



**Minutes
Minnetonka Park Board
Wednesday, October 11, 2023**

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

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

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

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

3. Reports from Staff

There were none.

4. Approval of Minutes

Jacobs moved, Beyersdorf seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 2, 2023 as submitted. DiLorenzo abstained. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

5. Citizens wishing to discuss items not on the agenda

Linda Russell from the Friends of Minnetonka Parks gave an update on a project at Lone Lake Park that was approved by the park board about three years ago. She stated that this project proposed adding some floral resources to mitigate for the habitat loss of the rusty patch bumblebee. A playground pollinator walk was installed last week by Urban Ecosystems; it's about 90 feet by 42 feet with a meandering path through it. The idea is for it to be an immersive experience. It will be really cool to walk through it in the summer when things are growing. Families can enjoy the flowers, pollinators and butterflies. There are 1,200 plants in the garden and it is very densely planted. It should fill in quickly which should keep the weeds down. She invited the park board members on a tour after it starts growing.

Russell also noted that a picnic shelter was removed to build the pickleball courts at Lone Lake Park. It was taken apart and there are some pieces of it but she understood that it wasn't structurally ok to rebuild it. The Friends had a conversation with former City Manager Geralyn Barone and she promised that they would get the picnic shelter back. Minnetonka has a population of 50,000 and has three picnic shelters but Hopkins has a population of 14,000 and has five picnic shelters. The picnic shelter that was removed was used well and she believed we needed another picnic shelter there and maybe somewhere else. She recommended thinking about that as you start looking at budgets and planning for the upcoming years.

Ingraham thought the shelter was a good idea. He asked if there was any preferences on where it would go in Lone Lake Park.

Park and Trail Project Manager Matt Kumka replied that they've talked a bit about associating it with the pollinator walk, but some site design is needed. Russell is leading the restoration effort on the basketball court side. Between the parking lot and where the picnic shelter was potentially sited to be there are some very heavy dense plantings. There needs to be some connectivity design and more of a welcoming inclusion of this potential picnic shelter moving forward.

Russell added that there is a flat spot on the turf grass on the other side. Their original plan was to take the pollinator garden and kind of loop people there. They didn't take the garden there for a variety of reasons but they could certainly point people from the playground over to that area. Kumka was correct that you couldn't easily take coolers and things from the parking lot with so many bushes.

Ingraham questioned if they were planning on putting it adjacent to the parking lot.

Russell replied that it is one of their ideas. The other place she has seen people put blankets down is by the soccer field when there are tournaments going on. On the south side of the field there are some trees and shade and that area would probably get used well.

Kumka added that there is a lot of parking there too.

Hanley questioned if there are two picnic shelters by the lake.

Russell replied there is one shelter but there are probably four picnic tables near the shelter.

Kumka said there are also several grills there.

6. Special Matters

There were none.

7. Business Items

A. Cullen Nature Preserve Habitat Management Plan

Kumka gave the report.

Hanley commented that a vernal pool on the north side of the property was mentioned but the vernal pool on the island was not mentioned. She wondered if that should be included.

Kumka thought the document covered both of the vernal pools. He will get back to Hanley after he reviews the documents.

Hanley added that some of the birds mentioned in the report could be in a woodland or prairie but not in the Cullen Nature Preserve because it isn't big enough. There aren't going to be loons, eared grebes, trumpeter swans or bobolinks there so she kind of has an issue with them being listed.

Kumka has noted some of those same comments that Hanley had. He feels like a big portion of this document is somewhat boilerplate. From the perspective in that our

particular target plant communities is what they are focused on. They looked at this region in the state and said these are all particular species of interest.

Hanley didn't want us to be in a situation where somebody complains that there are no loons and wants something to be done about it.

Kumka doesn't think this affects our restoration goals or how we go about it.

Hanley wondered what the lime colored area is on the map on page 18 that says preservation easement. It's not on the Cullen property but it looks like it is city property.

Kumka responded that it is adjacent to the highway corridor. There must be some sort of Minnesota Department of Transportation related preservation parcel there. He wasn't familiar with the details on that particular parcel but assumed it was related to highway construction.

Hanley thought we needed more money if they were going to do everything. She would like to go to the city council with a proposal to set aside more money for restoration. Even if Hennepin County helps, it will be a long and expensive process.

Recreation Director Kelly O'Dea replied that we have dollars in our 2024 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for restoration but he doesn't know if it covers this or not. Our next go around would be when we establish the 2025 – 2030 CIP around early 2024.

Kumka added that the stewardship fund is their catch-all for restoration projects. Staff identifies their highest priority efforts and allocates funds from the stewardship fund. The Cullen Nature Preserve is a high priority site. More particulars will come together as they look at the restoration contract that they will need to bring on board to perform this work.

Hanley said there are a lot of good things happening in many of the parks. She thought it would be great if they could all move forward together.

Semersky asked why the city council has to approve this.

Kumka explained that we have entered into this agreement with the land trust and this augments that agreement; the land trust is telling us it needs to be signed again.

Semersky asked if it is a formality.

Kumka replied yes.

O'Dea added that they wouldn't have to go to council if it was at a different park.

Ingraham has been on the board through a lot of this and has learned a lot. He has a lot of appreciation for the work that staff and The Friends are doing. It's a unique piece of our city and it's a great plan to pursue.

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to accept and move forward with the plan with the land trust easement. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Jerrold Gershone with The Friends of Minnetonka Parks said they support this. He stated the following. Hanley brought up some great points that they saw as well. There's really no open water to speak of and we aren't going to have loons there. As Kumka said, there is a lot of boilerplate here. If they took a fine pen to correct it, they would want it to be a little different, but they think it's efficient and they support it. In regards to the funding, for the first stage of restoration they got a grant from the county, a state grant and the city put in some money. They are currently looking at some additional money from the county and they think they have a good chance of getting it. They are excited about the burn coming this year. They have been waiting for that so they can sow the seeds and that will be a huge step. Some of The Friends produced a video about the history of the property and the restoration efforts in stage one. Ann Cullen Smith's son Bill Cullen was also interviewed in the video. He said he can send the board members a link to the video. Gershone thanked the city for everything they have done there. It's an exciting project and they love working with Kumka on this as a project manager. They are working collaboratively and it's been a pleasure. The Friends have also done a bird survey. They haven't seen any loons or grebes but they have seen nesting blue birds for the first time this year. They also did a vegetation survey and they are looking at how the vegetation will change over time in 18 plots. Also, there is a vernal pool on the island and they will be keeping their eye on that. They had an aquatic biologist out there and he found all sorts of interesting things like fairy shrimp that live there but it has been dry the past couple of years. The vernal pools will be noted with the master planning.

Ingraham asked how small it is.

Kumka said maybe two to three times the size of this room.

Gershone added that they dry up every year for ephemeral and they wouldn't have any cattails. There were a lot of ash trees there that were removed so more light is getting in and it might affect it. The island is actually in pretty good shape. The Friends did seeding there and for some reason there is not as much reemerge in buckthorn; they are seeing a lot of those grasses come up this year.

8. Park Board Member Reports

Ingraham complimented the work that was done on repaving the trail at Lone Lake Park and stated that it was the trail that goes up from the parking lot over the hill and then back over the hill. If you haven't been out there, it was in bad shape and the paving is really impressive given how steep it is in places. They also did a nice job at the very bottom of the hill by the lake. There is a memorial bench that was in terrible disrepair and it's been fixed up for the family that donated that. Regarding Russell's question about the picnic shelter, he wondered what the process was for the shelter to get queued up to be reviewed was.

O'Dea said he will follow up with Street and Park Operations Manager Darin Ellingson. He believed that staff took the shelter down but he didn't know the condition of the parts. We would have to work with the parks division to come up with an idea of how much it would cost to get it back up and running. He wasn't sure if it was something that the operational budget can take care of or if they needed to put it into the CIP.

Ingraham thought this came up at a meeting about a year ago. Ellingson was there and he talked about the process in a vague way.

O'Dea answered that he will follow up with Ellingson and will report back at the December meeting. We only have three picnic shelters that we rent out so having that one would be important.

Hanley thought we should think about where it should go since there is already one there. She wondered if they are fairly distributed throughout the city or if there are some underserved areas that are lacking in picnic shelters.

O'Dea replied that we can discuss that further.

Hanley asked when they were going to talk about dogs and where to put a dog park.

Kumka explained that staff is scheduled to present the draft Purgatory Park Master Plan at the December 6, 2023 park board meeting; a dog conversation will be related to that document. That will be the first time staff will have recommendations and a formal document will be presented for you to react to.

Hanley asked if that means the city is proposing to put the dog park in Purgatory Park.

Kumka answered that staff hasn't proposed that. The open house was yesterday and open feedback closes a week after that. At that point, staff will have all the data on what people generally think and they will start preparing the draft document.

Hanley asked if we could survey other cities to see what their dog leashing rules are.

O'Dea replied yes.

Hanley has heard that some people have threatened to leave Minnetonka if they couldn't let their dogs run in the parks. She wondered where else they would be allowed to do that.

O'Dea agreed that checking with other cities to see what they allow would be appropriate.

Kumka answered that our document is set up to host all the context around this conversation. It's not just the feedback and survey results, it's also the context around other city's dog ordinances and public safety reporting that has occurred related to dogs. All that context will be there to lay out the ultimate recommendations.

9. Information Items

Park Restoration Projects – Purgatory, Hilloway, and Ford Park

Kumka gave the report.

Hanley questioned if the buckthorn was on the slope on the ridge south of the big loop trail.

Kumka said yes, right along that loop. When you walk that loop and it turns from south to northwest, there is a wall of buckthorn there. It's a mix of mostly buckthorn, honey suckle and some prickly ash. There's not too much in terms of desirable species so there will be a pretty dramatic change to it, and it will be very visible because it's right along the trail.

Ingraham asked if it is from the limestone trail all the way to the top of the ridge.

Kumka answered yes and explained that it opens up when you get to the top of the ridge. There has already been clearing along the central trail and along the ridge; it will connect to that. It is going to be pretty significant when you are walking the trail and are looking to the south of that slope.

Hanley questioned what happens after the forestry mower goes through and there are sprouts.

Kumka answered that it will be a three step process. This year will be mowing down so there is just mulch debris. In the spring next year, it will resprout and the berries will germinate through there. We will let that grow until fall next year and then do a critical cut. After the plant has spent a lot of its energy resprouting and growing new leaves, then it will get maybe waist high and they will mechanically brush saw that out. That knocks it down again so the plant spends all its reserves trying to grow again. All the berries that germinated are putting out leaves again and are trying to resprout and they are spending a lot more energy and that is when they do a foliar spray. They come in with an herbicide application and they carefully treat those small struggling plants. In two years, a three step process can wipe out a buckthorn infiltration very effectively. That is their new strategy going forward. They will have to follow up with the critical cut and foliar spray within a year of the initial mow because no new berries will be produced. All the germination should've occurred by then and that would sort of set the stage for 2025 to have significant seeding and new plants introduced at that point.

Ingraham questioned that they don't remove any of the debris from the critical cut.

Kumka explained that some areas are heavily infested with buckthorn and they might leave a lot of mulch on the ground. In that case, they would need to spread it out or pick some of it up. Primarily they don't haul it offsite so they can save in trucking, the fuels associated with trucking, chipping expenses, brush pile storage and staff time to drive and fuel those trucks. By leaving it onsite, they are putting all that carbon back into the ground and there are a lot of benefits to it.

Semersky walked the park this week and really appreciated the signs that said "The burn is coming." She questioned if there will be signs where the mower is working.

Kumka replied that there should be signs along the trail now saying that a contractor will be working in the area. It will also note that there is going to be fairly large machinery and we are going to be cutting.

Ingraham asked how big the mower is.

Kumka explained that he has only seen pictures but he thought the blade was four feet wide. It's essentially a big autonomous ride-on mower with a drum style blade in the front of it. Minnesota Native Landscapes is very excited about using it and showcasing this restoration. The work will be very visible and they are fully committed in helping us perform this work.

Hanley asked if there will be one or two people doing that work.

Kumka said there will be several people but this particular machine only requires one operator. They will have other people on brush saws cleaning up if the machine can't get close to an oak tree or can't get all that buckthorn. There are follow up people who do that work. There are some of the larger, younger, softwood trees that we want to selectively remove because the mower can't get in the woods. That would be followed up with chainsaws and people walking behind.

Hanley wondered how much time it would take with hand tools to get rid of all that.

Kumka answered it would take much longer and frankly, it's not practical.

Hanley asked if the herbicide was done by someone spraying it from the path.

Kumka answered that it is an ATV style vehicle that two people can sit in; there is a 100 gallon tank attached to the back and it is filled with herbicide. There is a long hose that comes off with a nozzle on the end that someone can use to spray it.

Hanley questioned if staff would need to submit something to Hennepin County beforehand if it was used on the Cullen Nature Preserve.

Kumka said no, we have an herbicide application license so we can apply herbicides.

Hanley added that the document mentioned if they did burns or applied herbicide that they had tell Hennepin County.

Kumka answered that they give them something every year that notes what they are doing this year.

Jacobs asked staff to explain what the yellow/orange piece was on the map.

Kumka said the plan is more of a prairie with prairie edge style trees. There is a lot of topography on the west and north sides. There are oaks, white oaks, burr oaks, maybe some black oaks and chikapin oaks. There is a little angle of climate change resilience in terms of the tree species selection out there. We could install some species that might be just slightly east or south of us just to see how they handle the change in climate in Minnetonka. That would be a spot to showcase some of those particular species and see how they do.

Hanley asked if there would be a path through there.

Kumka replied yes. All these restorations not only makes it easier to maintain but if there are more formal footpaths through there, it also makes observation and inspections easier. If we

are spending time, energy and finances on these projects we want folks to be able to see them; we would design a trail network through there.

Hanley asked if people are using that as a dog park.

Kumka assumed they are. He hasn't personally seen it but a lot of those yards back up to it and you can get into that field. There is a chain link fence that separates it from the highway. He has seen kids sledding on those slopes so he assumes people also use it as a dog park.

Hanley thought it was an impressive sledding hill.

Ingraham was glad staff was looking at doing something in the northwest corner at Hilloway Park. When you go up the main trail, it is really pretty but there is no path through there.

Kumka said it will be dramatically different. If you look at the historic aerials that was all pasture back in the day. The pine plantation stretched over into that direction a little bit, mostly jack pine, and some of those are still there but it is primarily buckthorn. It is just a whole hidden part of the park and is bigger than you would assume; it's impossible to walk through it right now.

10. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

O'Dea gave the report.

11. Adjournment

Jacobs moved, Semersky seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m. All voted "yes."
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Kline

Kathy Kline
Recreation Administrative Coordinator