



**Minutes
Minnetonka Park Board
Wednesday, May 3, 2023**

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

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

Staff members in attendance: Kathy Kline, Matt Kumka, 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 announced there was an addendum.

4. Approval of Minutes

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of March 1, 2023 as submitted. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

5. Citizens wishing to discuss items not on the agenda

Heather Holm, 15327 Lake Shore Ave. Since prior to COVID-19, very passionate people have been putting painted rocks in our parks and it's pretty prevalent in Purgatory Park. To her best determination, there is one remaining individual that puts their signature on the back of the rocks that is still putting painted rocks in the park. People may bring the painted rocks home because they like what is painted on it. To help quantify, Holm brought a bag of rocks that she collected in one day and another bag of rocks that she collected in one week at Purgatory Park on the main loop. In the winter, the rocks were placed on top of snowbanks and now that the snow has melted, they are sitting in the footprint of the mower. It can be a big safety hazard once the mower comes a long because it can hit a rock and injure somebody. These are banned in both state and national parks for various reasons but one main reason is because it doesn't follow a leave no trace policy and it is a form of littering. She asked staff and the board to think about having a future discussion on how they can divert this individual's passion, energy and artistic talent into something that is more productive and not harming our parks. There are a lot of reasons why these are not good, namely the toxins in the paint. Many people think they are cute and nice but this is kind of an excessive quantity of rocks that are going into one park. She suggested a one-day art in the park event. She wondered how we can address this thoughtfully.

Hanley is a Purgatory user and she finds them kind of annoying. She looks forward to hearing ideas on how to handle this in a positive way.

Walick asked if there was a city ordinance regarding this or if staff had any perspective on it.

O'Dea answered that staff was unaware of this topic coming to the board so they would have to do some research.

Holm said one of the park rules is no littering and this would fall under that because the rocks are being permanently left in the parks.

6. Special Matters

There were none.

7. Business Items

A. Park Habitat Restoration and Maintenance Plans – Purgatory, Hilloway, and Ford Parks

Park and Trail Project Manager Matt Kumka gave the report.

Semersky asked how this plays into the master plan.

Kumka said the master plan is beholden to this work. The master plan is trails, parking and the human side of things. This is the work that needs to be held to the highest standard in terms of the master planning. These items are sort of locked in stone so if we are saying an Oak Savanna is being restored here, it can't be anything else.

Semersky thought the term master plan sounded like an umbrella.

Kumka replied that they can view master planning as the human component.

Ingraham asked if the master plan is still scheduled for this year.

Kumka replied that the master planning process is just kicking off. They hired a consultant and they are planning the activity and design work for the year.

Ingraham asked if the wetlands area on the east is private.

Kumka said yes and it cuts off at the property boundary.

Ingraham asked if we are able to work on the wetlands and treat the whole area there.

Natural Resources Manager Leslie Yetka explained that they don't really include wetlands in their restoration efforts because they are sort of a different animal. Staff is looking at assessing our high-quality wetlands in the next year or so to see if there are any restoration activities that they could undertake. Wetlands are so different because they are driven by the water and the water can fluctuate, that can really impact the amount of invasive species you have. We've done some purple loose strife control primarily through the release of beetles. We haven't done it this year but they are there munching away to some degree and the effectiveness isn't always what they would like to see. They haven't done any other wholesale invasive species control in wetlands and that technically isn't part of the restoration plan this time around.

Kumka noted that the southern portion of the wetland is rich fen; a very unique wetland community that has some diversity and unique species in it. They are noting that on their plans and they are looking to work with volunteers and staff to just sort of monitor and keep an eye on that unique and rare community.

Hanley asked Kumka for more information about the partnership with Hennepin County.

Kumka understood that with the partnership, they could get as many seedlings and young trees as they would want to fit in the parks. This is part of their million tree initiative but we are not obligated to install any certain amount of trees. This restoration process is just beginning so we'll assess the site and determine how many trees are appropriate. The same things he said about using prescribed fire as a management technique would apply to this park too. We are just proceeding carefully in terms of accepting this partnership and the possibility for improving this canopy here; we don't want to burden ourselves with a lot of potentially dead and dying trees in the future. We are treating this as a broad restoration process and will be working with Hennepin County to determine how many trees we receive from them and where they go. All of that is still up in the air at this point.

Yetka added that they have a new job training program. They have crews available free of cost to the city who can learn some of these practices that they are working on. They call it the productive day crew and it's sort of a new program. They are trying to offer municipalities assistance in projects like this and then also use this as a job training and skills development program.

Hanley asked if these crews would be just planting or if they would help with other things.

Kumka responded that they would primarily help with buckthorn removal.

Hanley requested to hear more about their plan regarding what to do about the deer.

Kumka responded that deer are a big issue and staff's aware of the severe pressure it puts on our native plant communities. He thought we need to talk broadly about the deer population in the city; there is nothing specific in these individual park plans that attempt to address the deer issue.

Hanley added that Kumka said we might have to plant more of everything due to deer browse.

Kumka explained they would need appropriate caging and tubing to prevent browse and they need to facilitate establishment of highly desirable species like new oaks for instance. That is where the effort would be but we would have to be judicious.

Ingraham thought the plans were great. He was curious if Kumka was going to mention anything about the comments in the addendum. He thought the concept of extending to the section north of Highway 7 from Purgatory Park was interesting.

Kumka said north of Excelsior Boulevard is Kelly Park.

Ingraham thought they were talking about north of Highway 7, behind Cub Foods.

Kumka thought they were talking about where you take the bike trail under Excelsior Boulevard and head north; there is a complex up through there. It's a little outside the purview of this particular effort.

Jacobs asked if that park could be in the future.

Kumka said yes and explained that the idea is to sort of get all these other parks under control to some degree where the intensity of our maintenance efforts goes down.

Ingraham said her reference is the section north of Highway 7 to County Road 101, so it is the wetlands behind Cub.

Kumka referred to Yetka's point about how wetlands are challenging. There are a lot of sort of upland wooded areas and once they work their way down the prioritization list they will ideally get there at some point. He just walked through Hilloway Park today with City Forester Hannibal Hayes. They are beginning to set some goals for pretty aggressive thinning through there because it's not really a natural system and they are trying to move it towards a natural system. They want to do the removal work in the winter so they don't disturb the soil too much and there is a significant amount of trees that would come down. There would be an education and outreach effort around the disturbance. Then they want to get their ducks in a row in terms of new canopy gaps and figure out what that is going to do to the forest floor and if a prescribed burn is appropriate through there. He agrees with a more aggressive approach to sort of stabilize that stand that seems to be aging really fast and support those trees. Then really get some massive white pines out there over time. We want to do everything we can to have a big strong forest stand and not a lot of thin ones sort of mixed in there, which seems to be the condition now.

Walick said he appreciates this being a living document. He also likes that it offers specifics. A lot of times they kind of deal in generalities but this actually conceptualizes the work you will be doing. It is a lot of hard work so he wanted to commend them on that.

Hanley asked how well the oak savanna restoration and the prairie restoration can really live on as long as the dogs are running free over there.

Kumka said disturbance is disturbance. Too much foot traffic via human or animals will create a disturbance and those are spots where weeds can come in for instance. Erosion and other things can also occur. The dog issue will be addressed during that master plan process. He would imagine that these restoration and maintenance plans will be referenced during that conversation.

Hanley said she partly was trying to figure out if we need to deal with that before a lot of restoration proceeds.

Kumka said the dogs inhibit restoration.

Semersky moved, Hanley seconded a motion to approve the Park Habitat and Restoration plans that were presented for Purgatory, Hilloway and Ford parks. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

B. Consideration of the 2023 Park Board Strategic Plan

O'Dea gave the report.

Hanley didn't see anything about a dog park or the off-leash dog issue and would like to see that in here.

Walick remembered from a past meeting that it was kind of under the city council's area.

O'Dea replied that it will be discussed at the joint meeting with the city council. Staff could add a bullet in here to reflect that but it doesn't need to be more specific than that.

Hanley wanted it to be on record that we are working on it.

O'Dea wondered if it was included in the master plan.

Assistant Recreation Manager Sara Woeste explained that it was discussed at the last meeting. She thought it fell under objective seven, "Review park rules and ordinances as needed" of the goal "To renew and maintain parks." We talked in length about the dogs being part of the master plan so we could get specific but she thought that goal and objective should address the dog issue.

Ingraham was supportive of making a notation of it. Having it on paper might help because it seems like the park board is pretty interested in it but the city council may be more laid back.

Semersky was supportive of adding it too; maybe include dogs under objective seven.

Vision and Mission:

Semersky thought about what a mission was and it's why they exist and their purpose. She thought the fourth bullet is maybe a goal or objective but it's not their purpose; it's how they achieve their goals and objectives. She also thought it reiterated goal one, objective five so she didn't know why it had to be in there twice.

Stroh said it seems more like a strategy than a mission.

Woeste thought it was put in the mission because there were so many comments throughout the March meeting about making sure they adhere to those in every section so they tried to cover it in the mission. She understands Semersky's point because it's covered in the goal "To conserve natural resources and open space."

Ingraham thought that was a good point and felt the other changes were good.

Walick felt like those documents are very important because they tie into everything they talk about. A little repetition is ok because it is cohesive to everything, such as the way they conceptualize things.

Hanley agreed with what was said but recommended leaving it.

Goal: To conserve natural resources and open space

There were no comments.

Goal: To renew and maintain parks and trails

Hanley requested numbering the goals.

Ingraham thought the reason why they weren't numbered was because they are not in priority order.

Goal: To provide quality athletic and recreational facilities and programs

Ingraham mentioned that some of the discussion last month was around the fact that the park board doesn't really oversee recreational facilities like The Marsh or The Williston Fitness Center. He thought it would be clearer if the word park was before recreational facilities to identify facilities they do discuss such as the skate park or athletic fields.

O'Dea questioned if he meant changing the wording in the goal.

Ingraham replied to add park to recreational facilities anywhere under that goal.

Stroh asked why Gray's Bay was called out in particular.

O'Dea said we have a partnership with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and there is a specific reason why it is in purview of the park board.

Goal: Enhance long-term Park Board development

Semersky wondered with objective six, if there was a way to do this process earlier in the year. It is odd to her that they are doing goals in May.

O'Dea replied that the current timeline was due to new park board members getting appointed in February or possibly in March. He could look into switching the timeline.

Hanley asked if the new members could start in January or possibly December.

O'Dea said he would have to check with the city council because they appoint a lot of the boards and commissions members at that time of year. He also mentioned looking at the strategic plan in November or December for the following year.

Semersky commented that if you moved up the strategic plan, new members would have good guidance on what the goals are and what is expected of them when they start.

DiLorenzo added that moving the strategic plan up would be helpful for a new member that is coming into something that is very structured. It would give them more time to learn and see what the priorities are. If there is something they are really passionate about, they could still bring it up in February or March before it gets finalized.

Hanley explained it's hard for a new member to feel as though they have a lot to say because they just got there. She supports doing the plan in November or December.

O'Dea added that the objective says we will assess it annually so a decision doesn't have to be made tonight. He will look into changing the timeline of the strategic plan and see if new board members can be appointed at a different time.

Hanley said it wouldn't be necessary to change when new board members get appointed if they can move the whole process up.

Woeste summarized the feedback they heard.

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to approve the recommended changes. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

8. Park Board Member Reports

Walick was excited about the new playground equipment at GroTonka but his kids are a little disappointed that the train is gone.

Ingraham asked if the equipment was in.

Walick said it is going in and you can basically see what it will look like.

Ingraham applauded the city staff's efforts on reopening The Marsh, which was a huge project. He visited the facility and thought they did a quality job and felt it was going well.

DiLorenzo wasn't sure if other's received an email from a teacher in Minnetonka about the Glen Lake accessibility park. She just wanted to bring some visibility to that project because the students are really excited about it. The teacher is Betsy Julien, a sixth grade teacher who has been working with fifth and sixth graders to raise money for a fully accessible playground. They've reached \$702,000 of their million dollar goal. She wasn't sure if it was appropriate for them to assist with this but she wanted to at least bring some visibility to that project the teacher and students are working on.

Kumka has been in touch with that teacher. Her effort is amazing and it is part of the wrinkle in the skate park feasibility study. There is a potential opportunity to coordinate her effort with our skate park effort but we still need to look at our feasibility study and come up with our recommendations.

Semersky asked if her project is at the elementary school that was one of the backup locations for the skate park.

Kumka replied yes; we also operate the ice rinks and tennis courts there.

Hanley added that the adaptive equipment will accommodate children in wheelchairs.

Ingraham commented that his grandson goes there and they got the funding for their school and what the kids have taken on is the funding for the metro area.

Kumka said the equipment is spectacular; he has seen some renderings and there are special carousal type features and swings that the whole wheelchair can go on. The teacher mentioned that it is unique and there is nothing quite like that in our area. It would be a real draw for that community.

9. Information Items

Summer Registration

Woeste gave the report.

Upcoming Park Projects

Kumka gave the report.

Park Signage Update

Yetka and Kumka gave the report.

Skate Park Feasibility Study Update

Kumka gave the report.

Ingraham asked if the feasibility update would allow for a slightly larger footprint in one spot.

Kumka replied that there will be more options.

Hanley asked by the time it is presented again if it would include neighbor's feedback.

Kumka explained that part of the decision making process would include deciding what sites they want to take to a true community engagement process.

Ingraham questioned if they would see the verbiage on the signs because he liked the signs at Big Willow Park that talked about the mills and stuff. The Friends of Minnetonka Parks have reviewed the signs but he wondered if there was a public period.

Yetka answered that they work with our communications staff and if you think of signs as a communication tool like the *Minnetonka Memo* or our website, they typically don't put content out for review because they are very strict on that.

Ingraham mentioned that the Friends of Minnetonka Parks did see it and reviewed it.

Yetka responded that they did. Staff had one or two meetings with them as a courtesy because of their high interest in the parks. The meetings were really focused on themes and concepts, not actual content and verbiage.

Walick asked if Yetka has heard anything back regarding the Native American information.

Yetka explained that she was at a conference today and Dr. Kate Beane was the keynote speaker. Dr. Beane works for the Minnesota Historical Society and she is a Dakota. She talked about the Dakota and the various bands in this area. Yetka talked to her afterwards

because one of the bands that was recognized in the sign was the Wahpekute and they were in this area as well as the Mdewakanton. It's a very fluid situation because they moved around; it's hard to pinpoint who was where because they were here for thousands of years. Yetka mentioned that particular sign was about biodiversity and landscape change so it was suggested that we keep it at Dakota instead of trying to identify a particular band. She thought it was a really good idea because it highlights the Native American presence but the sign is not meant to be a Native American history sign. Yetka mentioned that Dr. Beane is very interested in coming and speaking to the city. She has a very long rich history and she was very instrumental in spearheading changing Lake Calhoun to Bde Maka Ska. She has a very interesting story about the history of Native Americans and how important names are.

Hanley said for future signs, when it's appropriate, they should be specific to that park. It has some value as long as it fits within the communications guidelines.

10. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

O'Dea gave the report.

Semersky asked if they were able to find a farmer's market manager.

O'Dea said our new Farmer's Market Manager is Korey Beyersdorf.

DiLorenzo added that the park is really looking good.

O'Dea explained that they are finishing construction. They are working on the fountain right now and they have been doing some work in the building these past couple of days.

Ingraham asked if Crane Lake is done.

O'Dea said Crane Lake has punch list items still to do but for the most part, yes.

Hanley asked if staff would like them to be there for the opening.

O'Dea replied that invites for the ribbon cutting went out yesterday. It would be great if you are available to come.

11. Adjournment

Jacobs moved, Hanley seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Kline

Kathy Kline
Recreation Administrative Coordinator