

## **Minutes of the Joint meeting of the Minnetonka Park Board and City Council Meeting of November 13, 2019**

---

### **1. Roll Call**

Park Board members in attendance included James Durbin, Nelson Evenrud, Ben Jacobs, Elena Imaretska, Cindy Kist. Excused members included Chris Gabler and Christopher Walick.

Council members in attendance included: Mayor Brad Wiersum, Deb Calvert, Susan Carter, Bob Ellingson, Mike Happe and Rebecca Schack. Excused member was Tim Bergstedt.

Staff members in attendance included Geralyn Barone, Ann Davy, Darin Ellingson, Mike Funk, Corrine Heine, Carol HejlsStone, Kathy Kline, Kelly O'Dea, Mike Pavelka and Sara Woeste.

Park Board Chair Evenrud called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

### **2. Discussion Items**

#### **A. Report from the Chair**

Evenrud provided a park board summary of 2019.

#### **B. Community Facility & Programming Space Study Update**

Recreation Services Director, Kelly O'Dea gave the report of the Community Facility and Programming Space Study Update.

Calvert asked for an update on the Big Willow Park enhancements.

O'Dea replied that the study ended in 2017. The study looked at three significant upgrades to Big Willow Park; which included turf, winter refrigerated ice and a grandstand. The estimate was around \$4,000,000. It has been in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for about three or four years but unfunded the entire time. O'Dea believes it is still in the CIP for 2022-2023.

Schack asked if there is anything on the horizon regarding partnerships.

O'Dea responded that Minnetonka and Hopkins School Districts asked us what our intentions were with aquatics because they were curious. Hopkins seems to be fading a little bit and Minnetonka is definitely still looking at an aquatics facility. Minnetonka has the money for it and they are looking for a pretty significant facility. Staff has been in communication with schools which are probably the most likely partner.

Calvert was thinking about the geographical allocation of resources and anticipating all the changes that are happening in the Opus area. Calvert commented that there are schools in that area. She wants to make sure we have some of these recreational opportunities in that corner of the city. There may also be possible partnerships such as UnitedHealth Group.

O'Dea mentioned that the city partnered with Eagle Ridge Academy on a grant application and staff has explored a few options with them.

Imaretska loves the idea of partnerships and researched other pools in the area. The Marsh or the YMCA could be a partnership opportunity until a more permanent solution is found. Another thing that could be helpful would be communicating to citizens that are not able to get into our programs about other opportunities in the city. Maybe doing a referral program with different pools is another option.

Happe added that the city of Bloomington is working on an innovative approach with finance and funding for a development out at the Mall of America. Happe asked if the park board has talked about that.

O'Dea said that the park board has not specifically talked about it. Assistant Finance Director, Joel Merry looked into that financing. However, O'Dea was not sure on the specifics of that financing.

Barone shared that there is a third party involved. They will do the financing and run the facility for 30 years but after the bond is done the city will own it.

Happe wanted clarification that researching and looking into funding options is what staff wants.

Wiersum thinks we have gotten a lot out of the money that has been invested in Williston. It is a great facility that has everything you need but it's not too fancy. As staff thinks about some of these needs, he believes they are going to have to look for creative opportunities to fund them. He's not sure to what degree booster clubs can provide funding but we have to look at those creative opportunities for people that are passionate about some of these sports. He thinks that it is probably not very practical for it to be fully publically funded.

Barone responded to Happe and said that staff has not done any research on it. She has noticed with the available state bonding dollars that more communities are going to the state for facilities that may have either regional significance or people from beyond their city participating. Barone talked with O'Dea about this and they thought this option should at least be explored. Minnetonka has never done that. Although, the city did get the sales tax exemption on our public safety facility. There is some philosophical choices to be made if we were to go down that path. By putting it unfunded, it at least gets it in the CIP. It gives us the chance that if we do use any community investment fund dollars it has to be in the CIP for at least a couple years. That could be a possible funding source as well. Barone thinks we have to be open to all sorts of ideas looking at this because of the expense involved.

Wiersum concurred with that statement. Minnetonka has a proud history of being quite self-reliant. When looking at what neighboring cities have done, it may not be the way Minnetonka would do things but they get the money. Other communities benefit from tax payer dollars, and Wiersum thinks Minnetonka should consider some of those options. There are young families in this community who demand these facilities and we should find a way to provide them.

Carter asked for clarification on why things are left unfunded on a page. She also asked if the interest in baseball is diminishing and if the city runs baseball programs. Carter also was wondering how the interest in baseball was when we first started talking about the Big Willow enhancements compared to now.

O'Dea responded that this was started under the former Recreation Director. Looking at outdoor ice was a big part of that project. Not to say baseball is diminishing, but having turf would extend baseball and soccer seasons.

Carter added that having kids in sports programs is not cheap. To extend the season would mean that users would extend their participation dues. Which, she thinks would further exacerbate the participation gap that is being created with people that can and can't pay for youth activities.

Barone thinks with aquatics that the issue is affordability. There are facilities and private entities that people can go to, however, some places cost three times more than our program. We try to make these programs affordable to families.

Carter added that there is cultural nuance in swimming and safety. Stories have been shared about kids in school programs that had issues because they were not exposed to swimming until much later.

O'Dea said that every morning at Williston there are over 100 seniors in the pool exercising. It is not just kids that are swimming.

Calvert has a friend that learned how to swim in Lake Minnetonka. They had programs there and she is wondering if we could use our beaches as a way to expand swimming lesson opportunities while we don't have an extra pool.

O'Dea replied that the water temperature is the main issue at Shady Oak Beach. Staff has tried this but found out that there was only about a month available for lessons.

Barone added that it is also weather dependent.

Bob Ellingson asked what should be done with the Glen Lake Activity Center.

Durbin thinks Williston is so popular is because the price at a private sector is like 10 times more. Williston is a very good value but at 10,000 people it is crowded. People would probably say it's at capacity and it's on a plot of land that can't expand. Where would you put the next pool? The city is not going to be the provider for every single opportunity for every citizen, but it is one of the solutions. Durbin thinks we just need to use other resources in the city or surrounding cities to get everything we can before considering new construction.

Schack commented that looking at our voter demographics and where money is, it seems like there should be grant or partnership opportunities directly focused on seniors. She thinks it is something that should be explored. The senior demographic really has a presence at Williston but if there is a way to focus some of those activities elsewhere, such as a partnership with the school district, it potentially could relieve some of that stress on Williston. Seniors may be a place that there are more natural partnerships.

Wiersum replied that Minnetonka City Hall is busy and the space gets used a lot. The nice thing about senior utilization of Williston is that it is off-peak. The challenge we have is that people choose to go to Williston because it is such a good deal. Williston would have to increase the fee a lot to make the numbers go down, however, we don't need to do that. Some capacity management has been done by limiting non-resident memberships because parking is really the capacity constraint.

O'Dea circled back to Bob Ellingson's question. Staff is interested in hearing what you have to say about the Glen Lake Activity Center and Glen Lake in general.

Barone asked O'Dea if he had talked about a past plan that was brought to council.

O'Dea reviewed that back in 2015, a feasibility study was done and it was brought to the city council. There were three different options that included some gym space, meeting rooms and a track. Those were the things we thought we needed back then. It was estimated to be a 40,000-60,000 square foot facility. The projected cost was \$21,000,000. It was a fairly big building for that site.

Barone asked O'Dea to talk about what it is used for now.

O'Dea mentioned that the recreation department holds some programs such as arts and crafts there. Programming is limited because of what we can get in there. The facility can be rented as one large room or two small rooms.

Barone added that the facility is an old fire station. Our police department and HCMC also have sub-stations there.

Imaretska asked if there was a way to have minimal improvements done at a low cost so the facility can be used for classes; especially senior classes such as yoga. Since there is so much strain on the space here, it would make sense to look at.

Carter asked if there has been any push back from Glen Lake neighbors about parking.

O'Dea responded that this hasn't been brought publically.

Schack asked if certain classes that don't require the exercise machines could take place at Glen Lake Activity Center instead of Williston. Maybe it is staffed during limited hours and is a place where people can go workout without the distractions at Williston. Schack wonders if there is a way to use that facility in a cost efficient way for people who are looking for some of the utilitarian services that Williston has to offer. As almost like an overflow facility but also with some unique characteristics and limited programming.

Wiersum says the circumstances in Glen Lake regarding activity has changed meaningfully since that presentation and parking is a big challenge. Glen Lake is a more diverse community than it was but there are a lot of seniors living there. There is an opportunity to look at the Williston memberships and see how many members live in Glen Lake. People could walk there for activities and it would be convenient.

Wiersum thinks if a recommendation would be made now that the vision would change and it would be a smaller recommendation due to the commercial activity. Now, maybe it is to renovate with a very limited scope. Wiersum asked where in the city could we

expand our facility or make an investment in building. Glen Lake probably is not the solution because the whole area is constrained. Where would a new facility go now given the circumstances and given what we anticipate in the future? Collaborating with the school district or other publically owned property is possible but figuring out how to pay for it is going to be challenging. Could the state help us, what can the school districts or boosters do and also what role will city taxpayers have?

Durbin asked what the square footage of the meeting room is at the Glen Lake Activity Center.

Imaretska responded it is 1600 square footage.

Durbin continued that it is small and there isn't much you can do with that footprint. The parking there is adequate for the amount of people that can use it. How can that facility be made bigger without decreasing the amount of parking? To turn it into a yoga studio for like 20 seniors, is that going to take pressure off anywhere else? It's kind of a tear down property if EMS and police weren't there.

Calvert agrees that the Glen Lake Activity Center is past its prime and we need to figure out how much we are willing to invest in sort of a losing proposition. It is constrained but if this building is going to be there a while, can we invest a little bit into it to relieve pressure off somewhere else. Calvert thinks Wiersum's idea about catering to seniors, isn't too bad. Not only thinking about taking the pressure off Williston but the activities that are also held at the Minnetonka Community Center. Maybe some of these activities could be expanded to Glen Lake Activity Center.

Calvert also thinks that Opus is a place to look at. There are so many opportunities for partnerships there because of all the new development. Calvert is conflicted about Glen Lake because that building really is past its peak and the only population she sees using it is senior citizens. There is not a lot of space for parking and traffic is already a challenge. Calvert asked if maybe they should be thinking about what to do with that property instead of the building.

Wiersum agrees that there are traffic and parking constraints at the Glen Lake Activity Center and those two things create some challenges. Wiersum agrees with Durbin when wondering if that building is worth investing money into. The big solution is not going to happen at Glen Lake Activity Center but there are two things that make sense there because of its location. One is senior citizen opportunities because of location and the other is Mighty Mites baseball because it is at a place people already go to for baseball.

Imaretska added that maybe there is a different organization that would want to use this space. Is there someone that would actually enjoy this kind of space and would invest into renovating it? Maybe it's not city operated at all.

### **C. Robinwood Neighborhood Park Process**

Public Works Operations Manager, Darin Ellingson gave the report.

Kist asked if emails or mailings will be sent for the public comment meetings.

Darin Ellingson replied that mail notices will be sent to all the homes in that area for both neighborhood meetings.

Imaretska asked where the meetings will take place.

Darin Ellingson explained that they would be in one of the meeting rooms in either the Minnetonka Community Center or Minnetonka City Hall.

Carter said there was some dialog on Nextdoor about Minnetonka lacking a playground that has access for children with disabilities. Carter asked if resident feedback can be extended to people who identify with children with disabilities. This would engage the community in a conversation to be inclusive. There were a lot of comments about it.

O'Dea replied that staff has had conversations with this person.

Schack agrees with that but she's not sure this is the park for it. With the park being at the end of a cul-de-sac, the main neighborhood concerns were access and parking.

Wiersum commented that this is really a pocket park; a little neighborhood park.

Happe says the timeline looks great and the staff does such a good job with neighborhood outreach. Happe asked what the estimated cost or budget is going to be.

Darin Ellingson says that they have \$105,000 budgeted for design and construction.

Calvert read through the packet and it seemed like public opinion is somewhat split. It's technically a neighborhood park, however, having the park at the end of a cul-de-sac seems different. It kind of feels like it is a private park for people living on that street. Calvert is usually in favor of parks, however, it seems like a little park is being squeezed into a pretty limited space. She also appreciates why the people that want the park, want it. She is interested in seeing the neighborhood feedback and supporting the neighborhood.

Barone added that there was robust interest for a park in this area. People didn't want to walk along County Road 73 or Minnetonka Boulevard to get to a park.

Calvert replied that is why she said that she understands why people wanted it.

Barone explained that staff looked extensively in this area and there were not a lot of options. She thinks people outside of that neighborhood will use the park because of the location and their ability to walk there safely.

Calvert agrees and hopes that everyone walks because it is in a cul-de-sac.

Darin Ellingson explained that the park will be small enough to accommodate the few people that are there and not attract large amounts of people. It's balancing the size of the play equipment to the size of the neighborhood.

Calvert asked to please preserve the cottonwoods. People don't like them because they are messy but they absorb so much water. They are just a really important tree, especially in a year like this.

Imaretska likes the fact that it is on a cul-de-sac. It is kind of nice because you're not worried about the kids running in the street or on a busy street. She thinks people will definitely walk with their kids. Imaretska knows people in that neighborhood and since the initial discussion even more families with young children have moved in. She thinks there will be a big amount of excitement around the concept.

Wiersum adds that when this came forward in 2016, one of the reasons people were so passionate was because there were no nearby parks that they could safely walk to with their kids. That is a pretty significant and meaningful issue. It will be a tiny pocket park but he thinks it will benefit more people than the cul-de-sac. He understands Calvert's concern and agrees that it does feel a little different.

Durbin thinks these small pocket neighborhood parks are actually where the trend is going. He goes to parks and the only occupied space is where the play equipment is; nobody is using the big open fields. If we are building a smaller park, it will be popular and the kids will come. He is already imagining the kids running through backyards. Durbin adds that Minnetonka Boulevard and Hopkins Crossroad is a horrible intersection and very dangerous. Durbin thinks it will be popular and would love to see usage data after it's built to find out if this is the trend of future parks.

#### **D. Opus Placemaking**

Park and Trail Planner, Carol HejlStone gave the report and a PowerPoint presentation.

Carter thinks the way staff is thinking about this is really cool. She is eager to get the color coded paths and staff has her vote on an urban dog park. She thinks the cohesiveness and the way in which staff's thinking about it is creative and innovative. She is looking forward to be a part of it and complimented HejlStone on a really good job.

Calvert commented that she thinks HejlStone just got everyone re-elected with the announcement of a possible dog park in Minnetonka.

Wiersum said Opus was done as HejlStone indicated. It was really a utopian thing 30-35 years ago. While it was extremely innovative, it never quite achieved what the vision was. It has been successful and there are a lot of things going on there. Wiersum thinks that this vision is similarly utopian but with the light rail and housing going in it will be more of a community in the future. Everything on the list may not get added but the potential is very exciting. It is great to have a place where we can put some needed density to grow according to the comp plan. At the same time, it should be an attractive area. Housing is being put in an area that can benefit from it and can capitalize on everything it has to offer.

Schack commended everybody on this idea of leveraging opportunities in that area. It is probably more so than anywhere in the city; but these public or private partnerships are going to be pretty easy. This is a really good opportunity to give people options and it's going to meet our vision. Schack complimented HejlStone on the presentations she has done. They are impressive and gets people excited about Opus. She can envision this and what a cool place it is. Having a blank canvas to work with is a great opportunity for the park and recreation department.

Durbin believes Opus was originally a great vision but it didn't get maintained and kind of stagnated. Hopefully it will be maintained because eventually it will get old and things will have to change. With the density that is expected in the 2040 comp plan, the wonderful outdoor recreational space that had the waterpark and the art, etc...maintenance will be needed. Durbin saw one of those buildings and he saw the Williston. What a beautiful center of the city where if you ever needed a larger recreational space, indoor/outdoor if not there, he doesn't know anywhere else in the city where anyone can consider. This is going to be the park everybody is going to look at. This will get people off the train at the light rail station because it looks really cool. Durbin thanked HejlStone for putting this together.

### **3. Information Items**

#### **Lone Lake Park Mountain Bike Trail**

Recreation Services Assistant Director, Sara Woeste gave an update. Things are moving forward. Staff applied for the Hennepin County Grant and will find out next month if we get it. Staff is working with a consultant to work on the project study. The wetland delineation has been done and conversations have been made with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In November, staff will be doing the initial field siting. Final field siting will be done in the spring by the contractor. In the winter we will work on our memorandum of understanding (MOU), specs on the project and getting contracting. Things are moving and updates will be made to the project page.

Barone says that the project page is really important and staff is working really hard to be as transparent as possible. Any minute that staff or our consultants are in the park there are people questioning them. Staff is going to continue to be vigilant and make sure all rules are followed. Staff expects throughout the process that there will be some attempts to interrupt or disrupt the project.

Wiersum thanked everybody for all their work and mentioned that they should be proud of what they are doing.

#### **Volunteer Recognition**

This event recognizes volunteers in the parks and natural resources areas. It takes place every two years.

### **4. Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.