



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

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call**

Park Board Members Present: Elliot Berman, Korey Beyersdorf, James Durbin, Chris Gabler, Ben Jacobs, Katie Semersky and Chris Walick. Excused: David Ingraham

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

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

**3. Reports from Staff**

Kelly O'Dea, Recreation Director reported there was an addendum.

**4. Approval of Minutes**

Walick moved, Jacobs seconded a motion to approve the meeting minutes of September 1, 2021 as submitted. 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. POST Plan draft Mission Statement and Guiding Principles**

Sara Woeste, Assistant Director gave the staff report. Park board members gave feedback.

**The Mission statement and guiding principles – draft:**

Durbin states that community engagement doesn't belong in the mission statement but it belongs somewhere else.

Woeste replied that there is some talk about community engagement in the guiding principles. There was one guiding principle that talked about diverse communities and making sure to reach those that aren't always reached out to. Woeste thought there might be language that the board may want to add regarding engaging neighbors deeper into

the POST Plan itself. Woeste added that there were comments about adding the language about nature-based activities and not just recreational oriented activities.

Jacobs thought if you included that in there, then this section would be good.

Semersky asked how they want Minnetonka to be different than other surrounding communities. She questioned if the mission statement says how they want to lead or be different than other surrounding communities. She suggested adding a statement in the mission statement about what they want to lead in.

Durbin asked Semersky what she wants to lead in.

Semersky responded that a memorable quote from the last meeting was that we don't want to be good, we want to be great. When she reads that statement, multiple suburbs come to her mind.

Berman said reading this draft POST Plan mission statement plus the suggested changes, what really stands out to him is restoring and enhancing our unique natural amenities. He gave an example of the creek this summer and how it was not at a level for us to use it so we can't preserve that anymore, we have to restore something like that. There is probably many more examples throughout Minnetonka of things that are past preserving and we could re-enhance or restore.

Gabler thinks the mission statement is too long. He thinks they could shorten it and have it still say the same things. It would probably have more impact because people could remember it.

Durbin asked if the mission statement was drawn from the Minnetonka Park Board's mission statement because they should have to align somewhere. He thought maybe there was a compromise between brevity so people know the mission statement and not leaving anything out of it. They should know our mission statement really well and that is a lot to memorize.

Woeste replied the park board's mission and this one are different but they should somewhat reflect each other.

Gabler used to write a lot of mission statements and said that they should be simple. The guiding principles is where there should be more details.

Durbin supports what Gabler is saying about keeping the mission statement shorter but providing more details in the guiding principles.

Woeste thought that was helpful. On one hand we are hearing make it shorter and on the other hand we have to add a few things so there is a challenge there. One example is making the sentence shorter, "the parks system shall enhance the quality of life for all residents, workers and visitors." That could get shortened to say, "by making the park accessible." What we were trying to address is being inclusive to not only the residents but also to visitors and anyone that comes to our park system. That is one way to make it shorter but it may look less inclusive. To go back to the nature-based activities, there was feedback that was kind of across the board. Should we get more specific and add nature-based or should we say, "providing activities" so it isn't geared towards either one.

Walick views mission statements as staying pretty general and then addressing things maybe in the guiding principles. He feels like cleaning up language to make things a little more readable is always good. Overall, the content is solid because it does hit on those broad areas which are divided up.

**Guiding Principles: Advance Environmental Sustainability and Resiliency**

Jacobs likes adding in the word restore. He doesn't know about taking out the word protect though or keeping all three words but he thinks restoration is important.

Semersky asked if the reason why restore wasn't included was not because it might have a negative connotation but because it is said so many times in these meetings.

Woeste said there was no specific conversation about leaving it out. It is a good suggestion if the board would like to see it in there.

Semersky's assumption is that the word funding doesn't belong in the guiding principles necessarily. She can see the point that is being made by the feedback but it is probably intended to be in another place in the plan.

Woeste said as we move forward, there will be goals and recommendations and that perhaps would be more fitting there.

Semersky agreed.

Durbin was trying to think of what we have done for these things while he has been on the board for the past few years. He asked staff to provide an example of what they have done to promote environmental resilience throughout the park system to address the effects of climate change.

Woeste is going to turn this question over to Natural Resources Manager, Leslie Yetka. Also, she asked Yetka to address the last bullet regarding support for the city's Natural Resources Master Plan.

Yetka said a good example of something that we do often times and talk about a lot is habitat restoration and thinking about making sure we have a diverse amount of species on the landscape; think of trees or putting in pollinator plantings. When we have a diversity of species, think of a woodland and if you have all the same species and there is an event such as a flood or a storm or something comes through and wipes it all out, that is a less resilient community type. In all of the activities we do in restoring the habitat and in removing invasive species, she would say that is an example of environmental resilience our park systems. One reason is to restore a habitat to something that was historically there but another reason since climate change and the effects of climate change are becoming more prevalent, the added benefit of doing what we already do is that it is more resilient to those changes in climate. The second point Woeste mentioned was regarding the Natural Resources Master Plan. Staff is currently putting together the draft chapters of that plan and it will be made available to the public through Minnetonka Matters for review. There will also be a draft document for review at the November meeting. That will have its own goals and objectives specifically related to habitat

restoration and protection of our natural areas and our high quality natural areas within our park system.

Woeste said the only comments she was hearing on this page is to add the word restore.

**Provide Connections to Parks and Trails:**

Durbin asked what bullet number three means, “improve accessibility to park facilities and programs by reducing physical and financial barriers.”

Woeste thought they were looking at any time we build anything now, we are looking at any type of physical barriers. It could be looking at what the financial barriers are as we look to connect trails, parks or getting people there. This could also be program-based and looking at how we can get more people who can't financially afford to be in a soccer league. We want to make sure there aren't any barriers for people participating in our parks. We already do a good job on that but we are always looking for new ways to get away from financial barriers. One issue is always transportation and that is a really hard one to tackle. If people can't afford to get themselves to a park or program, long-term we could look at transit. One thing we looked at when we did our inventory assessment was the lack of transit stops at some of the parks. Some of the bigger parks you can take a bus to but not every park. As we build a new park at Ridgedale Commons, we hope there is a Metro Transit stop there.

Beyersdorf said that kind of goes along with promoting and advertising park programs and events. One financial barrier is that people don't realize that there is access to scholarship funds but it may allow people with financial issues to be able to participate. She thinks that is something that would be really helpful.

Woeste said that would be the fifth bullet where they talk about promoting and advertising. How can we advertise to some communities that are telling us that they don't know about our programs? Yes, that is a challenge for us and we need to address it. As a city as a whole, just trying to figure out better ways to do that. An example would be creating marketing in other languages.

Berman said he is looking at the last bullet point, increase connectivity to neighboring communities in Minnetonka. He asked if we should make that more narrow by saying who should do that. Such as, board members talking to other board members of other cities to set up programs together or should staff communicate with other staff to connect to those neighborhoods.

Woeste responded that there are two ways to read that. There is physical connectivity which she thinks is what we were focusing on here as we look to put a Three Rivers trail from Plymouth to Eden Prairie and from Wayzata into Minnetonka. That is a different angle if you want to discuss it.

Durbin commented that it is both. We have Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreation and we do that outreach. Sometimes having things vague is good and it allows people to interpret and move in a direction that makes sense.

Woeste commented that these are guiding principles that the board and a future board is going to use to make decisions moving forward.

Gabler added that if you get too specific you end up in that trick box of “well you said you are going to do that.” That kind of hamstrings everybody such as staff, park board, even city council moving forward if we get too specific.

**Promote Community Health and Wellness:**

Walick said looking at the first one, it states to support mental health and wellbeing but could it state mental and physical health. Because you address mental health specifically, throwing physical in there would encompass that.

**Promote Equity and Inclusion:**

Semersky asked while staff was writing these, if they found overlap between the connections guiding principle and this one.

Woeste replied that there are some things that overlap. Some things from this section are sprinkled throughout all of the language but it was a good stand-alone section to have as well.

Durbin wanted clarification of what “prioritize equity throughout the parks, open space and trail system to support all users celebrate diversity and embrace inclusiveness” means. He wondered how they would take that as a guiding principle and what that actually means for something they would work on.

Woeste thinks as we make decisions that we need to prioritize. An example, let’s say we are making a decision about a skateboarding park, we need to know if we are bringing in the right people to make decisions and if we have heard from the broad audience. As a whole, are we making decisions to provide amenities and features throughout our system that meet a variety of needs? You can kind of take these and look at them in different ways and use them in different ways.

Durbin responded that his takeaway of this is that if a group comes in and they want to do something, they should be very open and take in all viewpoints. They should try to think of everyone in Minnetonka and do what is right for everybody.

Woeste replied that it is embrace inclusiveness. Are we building, maintaining, and providing amenities or features that are inclusive when we make decisions. She thinks we all want to be doing that and hearing all voices.

Gabler would get rid of that bullet point all together mainly because he still doesn’t understand it even though she explained it. We do celebrate diversity so are we talking about the citizenry of Minnetonka because you get parts of Minnetonka where it’s a different demographic. What they want in a park is going to be different than maybe what somebody else wants in another part of the city which is a different demographic. Do we include those in both or what do we do? He struggles with that bullet point because he doesn’t know what it means.

Woeste thinks it is important to state that we support all users, especially as we diversify and we have user groups in the park that don’t feel welcome. That is one argument to why we should keep that.

Durbin asked if we could come up with something else. After Gabler's explanation, it should be clear but you could take that in any direction.

Gabler said he would use that line, "we support all users."

Durbin asked if we could come up with maybe potential edits to how Woeste explained it, rather than those words. He kind of understands Gabler and it should be clearer than mud and state what it needs to state. You could take this any direction in the world and he isn't sure next year he is going to remember what direction we need to take with this.

Woeste asked if we are thinking something simpler, for instance instead of using "prioritize equity", we can say "support all park and program users and embrace inclusiveness." It says that we as a board, a park system and as staff want to be inclusive to all.

Durbin said that it basically says that they listen and care without actually saying that.

Walick added that he knows equity is a word that's out there more now but he thinks it is important to have that in there because it shows more forward movement and intentionality. You are actually showing forward movement and consideration with things you may not have thought about before. It is ok that it is unclear because it's more of a way of thinking than a series of bullet points. We are putting it out there that when we make decisions, we are going to consider this. We don't know what we are going to consider but we kind of have a general idea of what it is, what we need to look for and the questions that we need to ask. You can't have all those questions listed in here. He thinks it is something to strive for and he thinks it is important to have in there so he wants to keep it.

Durbin knew what Walick was saying and he thinks it is a valuable comment, he just doesn't know if it could be written clearer. He gets equity and he believes in it. Let's say we have park "x" and some people want to do activity "y" and some people want to just stand around and do "z". How do you make that so this park can be enjoyed by different diverse groups and where would you put the funding? That is very important and is something we do as a park board. He is just a little confused on the language.

Semersky asked if we strive for a balanced system within what you are explaining.

Durbin said he thinks our goal is that they want everybody to feel comfortable and welcomed to use our parks. Everybody should want to go there to do something and there should be a little bit for everybody to enjoy there. We should be able to design our parks or trails so everybody has that feeling of being welcomed. He thinks that is what it is trying to say.

Beyesdorf said maybe the word prioritize could be changed to something a little lighter. Maybe it is something like consider equity or something saying that we are thinking about it. When it says prioritize, it seems like we are making it our top priority. However, she thinks we are trying to say that we are always going to keep it in the conversations. Maybe just changing the wording of that would soften it a little bit.

Woeste said maybe promote instead.

Gabler thought that every park is a little different and is probably going to cater to a different demographic. He just doesn't know how we would measure that. How do you try and measure success?

Durbin answered that he doesn't know. It is very ambiguous and thinking of our entire park system, we kind of balance that ambiguity throughout. You can't quantitate it.

Berman explained that equity is different than equality. Equality is balance where equity is going to underserved communities and bringing them back up to where served communities have been. For communities that feel like they haven't been promoted to in the past, making sure extra resources go there to make sure that they are brought to where everybody else currently is; not making them anymore special but making sure that we are actually reaching them in that moment and bringing them to the same level. It's programs in the past that haven't been served that have asked for funding, not because they are worse than any other program but just because maybe the board at that time or whoever was in charge didn't see any value in that; now bringing value to that because they are community and they are members. He thinks it is very important for us to be careful with that, specifically that bullet point as a whole and especially the word equity. As a fully white presenting board, if equity gets cut out, it doesn't look great.

Walick thinks we shouldn't leave it in solely for optics, he thinks it needs to be something we believe in. He also wants to say this discussion has been good but this is a guiding principles plan and they shouldn't get caught up too much in the details on how they are going to do this. There will be people who have recommendations and then we'll break it down. This is something that we as a park board should strive for and that is why he thinks it is super important to keep it in.

Gabler thinks this is a great conversation because everyone is going to read things differently based on our age differences. He is really glad Berman chimed in on that because part of our biggest demographic is age. He thinks some of this kind of goes into the next bullet point as well. It highlights an area of confusion that we are going to have all throughout because you and I will look at something and read it totally different based on our lives.

Woeste said she thinks there is still a little disagreement about prioritize or promote or changing that word. She thinks what Berman is saying is that we should prioritize equity. An example, let's say there is a park in a maybe less affluent neighborhood and we don't hear from those neighbors so much. We need to make sure that we have our eye on parks that are not in the rich neighborhoods or don't get as much attention.

Durbin says the third bullet really hits home of how it is done. He likes to think two steps forward of how we are going to implement things. He doesn't want to just come up with these lovely phrases and then it is just word salad. If they are going to be coming up with these guiding principles, how do they as a park board take this and make it an action. How can we work with the staff and actually do this? If we don't all agree or understand exactly what we are supposed to do with that bullet than that bullet is not as strong. That is why he wants to discuss it.

Woeste doesn't think that every decision you make is going to be able to run through every one of these and check them off. Guiding principles will fit in some of the boxes but

you aren't going to be able to go through this for every decision you make and be able to say it checks all boxes.

Beyersdorf went back to the third bullet point where it is talking about community engagement and future park planning. Maybe going back to that second point and bringing it back to current, such as relooking at current parks that we have. Otherwise, making sure we are going back and making sure we are including everyone in what we currently have available.

Durbin said it's almost like you could combine those two bullets. Why are you expanding community engagement to traditionally underrepresented groups? Are you doing that because you want to promote or prioritize equity? They are so connected they could almost be the same bullet.

Walick added that the third one is park planning and he thinks the second one is more utilizing the parks.

Durbin didn't understand what Walick was saying.

Walick explained that the second one is expanding equitable use and outreach to those existing parks. Then the third one is the planning process for those in the future.

Gabler said you could add the word current so it reads, "expand community engagements in current and future park planning."

Durbin said there might be some way of getting the same meaning with less words combining them. It is something to think about. He thinks the board is going to do this no matter if it is written or not, however, as a formal plan we probably want to make sure it is clear and that is what we are going to do.

Berman questioned the fact that we've been using this term word salad and we didn't want it in the mission statement and now we are talking about how there are too many words here so he wondered where that expansive information will be.

Woeste responded that we were hearing that the mission statement should be a little more concise and the details should be within the guiding principles and in the bullets.

Berman asked if we should expand here.

Woeste said the entire plan will go into more details. Some people like their information differently and you all are going to have a little different opinion on how you want to see this. The city has a plain language style that staff tries to write in when we communicate to the public. There needs to be some details in here but it should also be concise too. What she is hearing is that the second bullet is important, however, there may be a little confusion about prioritizing equity and maybe it should be promote. We'll bring that one back. She doesn't know if that should go away, but she thinks it is important even if we think it is a little bit repetitive with the next one. The one after it is a little more focused just on community engagement for future planning. We could include current or future planning.



Semersky said words are really powerful and the words diversity, equity and inclusion should all come through in these guiding principles. It is part of our city plan, and is part of many things in city government right now.

Woeste added that even if there isn't a perfect definition on what that will mean or how you are going to use it, it is a good lens to look through as you make decisions.

**Support Excellence and Innovation:**

Berman thinks there is some good added language in the fifth bullet point, explore opportunities for partnerships to help fund and restore parks. He would say to help restore park space, open space and trail in high quality natural areas, in addition to maintaining facilities, programs and events.

Berman added that there are so many great places like Hennepin County to partner with to restore our parks and natural areas. To put that in there as a priority would be great.

Gabler said you have a great track record with doing that with pickleball courts and with the mountain bike trail. Those were really good public/private partnerships and it was well done.

Durbin commented that the restoration, invasive species restoration is restoring the parks. He thinks that is definitely a spot to put that word because that is what we are doing. In the last few years, we have taken that very far in the amount of volunteers that are working to get rid of invasive species and really protect the parks. He likes the word protect too but he doesn't know if we need to keep that one in there because restore is the word we've been using. He agrees with Berman that it is a solid spot for that and we will probably expand that in the next five to ten years.

Gabler thinks the last bullet point is excellent.

Semersky likes the last bullet that the friends group wrote. She was thinking about what innovation is and what it means to them. The nirvana in her mind is wow, how can we approach changes so that we are adding amenities and protecting and preserving at the same time.

Durbin thinks we have done that in practice too when designing a new park. They try to think about restoration, preservation and even with Lone Lake, they've done things with pickleball and bike trails and now doing restoration and protecting bee habitats. Ten years ago we weren't talking about bee habitats but we are flexible to be able to do that.

Woeste mentioned to Semersky that she talked about being leaders in the mission statement and she thought some of that language could come out such as being innovators in the guiding principles. She doesn't know if it will come out in the mission statement as they try to make it more concise but she thinks it could come out in something like the guiding principles.

Durbin said the city is signatory to a few things such as the butterfly proclamation. He thinks that maybe is where we could put that leadership. Maybe they can lead by doing those things.

Gabler asked if we could rearrange the order of the guiding principles.

Woeste replied yes, they are in no particular order.

Gabler thought when people look at the guiding principles, one is going to be the first thing, then two and so on. If people read it that way, would it make sense to reorder the guidelines especially when this one deals with innovation and leadership?

Woeste replied that it kind of wraps it up as well. She asked Semersky for clarification on if she liked the language about innovation and if she liked the entire statement that they added about ensuring that nature spaces are enhanced not to compromise in the process. She is just wondering if she is looking more at being innovative in general or specifically.

Semersky liked how it touches on our dichotomy challenge that we often have. The language doesn't have to be this strong. This is worded as nirvana, as she said, so it doesn't have to be not compromised ever. Enhanced, protected or maintained you could change a little bit.

Woeste said she is seeing and hearing that people like the language of being innovative as we make decisions. She was just wondering of the entirety of that bullet that was proposed.

Gabler doesn't like the last part of it because he thinks it locks us in and it also sets precedent that the Friends of Minnetonka Parks are great. It suggests that we need friends, but we need people to take action in things and we need them to suggest and not to dictate is the way he would look at it. He loved the first part of it but he is not crazy about the last part. While ensuring nature space from there, he gets a little concerned because you never know, you lose flexibility then.

Walick added that he reads enhanced, not comprised in the process and that can be interpreted in many ways. Legally that seems like a rocky area to cross. He likes the innovative part but maybe that second half can be changed or softened.

Durbin commented that the bullet they want added to the POST Plan, maybe they could add innovative opportunities for partnerships to fund and restore. It seemed like they are almost rewording that bullet in their own language. He's not sure if we need the word innovative because that is what they do.

Woeste pointed out that she is hearing that some people want to show they are being innovative and are being leaders in all of their decision making. So maybe make that a little broader or perhaps work it into one of the other bullets?

Beyersdorf said you can work it into the bullet point the Friends created, "Create innovative approaches to parks, open spaces and trails" then add to provide a variety of new or improved, etc...from the first bullet.

Woeste asked where she was going to add innovative.

Beyersdorf explained that you can take the beginning of what the Friends of Minnetonka Parks added, "Create innovative approaches to parks, and open spaces and trails" and

then add part of the first bullet and say, “to provide a variety of new or improved active and passive parks and programs that are accessible to all park users.” It just combines the two.

Woeste asked for more feedback.

Durbin said when he was talking about leadership and the signatories, he doesn't think this would be the right section to put that. If we are talking about leadership and what the park board wanted to lead on, he doesn't think this is the spot.

Woeste was happy to hear they aren't thinking staff was way off or that there was a lot of work to do on this. We will bring this back to the technical advisory committee that we meet with internally as we are trying to come up with all of our language for the document. It's still going to be in draft form when you see it in November. You are not going to approve this plan until January next year so she thinks this is a nice way for you to have some good conversations. That way we don't have to do it all at once and also the community has time to give feedback throughout the process and not all at once when we have the final draft form. We will likely look at where we are headed for goals and recommendations in the document at the next meeting and get some feedback on that and then continue to come back with information throughout the process.

## **8. Park Board Member Reports**

Walick said the open house yesterday was awesome and his kids had a great time. They loved the glowing sticks and fireworks.

Semersky said her family had a tremendous time as well. They loved the farmer's market and music concerts. She appreciated that the park and recreation department provides family activities that are free and accessible to everyone. They aren't free for the city and you have to budget for them. They are very expensive but she likes that you sprinkled them in throughout the seasons; some free activities that seem to be really well attended and enjoyed by families.

Gabler was in Chicago at the beginning of the month and saw a skateboard park. It was part of Grant Park and must've been at least a half mile long. It was more than what we could ever do because I don't think we have the turf but it was really cool. He believes the day he was there it was nice out and there must've been 300-400 people using the facilities. He saw bikes, skateboards and scooters. The youngest person he saw might've been five or six years old and then he saw a guy older than him.

Gabler also commented that everyone at the meeting was so smart and he learns something every time he is there. When they have a discussion like that, that is the reason why he wanted to be on the park board. He thought that was awesome and he learned a lot.

Durbin complimented the tennis courts because many of them have been resurfaced and are awesome. When tennis courts are in disrepair nobody uses them but when they are new and shiny, more people use them. One thing that he noticed is that when people aren't

playing tennis, people are using these as mini skateboard parks. They weren't using them when they were torn up but now you see people using them. There is this silent demand that he looks forward to talking more about regarding skateboard parks. He is thinking that if we build it, they will come. People are really innovative and use them for skateboarding, playing fetch with their dogs or doing yoga. He has played tennis on them with his son and they are gorgeous. That was money well spent and hopefully we can keep those in really good shape in coming years.

## 9. Information Items

### Robinwood Park

O'Dea gave the report.

### Oric Avenue Right of Way

O'Dea gave the report.

### Futsal Court

O'Dea gave the report.

### Ridgedale Commons

O'Dea gave the report.

Durbin asked when Ridgedale commons is scheduled to be completed.

O'Dea said we are hoping fall of 2022.

## 10. Upcoming Park Board Agenda Items

O'Dea gave the report.

## 11. Adjournment

Jacobs moved, Durbin seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:14 p.m. All voted "yes." Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kathy Kline*

Kathy Kline  
Recreation Administrative Coordinator