. She is one of the 20 percent that is afraid to walk in the parks because she

was attacked by a dog when she was a child so it really scares her to see dogs running around.

Jacobs said we should be proactively starting to plan. All these other cities have dog parks and some of them require a fee to use them. We could at least get ahead and start a discussion.

O'Dea responded that he will connect with the city manager to see what type of discussions they can have. Maybe there are some temporary solutions that we can try. Ultimately, we need to look at ordinances and city laws to make it clearer for people; let them know if it is an area they can or can't be in.

Walick recommended reaching out to the city council through the city manager to highlight the importance and expediency of this. A dog park has come up in the past in terms of location and existence and he hopes the council can revisit it sooner than later. Based on some of these stories, hopefully we can recommend some action. Maybe we can start by forwarding the necessity of time through the city manager.

Ellingson explained that about 11 years ago, a lot of work was done looking at establishing dog parks in several parks. They had neighborhood meetings and there was huge pushback for a dog park at any of the suggested locations. It has been over 10 years but he assumes the resistance will be about the same.

Hanley said unless there is an area that's not park.

Ellingson replied that all of those areas were looked at.

Jacobs asked if the pushback was from people that lived there and didn't want it near them.

Ellingson replied that people nearby didn't want people coming with dogs, dogs barking, dogs around their yard, and people not picking up after their dogs in the park right by their house. There was a lot of work put into trying to find a solution and it was not successful.

Ingraham commented that is why Purgatory Park would ultimately work, because it is already off-leash there. Neighbors would probably appreciate the idea of corralling the dogs.

Ellingson said it would be nice to do something fast but it would also be nice to do something coordinated between the park regulations and the city regulations. If the park board gets initiation to move that forward and approves that dogs must be leashed at all parks unless there was a designated area, there would be a big education effort. Then at a later date, if the city council approves Chapter 9 of the ordinance for citywide things it would require another big education effort. It would help if this all could be done at the same time because it would be really hard to push out two new big changes in two different ways throughout the city. It would be best if it all got aligned at the same time.

Stroh wasn't sure if the scope and expenses of this idea would make it worth it but she asked if there could be a system where dog owners could get a license to prove their dog is controlled by voice command.



Bloom replied that somebody would have to test that the dog is under voice command and it would also have to be tested under off-leash conditions with other dogs. She doesn't think that would be a feasible situation.

Ingraham said in Boulder, Colorado there is a large open area in the flatiron foothills and he thinks they still have a certification process for dogs to be off-leash. Their rule is that your dog can be off-leash only if it is under trained voice control. If another person approaches and asks for the dog to be leashed, you have to leash it until you pass. He thought the owner certified the dog, which left them open to being cited if later there was an incident in the park because they said their dog was under voice control. You can't feasibly do testing from an expense or feasibility perspective. However, he thought the way they did it was to put more stress into the idea that if you've confirmed that you can control your dog and your dog ends up being the problem, that's a serious problem.

Bloom sees that being an enforcement issue though because everybody is going to say their dog is certified. Until you have issues, then you still have all the dogs running around.

Ingraham replied in that case they actually provide a certification but to your point it is self-certified.

Walick requested that when we bring this information to the city council that we relay all these points to them. That way they are given the information that the park board has talked about and they can have a starting place to determine whether or not to move it forward.

Ingraham asked if the park board should make a motion to encourage the city council to advance it or not.

O'Dea replied that this is under information items so technically we would not. These are video recorded and some council members do look back at commission meetings. As Ellingson mentioned, it would be nice to handle it all at once. In addition to that, it would also be great if we had an off-leash option. He thinks there are actually a lot of people who are good dog owners that also want an off-leash dog area. They want to let their dogs run and they aren't comfortable doing that in our parks with our set of laws. He will make sure that our city manager is aware of our comments tonight.

Hanley asked if it is possible to get access to the 10 year old study.

Ellingson responded that it was done before he started but he will look for it.

DiLorenzo asked what the study session in September would entail.

O'Dea answered that the September meeting is a city council study session. This would be a topic at their meeting and staff would present information to them. That would include park board information and any updated information from the Purgatory Master Plan. Then they could give feedback and give staff direction.

DiLorenzo asked if there would be any possibility to get research data. She would like to believe that neighbors aren't bringing out their dogs to hurt people but she knows that people do get hurt by dogs so we need to find that peace between the two. Maybe it is going up to people with off-leash dogs and asking them to help her understand why their dog isn't on a leash. Maybe the reason is the lack of enforcement but maybe it is lack of education

and they simply don't know the rules or the areas to be in. She would like to believe people want to follow the rules but maybe she is just naïve and not noticing it.

Jacobs said that these are the rules and people can kind of do what they want. They are following the culture and accepted rules so he thinks that is why if someone else's dog is off-leash then they will have their dog off-leash too. If you go to Eden Prairie, it's accepted that the dog is on a leash and you don't see dogs' off-leash.

DiLorenzo thought that was true because she thinks they are good people but they aren't getting in trouble.

Jacobs thought the reaction was because it is accepted and you are asking them to do something that is not accepted. Then it manifests to them not listening to anyone.

Bloom thought it definitely seems that way. A lot of times she will come around a corner in her truck and people will be on the trail with their dog and she watches them hurry to put a leash on their dog. She will tell them that their dog needs to be on a leash but they pretend like they don't know. They know the rules because otherwise they wouldn't have tried to hurry and put a leash on their dog.

Ellingson said most people know the rules because they carry their leashes with them.

Bloom said the other thing that happens a lot at Purgatory Park is people will go from an off-leash area, to a trail that is a leash area and then back to an off-leash area so they don't think they need to leash their dog to get to the other point. People get mad if you tell them their dog has to be leashed on a trail and they will complain that it is only 10 yards.

Jacobs added that at the park board tour about five years ago they went to Purgatory Park. They witnessed a guy walking his dog on a leash and then took him off the leash. About five minutes later the dog came back without the owner and went towards the owner's house. They saw the owner about 10 minutes later and told him his dog went home.

O'Dea said he would talk to the city manager and staff will report back regarding the timing.

Hanley volunteered to read the study from 10 years ago if staff could find it.

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

O'Dea gave the report.

## **11. Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted,

*Kathy Kline*

Kathy Kline  
Recreation Administrative Coordinator