

COON RAPIDS PARK & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES OF
MONDAY, JULY 9, 2012

The regular meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission was called to order on July 9, 2012 at 6:30 P.M. in the Public Works Conference Room.

Members Present: Commissioners Tim Arntson, Mary Lou Hecht, Mike Jacobson, Gen Sand, Ryan McAlpine, Neal Livermore and Steven Head.

Members Absent: None.

Also Present: Gregg Engle, Parks Supervisor, Steve Gatlin, Public Services Director, and Matt Fulton, City Manager.

1. ROLL CALL

Gregg Engle acknowledged roll call.

2. APPROVAL OF THE JULY 9, 2012 AGENDA

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER MCALPINE, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER SAND, TO APPROVE THE JULY 9, 2012 AGENDA AS SUBMITTED. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 2, 2012 MINUTES

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER SAND, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER LIVERMORE, TO APPROVE THE APRIL 2, 2012 MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

APPROVAL OF THE MAY 7, 2012 MINUTES

Chairman Arntson stated that the date on the minutes should be May 7 instead of May 5.

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER SAND, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER LIVERMORE, TO APPROVE THE MAY 7, 2012 MEETING MINUTES WITH THE NOTED CORRECTION. MOTION PASSED 6-0-1. COMMISSIONER MCALPINE ABSTAINED.

APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 4, 2012 MINUTES

Commissioner Livermore requested an addition on page 1: Sunrise Park should be added to the 2013 parks budget.

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER LIVERMORE, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER SAND, TO APPROVE THE JUNE 4, 2012 MEETING MINUTES WITH THE NOTED CORRECTION. MOTION PASSED 4-0-3. COMMISSIONERS MCALPINE, HEAD AND JACOBSON ABSTAINED.

4. PARKS MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Mr. Gatlin stated that there is a task force working on the parks master plan update, which has met with a variety of organizations and held two public house meetings. He provided an update. He stated that they would like to move ahead with the master plan but the Commission is being asked to review it first.

Jason Amberg of Brauer & Associates stated that they are involved in the planning process and will focus on the big picture ideas. He commented that they will discuss neighborhood parks and look for Commission comments. He reviewed that they studied the community and looked at what works and what doesn't currently. They also considered what is important when purchasing a home in the city. He reviewed that some past surveys and recent surveys show satisfaction and value of the park systems by the community. He commented that the larger parks have high use. He noted demographically that there is little housing turnover in Coon Rapids and the community is aging. He reviewed that Brauer & Associates visited all of the parks and ranked the facilities there. He noted that parks which have not had updates were lower ranked. He commented that higher ranked parks were ones that had updates. These also had higher attendance. He commented that residents like having several parks although some are not as accessible. He noted that open space preservation was valued. He relayed that increased opportunities for various age groups was requested. He commented that straightening out turns, benches and water were suggested. He noted that skating opportunities were requested. He commented that a lack of maintenance was noticed which is a direct reflection on budget cuts in recent years. He advised that the dog park has been an issue. He noted that there was a designated need for a recreation department for the community so there is one place to call for information versus calling all of the sports associations. He added that the quality of parks is an increased need but no residents would like to see a decrease in the number of parks. He commented on the environmental park aspects such as wild vegetation was suggested. He stated that nice parks stabilize the real estate values.

Mr. Amberg commented that between 10-12 interviews were held on June 27 with churches, schools, daycare moms club, scouts and more for feedback. He commented that the feedback was similar to open house meetings. He noted that improving trail connections and neighborhood parks was important. He noted that an online survey had about 80 responses. He added that many believed the parks were well maintained, and liked the outdoor rinks in the winter. He reviewed that people did not like or suggested improvements by adding more trashcans in the parks, more trails, more benches, more

water fountains, connect more trails, enforce dogs off leash, more picnic and grilling, more park use at night, adding water amenities and more teen and kids' activities. He commented that Council needs to be aware that there may be a limited willingness to pay for these improvements. He reviewed a list of priorities that people consider when purchasing a home and parks is listed somewhere in the middle. He suggested looking at the impact of recently redeveloped parks on home values to use as a comparison. He commented that the task force, the public at large and the interview groups were asked for input on the idea of sector park improvements. He noted that key select parks would be more important than a neighborhood park. He suggested not letting the neighborhood parks fall behind. He suggested that some parks may be at a stage where they are close to each other and have redundant activities and other parks are more relevant. He suggested focusing on the park connections. He noted that the amount of land is acceptable for athletic facilities. He asked for comments.

Commissioner Livermore asked for Councils input from their meeting which focused on park sectors. Mr. Amberg stated that the meeting with Council was similar to tonight's presentation and focused in park sectors and trails.

Mr. Fulton reviewed that their discussion focused on the economy in general and its impact on choices made by the parks department. He reviewed that there has been a scale back due to finances. He suggested that the master plan be done in an equitable way across the community with a plan in mind for the next 20 years. He commented that the stakeholder groups are supportive of this. He commented that they are looking to determine what level of amenities the neighborhood parks have and what level the sector parks would have. He stated that they cannot have all amenities at each level. He suggested that when people are looking to retire and move from their home they would like to promote a nice neighborhood park as a selling point. Chairman Arntson stated that he was disappointed that only three realtors attended the meeting to give feedback. He reviewed that he was disappointed on the stakeholder meeting in that there were topics that had not come up which would have been beneficial.

Mr. Amberg stated that the stakeholder meetings were open and there was discussion. Chairman Arntson stated that he is not supporting the sector park idea yet although he is supportive of neighborhood parks. He commented that he does not want to be driving the grandkids to a park but would like to use trails to get there. He suggested that there are too many sectors. He asked how the school district areas fit into the plans.

Mr. Fulton stated that people were asked where they are connected and it turns out that they are not connected to the city, or church but are connected to their community. He stated that the city is divided up geographically by the railroad and other ways. He recommended that facilities be divided up in a reasonable sector for that geographic community. He stated that the neighborhood park is still needed as it is a more casual space that is needed for that area. He stated that they are seeking to make a plan for the

next 20 years and then decide how to pay for it. He stated that the Council is supportive of the sector approach and recognizes the value of trails as a connector for the parks.

Chairman Arntson confirmed that the Park Commission would be charged with determining what would go into each of the sector parks. Mr. Amberg stated that they will need to determine what the cost will be before decisions are made.

Chairman Arntson asked if the people who were surveyed had an understanding that maintenance is lacking because staff is at half the level it was at previously. Mr. Amberg stated that there was support for a \$100 to \$200 tax increase to see some changes happen.

Mr. Fulton stated that the maintenance relates to park quality which was determined to be important. He stated that the splash pad was identified as an important feature the community would like. He noted that the community center park would be a first priority to be developed. He commented that there has been support for a basketball concept. He asked why people want to invest in their community, live here and take their kids to school here. He asked that they work to identify what steps need to be taken. Commissioner Sand asked about Sand Creek Park as a priority.

Commissioner McAlpine stated that he hears people in the community who are confused about where to go for activities as there are three baseball organizations, for example. Mr. Fulton stated that they have many recreation programs with hockey, the senior activities and more.

Commissioner McAlpine asked if the sector program can be developed into a recreation program. He added that having a recreation department because then families will know for certain who to contact for information. He asked that this be considered and grown over the next 20 years. Mr. Fulton stated that this Commission should participate in this concept.

Chairman Arntson asked if there was a discussion on the master plan with the school district.

Commissioner McAlpine suggested that the sector concept is a good idea but he supports starting with the community center and then working on the trails. He suggested increased signage. He asked to have a recreation program in the 20-year master plan.

Mr. Fulton stated that Sand Creek and Riverview reconstruction would take three years of finances. He stated that this was a catalyst in creating the discussion on where to go with the city and their parks. He suggested that the Commission present their priority for Sand Creek to the Council so this is communicated.

Commissioner Livermore stated that he is not on board with the sector idea yet. He stated that there needs to be trails connecting to the parks in order for them to be usable. He asked if the sector parks can be called community parks.

Mr. Engle reviewed that the likely sector parks will be Sand Creek, Lions Park, the community center, Riverview and Al Flynn. Commissioner Sand suggested making more use of Crooked Lake so the water is accessible to the community.

Commissioner Jacobson suggested adapting parks to fit the demographics of the neighborhood. He stated that some amenities are redundant within a few blocks of each other. He reviewed that all elementary schools have playgrounds. Mr. Fulton suggested that there should be a sharing of resources between the schools and city.

Commissioner Livermore commented that a different dog park is needed. He suggested moving warming houses. Mr. Amberg stated that they have inventoried all parks are ready to take recommendations.

Mr. Fulton stated that the current dog park should be closed for a number of reasons. He commented that there is a proposed dog park near the compost area which is away from residences. This will be a joint project. Commissioner Livermore suggested Wilderness Park as an alternative area for the dog park. He suggested the old Cook site. He commented that they have talked about using Woodcrest. He stated that the Commission has discussed alternative areas. He suggested Evergreen Park.

Commissioner McAlpine suggested having dog parks in more than one place in the city.

Commissioner Livermore asked if a building needs to be in each community park. Mr. Fulton stated that he has experience with a model where buildings made a stronger connection to the neighborhood by the residents. He noted that this creates additional meeting space which is needed in the community. He commented that they can be used for putting ice skates on, meeting places and for hosting events.

Commissioner Livermore stated that Riverview and the community center are close to each other and a building should not be in each area. He commented that the building at Riverwind should be torn down but a building should be put in there. Mr. Fulton stated that there is a small number of youth using the park. He stated that there is not uniform agreement on how to handle this park. He agreed that Riverwind needs attention. He commented that the concept will be to locate the ice rinks in the area where the community center is.

Commissioner Livermore asked about Sand Creek fitting as a community center. Mr. Fulton stated that Sand Creek is really an athletic facility and not just a park.

Chairman Arntson stated that he is more supportive of the community concepts but does not care for the sector term. Commissioner Sand stated that she remembers when a community hall was used for all activities as a neighborhood center.

Mr. Fulton stated that north of Main Street there are no athletic facilities. He asked if a plan should be to acquire land for recreation purposes or for open space. He stated that this has not been discussed but could be considered for a 20-year plan. He is not aware of the cost of this or what it would be used for. He expressed understanding that homes cannot be built on this area.

Consensus of the Commission was that preserving some land north of Main Street is a good idea.

Mr. Fulton asked what the key elements are for a neighborhood park. Commissioner McAlpine stated that the playground is a priority.

Chairman Arntson stated that Cardinal Woods should not have softball programming as it creates parking issues. Mr. Engle stated that they are taking the softball out of parks like this.

Commissioner Livermore suggested having the street department involved so there is a designated bike lane as well as a trail.

Mr. Amberg asked if shading and seating is needed in neighborhood parks. Commissioner Livermore supported adding trees. He recommended picnic tables.

Consensus of the Commission was to add shade.

Commissioner Livermore suggested that Thrush Park is a good example of a neighborhood park with the connecting trails and amenities. He noted that when parking spaces are added people are drawn from beyond the neighborhood and it is not a neighborhood park.

Mr. Fulton asked if the priority in the future is to replace items at a community park over the needs from a neighborhood park. He stated that understanding this is important to the budget.

Commissioner Livermore stated that Coon Rapids does not offer some of the newer elements like Frisbee and BMX biking. Mr. Fulton stated that they need to get ahead of where things are going so Coon Rapids creates a buzz and there is a buzz about what is happening in the city.

Mr. Amberg reviewed that they discussed small and large neighborhood parks, neighborhood access and parking. He noted that new facilities could be considered like

the Frisbee area and a splash pad. He stated that skater parks would be added in visible areas as the users like to be seen and show off. Mr. Livermore suggested a water feature at the soccer complex as many young kids are there. He suggested that it would draw people to the complex when soccer is not being played. He stated that it is accessible.

Commissioner Jacobson stated that he has seen concepts of the Community Center in the paper and asked about the possibilities for this after November. Mr. Fulton stated that movement needs to be taken on the community center as a means of revitalizing the community. He stated that he does not see this as being tied to the election. He added that the plan needs to be identified, financing secured, the library planning and college development are all aspects.

Mr. Amberg stated that the financing challenge is not unique to the City of Coon Rapids alone.

Mr. Fulton stated that the plan will be enticing to the residents who will be supportive of the idea. He stated that getting people to want to pay for it will be a challenge. He stated that a local sales tax would be an option. Commissioner Jacobson supported this idea as anyone coming into the area will help support the project as opposed to just taxing the residents.

Mr. Fulton stated that another option is to do the project piecemeal which will take decades to accomplish. Commissioner McAlpine stated that the budget has been taken from them three times and he would suggest not doing the project piecemeal.

Mr. Fulton stated that they will need to come up with a great plan and then show residents the benefit to them so they will approve it.

Mr. Amberg asked if there is a consensus. Chairman Arntson stated that they should just go with it.

Commissioner Jacobson stated that he agrees with the strong trail component. He asked if the community center is a part of the plan. Commissioner Livermore stated that the Council has removed the community center from the Park Department and they are not part of the discussion on this.

Mr. Fulton stated that the project is not on the community center but is on parks and trails. He suggested that the discussions should come together.

Commissioner McAlpine asked if adding another water element is important to young families. He asked when the demographics will turn over and when this will be important. Mr. Amberg stated that there is a demographer involved in their planning who will give input overall to the plans.

Commissioner Livermore asked if they are looking for a recommendation from the Commission that they would like two splash pads. Mr. Amberg stated that they will eventually look at specifics.

Commissioner Jacobson stated that they should look at the cost for maintenance and consider this in the planning. Mr. Amberg stated that this is important for new facilities in particular as their costs are not familiar. He stated that they are not necessarily going to add facilities but are replacing things so it is not an additional burden on staff. He noted that on Thursday they are completing some stakeholder meetings. They are working on a draft report. They will have an open house meeting and task force meeting in August and September and a final report in October.

Commissioner Livermore asked if the next Commission meeting on August 6th would be an update with Brauer & Associates. Mr. Amberg stated that is what he has scheduled.

5. DOGS AT SOCCER COMPLEX

Mr. Engle stated that the soccer complex has approached the city asking for help with a situation where dogs from the neighboring apartments are coming to the soccer fields. He stated that signs could be put up around the park. He explained that there is a request to have a complete ban on dogs in the park. He reported that he contacted the police department who has no record of dog bites.

Commissioner McAlpine asked if there are bags to pick up after the dogs. Mr. Engle stated that there are not.

Commissioner Livermore stated that several families bring their dogs with to the soccer games. He stated that the soccer families will be punished because of the actions of the apartment residents which is not good.

Mr. Engle stated that he recommends putting leash signage up and a no dumping sign to see if that helps manage it. He stated that he asked the soccer complex to take a stand and help with this. He stated that the National Little League has banned dogs in their area. Commissioner Jacobson asked about having dogs on the loose in an area where games are taking place and kids are running around.

Chairman Arntson suggested putting up the signs which mentions the ordinance and see if there are police calls as a result before they act further. Mr. Engle stated that the soccer association is sending out letters to their families to help control it.

MOTION BY COMMISSIOENR LIVERMORE, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER HEAD TO PLACE SIGNAGE AT THE SOCCER COMPLEX TO REINFORCE THE DOG POLICY AS IT IS NOW. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Livermore commented that things are moving forward with the hospital. He asked if there is a park swap. Mr. Engle stated that the park is staying and the sign is up.

Commissioner Livermore stated that there is a new trail across the railroad tracks at Sand Creek.

7. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER SAND, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER MCALPINE, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 8:13 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gregg Engle
Parks Supervisor