



**Minutes
Minnetonka Park Board
Wednesday, January 6, 2021**

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Park Board Members Present: Elliot Berman, James Durbin, Nelson Evenrud, Chris Gabler, Elena Imaretska, David Ingraham, Ben Jacobs and Chris Walick.

Staff members in attendance: Carol HejlStone, Kathy Kline, Kelly O'Dea, Sara Woeste and Leslie Yetka.

Evenrud called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

3. Reports from Staff

Recreation Director, Kelly O'Dea had no reports.

4. Approval of Minutes

Walick moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of December 2, 2020 as submitted. Imaretska abstained. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

5. Citizens wishing to discuss items not on the agenda

There were none.

6. Business Items

A. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

O'Dea gave the report.

Gabler indicated that he would like to be considered for the chair.

Jacobs moved, Ingraham seconded a motion to appoint Chris Gabler as park board chair for a term beginning Feb. 1, 2021 and running through Jan. 31, 2022. All voted "yes". Motion carried.

Jacobs nominated Walick for vice chair.

Jacobs moved and Ingraham seconded a motion to appoint Chris Walick as park board vice chair for a term beginning Feb. 1, 2021 and running through Jan. 31, 2022. All voted "yes". Motion carried.

O'Dea mentioned that the city has established a new sustainability commission that they are wanting one park board member to serve on. The February meeting might be when it will be decided which park board member would be assigned to the sustainability commission.

Ingraham watched the city council meeting on Monday and thought it was confusing when the selection for the commissions committees was discussed. He asked if O'Dea has gotten guidance since then. He was looking for clarity on if they were allowed to nominate or select their representative. If so, would they have to interview for it?

O'Dea responded that City Manager, GERALYN BARONE said that we should have a nominee from the park board. The city council will then have to approve that position. O'Dea wasn't sure if they would have to go through the interview process. He assumes that if the park board has a unanimous vote as to who the representative should be that the city council will approve them.

B. Natural Resources Master Plan Update

Natural Resources Manager, Leslie Yetka gave the report.

C. POST Plan Update Process and Timeline

Park and Trail Planner, Carol HejlStone gave the report.

Evenrud thanked HejlStone and Yetka and said their reports covered both areas well. He noted that what people love about Minnetonka is our natural spaces, trails and places to get away. While this is extensive and really does cover everything, city staff can't do it on their own. People in the community are needed to help out with this. He was glad they have all those opportunities in the process to do that.

Walick thought it was very thorough and incorporated public feedback. He was excited to see it and felt like there was nothing he could add to it. Walick would be happy to be the park board representative with the POST part of it.

Ingraham commented that there was a reference to different opinions on uses of parks. He asked Yetka to share more about that.

Yetka responded that when we think about how we manage the habitat, back in the 1990's and early 2000's it was common to think about our habitats as natural areas. That we are restoring the plant communities because we want it to reflect what was originally here. It didn't always necessarily take into account how humans play a role in that. For instance, if there was an oak woodland, you would have to ask yourself whether to preserve this area by keeping people out and keeping it pristine natural or allow people to come in. Yetka sees that as an important component to focusing on the restoration of natural areas.

Ingraham wondered if there was more of a difference of opinion now about whether people should be in the open spaces or not.

Yetka responded that there is a tension between those people who think we should keep natural areas pristine versus people that think we should include humans in the

equation. That is a tension that exists and a tension that is a question that should be posed to the public, park board members, and the city council.

Ingraham thanked Yetka and added that these are very ambitious plans and complimented her on the development of pursuing them.

Imaretska thanked Yetka for her presentation. She loved how staff was thinking about this in a holistic way and are collaborating with updating this. When thinking about climate change and resilience, we think about what is going to happen to our trees, plants and animals. Part of this could also be built environment such as flooding. There have been issues and problems with flooding in our city for various homeowners. This might be an opportunity to think about that too; in terms of how the built environment is effected by potential climate changes and warmer environment. Maybe using the natural environment as a way to mitigate some of these risks.

Durbin commented that these plans are probably the two most important things that the park board talks about. He believes that planning 20 years out is too long. He believes that 90 percent of energy should be focused on 10 years out and only 10 percent of energy should be focused on 11-20 years out. So much is going to change with the dynamics of the outdoor spaces and climate stressors. There are a lot of things that are unknown. If you look back at the past 20 years, things have drastically changed. Durbin thinks that staff is giving it their best efforts on trails, parks and outdoor spaces but none of this is going to be potentially valid that far in advance. Given that, he suggests that a revision checkpoint happens at the 10 year mark to reevaluate and make major adjustments if required.

Imaretska added that this might be a similar situation that we have with our Trail Improvement Plan. There are all these trails that need to get done but there is only so much that we can really do. She has a feeling that might be similar just because of how many parks and how many invasive species there are. It will be interesting as part of this process to determine the criteria. There is criteria for our trails in terms of ranking, what needs to be done and when it will be done. It is a clear, transparent criteria informed by the community. She loves seeing the robust community engagement process you are planning so that you can make decisions for the next 10 to 20 years moving forth. Imaretska also hopes staff will devise some strategies to engage more volunteers in restoration activities and thinking more creatively around that. As people are out enjoying our great natural resources they can also be more substantially engaged and involved to preserve and restore them.

Gabler asked Yetka to educate him on how earthworms are stressors.

Yetka responded that there are a few species of earthworms but the typical earthworm is not native to North America. They eat a lot of the debris such as the leaves that fall off the trees in the fall, which depletes a lot of the organic material in the soil. In addition, they churn up the soil, which allows seeds to germinate. With buckthorn, there are a lot of seeds in the soil that you don't even know are there. If you churn up that soil, that is how things like buckthorn and garlic mustard start sprouting and growing. Earthworms are not thought of as being a problem but they actually are pretty destructive. Earthworms also prevent a lot of seedlings from growing specifically oak woodlands or oak seedlings. They will take out the roots and basically keep the seeds from germinating in some cases. Deer will also take out young seedlings. When you think of

oak regeneration or forest regeneration, earthworms and deer can have a big impact on that.

Imaretska loved the fact that private property and the private land is being thought of. It was really interesting to see the maps with the turf. She loves thinking about the ways that we can engage and educate landowners on best practices. Turf is so resource intensive and can have pretty big impacts.

Evenrud asked if white tail deer are not native to this area.

Yetka answered that white tail deer are native to North America.

Evenrud enjoys the historical perspective as somebody who uses one of the Minnetonka parks almost daily. The parks look great right now and a lot of thought has gone into everything about them.

7. Park Board Member Reports

Imaretska thanked staff for the Yeti Challenge that is happening right now in our parks. If you are not familiar with it, there is a challenge every week in a different park for residents to find Yeti toys that are hidden within the parks. They hold the key to various riddles which then can be solved. She did that with her son and they had a lot of fun. She added that it is such a great example of creative thinking and is a great tactic and strategy to get residents out enjoying our parks and exploring them and having fun along the way.

Evenrud added it is a great COVID activity.

Ingraham said he is not sure how COVID friendly it is considering how crowded Big Willow Park was this past weekend. He thanked staff for the really creative use of the parks and to get people out. It's a pretty fun thing and it gets people to multiple parks which he thinks is great. He also shared that he took advantage of the snowshoeing at Lone Lake Park. He was a little curious how snowshoeing would coexist with mountain biking. He said it actually worked out really well. He didn't have any issues and thought it was good coexistence. He asked if the vandalism in Big Willow Park has been resolved.

O'Dea responded that it has been reported to the Minnetonka police but it doesn't know if it has been resolved. He believes some person has been out with a machete type of tool or instrument kind of taking chunks from trees. The police are aware of it and they are working on catching that person.

Durbin commented that the parks are awesome. Kids are out there playing hockey and skating on the outdoor rinks. There are a lot of people walking their dogs at Gro Tonka Park. The sledding hill at Gro Tonka Park is very busy, maybe more busy than Civic Center this year. It is really cool to see that there are so many free things to do. The activities cost nothing, are nearby and they are fun and mostly safe.

8. Information Items

Outdoor Rinks

O'Dea gave the report.

Lone Lake Park Multi-Use Mountain Bike Trail

O'Dea gave the report.

City of Minnetonka named "Monarch Champion"

Yetka gave the report.

Evenrud commented that it is always great when something that's kind of sad can be turned into something positive at least into our backyard, if not the rest of the country. He suggested putting in a rain garden if you want more monarch butterflies. He has seen an increase of them ever since he put in his rain garden.

9. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

O'Dea reported. Next meeting is Feb. 3, 2021 and it will be virtual. The Park Board tour, which was originally scheduled for May 12, is going to be postponed due to COVID and because the weather in May can be uncertain. There are no dates in mind but we are hoping to do that in either June or July.

O'Dea reminded everyone that tonight's meeting is the last one for Evenrud and Imaretska. He added that the park board is a relaxed environment, which he appreciates and thinks that they made it that way. The work we do is really important when you think about the projects that we have done such as pickleball courts, mountain bike trails and trails. O'Dea thanked both of them for their service to the city and he appreciated how dedicated both of them were. They always put things in perspective no matter what was going on in the world. We appreciated you being respectful to the members of the community who came and expressed their opinion whether you agree or disagree. You are here every month and are involved in other tasks that we ask for help with. O'Dea thanked them again and asked for other comments from park board members.

Ingraham expressed that Evenrud runs a great meeting and that he has done a great job. He also added that Imarestka did really well stepping in for Evenrud when he was having technology issues during a meeting. Both of you are going to be missed.

Evenrud said he is looking forward to watching Gabler and Walick run the meetings.

Imaretska thanked staff and the park board and council members. It was really fun and great. It is important work and she really believes in the importance of all of us being engaged with the local community and making it better. She thanked everyone for being such a fun group, she has learned a lot and will certainly be staying in touch. She wished Gabler and Walick luck.

Evenrud appreciated the chance to say thank you and said it was fun. As O'Dea said, it is casual but it is also important. What he has enjoyed most is as a volunteer you can have such an impact on helping create new parks, new amenities and new bike paths. He has learned a lot. This is a great way to see that a lot of work goes into our parks and it really takes everybody to make them the way they are. He is going to miss the personal relationships that he has made and also the meetings. He will miss the pre-meeting dinner,

but most of all the fellowship during the hour before the meeting. The coolest thing he thinks about recreation is that everybody finds something that they like within the field of recreation. It could be sitting on a bench, being in a sport at any part of your life, everybody has something that they do and it usually spans their whole life. It is a rare chance that you can make connections with people especially now days with technology. He has met and talked to more people at the parks. He has learned more from people and none of that would be possible if it wasn't for the Minnetonka Park Board making it such a great place. It has been awesome and he just wanted to say thank you and that it was great to meet all of everyone.

10. Adjournment

Gabler moved, Walick seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:16 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Kline

Kathy Kline
Recreation Administrative Coordinator