

Parks and Recreation Commission December 9, 2020 via Webex

The main agenda item was an informational presentation, the annual year in review for the Parks and Recreation department for 2020. This was presented by Parks Manager Jessica Peterson and Assistant Parks Manager Alicia Watts.

Overall, the department had to continually adapt to comply with new restrictions and refinements of government executive orders and CDC guidance, from masks and social distancing to closure of indoor facilities and programs. At the same time, interest and participation in dispersed outdoor activities such as walking and mountain biking in the parks grew substantially.

The number of reservations for indoor park facilities was down, from 244 in 2019 to 32 in 2020. Likewise the facility revenues fell from \$20,585 in 2019 to \$4,525 in 2020. There were 67 permits for weddings on park property in 2020, down from 95 in 2019, and permits for buskers (e.g., along the Lakewalk) were down somewhat from 40 to 35. Permits for activities involving alcohol consumption in parks and park facilities were down from 69 in 2019 to 22 in 2020.

The department had 10,400 participants in 35 different programs. Bayfront Park rink counted 1,193 skaters last winter. The number of Facebook followers grew from 5,300 in last year to 8,100 in 2020. For the most part, scheduled trail work and other park improvements were able to proceed as planned. This was considered especially important for projects funded by federal and other outside grant sources, so that requirements for timely project completion could be met. In the natural resources enhancement category, the department continued to remove invasive species and replace with native plants, and the St Louis River and Hartley Natural Areas were created.

A new City Code section (35-9.5) was adopted which will formalize the process of accepting and maintenance of memorials in in the parks.

In other business, the Commission adopted a new schedule for meetings in 2021 which will reduce the number Commission meetings from twelve to seven (January, March, April, June, August, October and December). The rationale for this was to restrict meetings to those that require Commission action, and thereby make more efficient use of Commissioners' and staff time.

Submitted by Ron Regal, Tom Burns, Lane Palmer

Parks and Recreation Commission, November 18, 2020 via Webex

After Commission president, Amanda Crosby, called the meeting to order and took the roll, Jess Peterson, Parks Manager, introduced Senior Parks Planner, Cliff Knettel. Next Diane Desotelle, Natural Resources Coordinator, outlined the natural resources management plan. Commissioner David Demmer stressed the importance for a city like Duluth with so much green space to have such a central plan. Jess Peterson asked how the Coordinator's position is funded, and Desotelle indicated that there were two sources of funding within the city's budgeting structure: the Parks Fund and the Facilities Management Division.

Next up, Jess again took the floor and presented an update on Lincoln Park and the status of Lincoln Park Drive, which the Commission had previously voted to remove in favor of having a trial only. It turns out that the National Parks Service challenged the city to come up with a plan that would keep the road in place. Commissioner Jill Joyce asked whether the costs of various suggestions were being included in the analysis process. Jess replied that making needed repairs would extend the road's lifespan.

The final item fell under "Old Business," as all would agree. Jim Filby-Williams, Director, presented an informational report on "Golf Budgeting and the Planning Timeline." President Crosby questioned why minimal maintenance at Lester would be kept as an option, since it was potentially to close regardless. Commissioner Jenny Peterson asked for an explanation as to the source of funding for Duluth Public Golf. Jess responded that the General Fund, hoping for future profits, had previously accepted the debt, but that those profits had never materialized. Jim Filby-Williams made clear that the city's cumulative subsidies to golf now approached \$3 million dollars, and that this commitment had reduced the funds available for other much needed projects such as city streets and utilities. He added that after two decades of support the city has suffered significant losses.

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.

Submitted by Ron Regal, Tom Burns, Lane Palmer

Duluth Parks and Recreation Meeting, October 14, 2020

Notes below are largely quoting from parts of Parks Department minutes of the meeting:

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/95/20201119-95-12282.pdf>

Buildings and Facilities Update. Presented by Erik Birkeland, Property and Facilities Manager:

This winter only three buildings will be open: Morgan Park Community Center, Washington Center Gymnasium, and Portman Community Center as posted at

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/10396/letter-to-parks-building-users.pdf>

Commissioner Jenny Peterson questioned how the decision came about for the three facilities that will remain open. Erik Birkeland said that the volume of use played a key factor. Portman has hockey in the basement and hosts the opportunity for rentals. Washington Center has the gym. Parks and Recreation Manager Jessica Peterson mentioned that Morgan Park and Portman have serviced the Senior Program in the past in collaboration with AEOA, which provided meal service. Commissioner Peterson indicated she understands the rationales but wondered why we couldn't have buildings in lower income areas. Jess Peterson mentioned that Grant Recreation Center had a tenant last year, but the tenant chose not to continue. Jim Filby Williams clarified that the public has been notified that Grant Recreation building will be demolished. Commissioner Britt Rohrbaugh stated that she feels like she is being punched in the gut. She said that the Grant to no longer be available. Commissioner Rohrbaugh said she has attended many events at Grant Recreation Center. Commissioner Demmer indicated he is still confused why some structures are being closed.

According to Erik Birkeland, special requests are reviewed on a weekly basis. Commissioner Peterson said that the Park Point Community Club is worried that once winterized, the Park Point Center will not be revived. Erik Birkeland indicated staff routinely check buildings to make sure the furnaces are still running and that water is shut-off. Jim Filby Williams indicated that due to the pandemic a large number of workers were laid off, limiting ability to keep the buildings clean and sanitized. The city has called people back to work, but many had chosen other jobs due to their immediate needs. There are many unfilled positions. Commissioner Natalie Chin asked how the reservation system works and if it is a first come first serve basis. Jessica Peterson said reservations are on a first come first serve basis and that the Parks and Recreation Department will work with the community clubs to make sure they have a space to meet and work with the general public as well. In the event of high demand with not enough buildings, Parks and Recreation would discuss this with the city's Property and Facilities Department.

Submitted by Ron Regal, Lane Palmer, Tom Burns

Duluth Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting, September 9, 2020

The Commission meeting was held on Webex; this report is primarily excerpted from Commission meeting minutes.

Diane Desotelle, Natural Resources Coordinator presented information on the annual city bow hunt. Commissioner David Demmer questioned if there is a long-term plan, or target, for the decline in the deer harvests. Phil Lockett, president of the Arrowhead Bowhunters Alliance, which administers the hunt, indicated there isn't an actual number, they focus on citizen complaints, number of dead deer on the roads, and focus on the hot spots to manage the numbers. Demmer indicated he supports this type of active management and would like to see continued conversations.

Megan Lidd, Provisional Assistant Manager reported on fall programming for the parks. Commissioner Jenny Peterson questioned how this year compares to last year in regard to participant numbers. Lidd indicated the numbers scaled back this spring without programs but were able to build up over the summer. She shared that limited staffing has impacted the ability to provide the additional programming. Commissioner Jill Joyce shared the positive feedback from the public regarding the Easter Egg Hunt in the spring.

Parks Manager Jess Peterson led a discussion of a proposed Memorial Program to be adopted in Chapter 35 of city ordinances. The new ordinance would clarify city policy and practice regarding public donations, for example park benches, to be designated as memorials. After discussion on various specific items, the Commission voted to table action on the draft ordinance until the October meeting.

Submitted by
Lane Palmer, Ron Regal, Tom Burns

Duluth Parks and Recreation Meeting on August 18, 2020

Taken largely quoting from parts of Parks Department minutes of the meeting:.

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/95/20200910-95-12120.pdf>

Commissioner & Liaison Reports:

Commissioner Jill Joyce questioned if the closure of Lincoln Park Drive could be permanent. She indicated homelessness continues to be an issue at Lincoln Park and thanked Parks and Recreation staff for taking quick action on the reports

COVID-19 Parks and Recreation Updates (Informational) Jessica Peterson , Parks and Recreation Manager:

Commissioner David Demmer questioned if there is a vegetation plan for our open spaces. Jessica Peterson indicated our Natural Resources Coordinator is working on hiring a consultant on our natural resources plan. She shared that Park Maintenance is working on an internal management document.

Public Golf Committee (Informational) Jessica Peterson , Manager:

Jessica Peterson questioned if there could be more details of the exclusive agreement with a developer that will be going to City Council. She indicated that this doesn't mean this developer will be awarded, just that this allows the City to continue conversations with one developer. The award would be an additional step for City Council to review. She questioned how the Parks and Recreation Commission will be involved with this process.

Jessica Peterson indicated many wanted to speak tonight and are having trouble getting on. She is playing golf at Enger weekly. Concerns are the conditions; many people are choosing to golf elsewhere. Commissioner Barb Darland plays weekly at Enger and is considering moving league to another course. She requested Parks and Recreation to offer a reduced rate for the middle 9. Commissioner David Demmer questioned the process of how decisions are made for the management of the courses. He questioned who decides on the replacement of irrigation or roping off the middle 9. Jessica Peterson indicated she would need to review this documentation to provide information and said that the management company placed the rope closure.

Other Topics:

Commissioner David Demmer questioned if there would be changes to the Mini Master Plan for Lincoln Park. Jessica Peterson indicated this is a concept plan and has not made it to design. She shared that the City was contacted by the National Park Service to align more closely with the original park concept. Therefore the City has reengaged with LHB.

Ron Regal
Lane Palmer
Tom Burns

Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting, July 8, 2020

Several topics of interest to the Commission were discussed at the July meeting: (1) the Memorial Bench Program; (2) COVID-19 procedures being implemented within the governor's evolving policies and the status of the Department's service and programming; and (3) the need to create a Spirit Mountain Task Force at the request of the mayor's office and the City Council.

Cheryl Skafte, Operations Coordinator, led off discussion of the Memorial Bench Program assisted by Jess Peterson, Manager. As a part of the Memorial Bench Program the Department has been interviewing people familiar with the foundation of various parks in order to better understand how that process has evolved and to ascertain whether those instrumental in their creation have been appropriately remembered with a bench in the park. Peterson noted that at present the City Code does not specifically mention the Bench Project, and she led a discussion as to whether it should be and, if so, where in the Code a statement might fit. The Commissioners supported some such inclusion, probably by adding a clause to Chapter 35.9 of the Code or by adding a new section. The Commission and Peterson agreed to work on language that could provide support within the Code for the continued evolution of the program, allowing for it to grow or shrink as the needs and available resources change.

Next, Jess Peterson gave an update on various aspects of the Department and its programs. Most importantly was news that all 4 of those laid off from Parks Maintenance had been rehired or had found new jobs. In addition, one technician had been hired in small engine repair. These slight improvements in staffing have already made it possible to (1) increase trash collection, (2) increase mowing, (3) evaluate athletic facilities in order to determine what needs can be remedied in what remains of the peak season within current staffing and budgetary constraints. Permits and Reservations at some parks opened as of July 10. The Parks Department is doing its best to develop plans to support sports and leagues within the governor's Pandemic operation Plan [PoP], but with a smaller than normal staff not all sports and leagues can expect to be supported. Summer Camps have reopened at Hartley Nature Center and Chester Bowl. The Park Point Beach House is now open from noon to 5pm, July 10 through Labor Day Weekend. Lake Superior Zoo has reopened its indoor exhibits. Duluth Indian Point Campground has reopened with limited site capacity within the PoP.

Jess Peterson and Jim Filby-Williams, Public Administration Director, next requested that the Commission recommend to the Council City the creation of a Spirit Mountain Task Force. They anticipate that the Task Force will start meeting soon and meet about once every other week and that furthermore, the Task Force would complete its charge within a short duration. The Task Force will require that at least one member of the Commission be among its members. Commissioner Noah Kramer volunteered.

There followed considerable discussion as to how the City could justify establishing a new Task Force when the

Duluth Public Golf Committee has yet to meet and that all its meetings have been "cancelled until further notice." Jess and Jim pointed out that the Golf Committee was actually a sub-committee of the Commission and that existing staffing could not spare the people and funding to offer support at this time; moreover, that previously a Task Force on Public Golf had been so supported and had issued its report to Council. Upon further questioning from various commissioners, Peterson noted that the Department did not prioritize the Spirit Mountain Task Force, but rather the mayor's office and Council had done so. There was no further discussion on this issue, but the commissioners subsequently agreed to add as an agenda item for their August meeting a discussion as to whether to recommend to the Council that it extends the deadline for a decision on Duluth Public Golf courses for one year.

Submitted by Thomas Burns, Lane Palmer, Ron Regal

Duluth Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting, May 13, 2020

This Commission meeting was held on WEBEX.

The Parks and Recreation Commission welcomed Barb Darlane, the new Commissioner for District 5.

The main order of business was a presentation by Jessica Peterson and Jim Filby Williams, who provided updates on adjusted operations due to COVID-19. In general, the changes were aligned with the Governor's most recent Stay Safe order, but constrained by reductions to the park maintenance workforce. The full text of recent changes is available at:

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/WebSubscriptions/93/20200611-93-5947.pdf>

Highlights include permits and reservations for activities for up to 25 people at select parks locations, selectively opening up some park buildings for public programming, opening up playgrounds, and re-opening closed sections of Skyline Parkway for motor vehicles.

Submitted by Lane Palmer

Duluth Parks and Recreation Meeting: March 11, 2020

Cheryl Skafte noted that Citizen Pruning and Tree Health Monitoring Training will be offered on Friday March 20, 5-7 pm and Saturday March 21, 9:00-noon. See link at <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/volunteer/volunteer-calendar/>. She also presented on the reLEAF Duluth Program which engages citizens in Duluth's community forest (<https://duluthmn.gov/parks/volunteer/releaf-duluth/>) and Keep Duluth Clean Program (www.KeepDuluthClean.org live link after March 15.)

Joan Christenson, City Attorney, presented on the Open Meeting Law. Aspects of her interpretations were narrower than what this reporter would have expected including restrictions on certain emails between commissioners.

In the continued saga, the reconstituted Public Golf Committee meets Tuesday March 17 at 5 pm in the Parks Office. See current plans at <https://duluthmn.gov/media/8050/proposed-changes-to-ownership-and-use-of-public-green-space-in-the-lester-park-and-enger-park-areas.pdf>

Matt Andrews presented the revised Chester Bowl Shared Use Cross-Country Ski Trail. See <https://duluthmn.gov/media/9386/chester-shared-use-trail-03112020-parks-commission.pdf>. "Parks and Recreation staff recommendation: Align the Chester ski trails with all other City-groomed trails by designating the cross-country ski trails as single use only during grooming season, thereby disallowing shared use, including canine use, during the winter season to preserve the quality, safety, and experience of cross-country skiing on the cross-country ski trails within Chester Park." The change from the previous recommendation is that this plan does not include building a separate winter hiking trail. Many public comments were heard including walkers advocating for a shared use trail and skiers arguing for safer skiing only trail use. Commissioners gave detailed comments on how they chose to vote on the recommendation. The recommendation to allow skiing only on the Chester Park Ski Trail passed with only one vote against the proposal. A reason given by more than one commissioner was the issue of safety.

Submitted by Ron Regal, Lane Palmer, Tom Burns

Parks and Recreation Commission: February 12, 2020

The meeting was primarily devoted to presenting updates to the members of the Commission with but one item requiring action, that of an easement dedication to amend the Brighton Beach mini-master plan already approved by the City Council.

Mike Reuter, COGGS, led off with an informational report on “Snow Dog Grooming at Hartley.” No, a “snow dog” is not a dog that loves snow, but rather it is a \$3800 machine weighing 350 lbs. and designed exclusively for grooming ski trails. The necessary funds for the purchases were donated by users of the trails; first at Hartley, and most recently at Lester. There are several advantages to using snowdogs rather than snowmobiles dragging weighted sleds: snowdogs can groom tighter curves, they offer better compacting, and they are much easier to use than snowmobiles. The latter advantage is underscored by the fact that most of volunteers doing the grooming do not have snowmobile skills. The snowdogs groom a 32” wide strip. Last season the volunteers logged over 2700 hours grooming city ski trails. COGGS plans to move beyond grooming trails, and hopes to create an all-weather loop at several parks, potentially first at Central Park below Enger. Another of COGGS goals, a skills park has just been approved by the City and preliminary work has begun for it at Keene Creek. Public meetings will be announced soon.

Next Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator, presented an informational update on “Signs and Wayfinding.” The Final Design Plan that was approved in March 2017 was a basic design package and did not provide sufficient detail to move into production. Fabrication and Installation Technical Specifications were created in June 2019, and in November the first signs started to appear. The Department has made substantial progress and has issued a 2020 Signage Implementation Plan for 19 Project Locations (11 Wayfinding and 8 at Park Entrances). The wayfinding signs include aids for mapping with GPS. Detailed data on remote trails will be available only to rescue personnel and includes data on accessibility for emergency vehicles.

The next item of business was a request for action on a Brighton Beach Trail Easement Dedication. This was necessary because the mini-masterplan previously approved by Council needs to be modified in the area of northernmost “Out lot” A, where the stone fireplace and small stone structure are presently located. This change accommodates the most recent wave action analysis. The motion passed with but one opposed. The matter will now go back to Council.

Finally, Matt Andrews offered an update (for future action) on the Upper Chester Bowl Trails, highlighting plans for 2020. The goals are to improve the quality of existing trails, rehabilitate trails posing erosion concerns, consolidate and improve public entry points, formalize some previously unsanctioned trails (user “pathways”), obliterate and re-vegetate unnecessary trail segments, and improve the connectivity of the trail system with an additional pedestrian bridge. When completed there will be three different types of signs at Chester Bowl: those at park entrances, trail markers, and those with maps at entrance point trails.

The next meeting of the Commission is on Wednesday, March 11.

Submitted by Thomas Burns, Lane Palmer, Ronald Regal

Parks and Recreation Commission, January 8, 2020

The meeting was primarily informational with only one action item coming before the commission for a vote -- the creation of a Golf Sub-Committee of the Commission's Committee on Public Golf.

Leading off the evening, Chris Severson, Permits Coordinator, reported on the permitting and reservations for 2019 along with a forecast for 2020. In 2019 permits were issued for numerous park events falling into the following categories: special events, private events, wedding permits, alcohol consumption permits, busker permits and commercial operator permits. Facility reservations were issued for the following community centers: Evergreen, Lafayette, Morgan Park, Piedmont, and Portman. Severson presented detailed statistical information on all aspects of permits and reservations including the revenues when generated. In general revenues are derived from the rental of built facilities at parks and community centers. In addition to these were revenues from new built elements such as rentals of the canoe/kayak racks at the three present locations: Brighton Beach, Chambers Grove, and Park Point.

Next, Lisa Luokkala reported on the Metro Land Acquisition of 44 acres of undeveloped forest land along Skyline Parkway in the Merritt Creek watershed. This addition to Duluth's protected lands was the result of a Conservation Partners Legacy Grant that will ensure an existing wildlife habitat corridor between Piedmont, Brewer, and state lands. It also provides for bow hunting and the removal of informal social trails. Similar grants have previously assisted projects along the St. Louis River Corridor (2016), Hartley Park (2017/18) and most recently Amity and Kingsbury Creeks (2019).

Jim Filby Williams then presented the Commissioners with a summary of the Parks and Trails Capital Projects and Funding Sources for 2020. The total parks and trails funding sources for 2020 is \$16,953,652, primarily derived from the ½ and ½ Tax, grants (mainly from the state) and donations, federal grants, and the Parks Fund. These funds will be used to address restoration and park development throughout the city, including at the Zoo, Spirit Landing, Lincoln Park, the Wade/Wheeler Ball Field, as well as at various neighborhood parks and other natural resources. The budget will also provide funds for the improvement and maintenance of trails throughout the system, both paved (crushed stone) and natural surface trails. Note that this specifically does not include the funds expected to be available in 2020 for Phase III of the Lakewalk Storm Recovery – Canal Park, which is anticipated to cost up to \$20 million and involve the purchase and placement of 70 thousand tons of cut stones, many of which weigh up to 10 tons each. All this will require careful coordination with the affected community groups and patience from Duluth's citizenry and visitors.

Finally, Jessica Peterson, Parks and Recreation Manager, presented a formal request that the Commission create a sub-committee of its Public Golf Committee, which itself had been previously approved by Council. Peterson assured the Commission that this action was being taken in accordance with the Commission's by-laws, which stipulated that the Parks and Recreation Commission "may periodically reassess the composition, charge and relevance of the Public Golf Committee" and therefore this subcommittee. The vote for approval was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by Thomas S. Burns, Lane Palmer, Rona

Duluth Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting, December 11, 2019

Diane Desotelle, Natural Resources Coordinator gave an informational presentation about the nomination of the proposed St Louis River Natural Area.

The purpose of the Duluth Natural Areas Program is to designate certain lands with environmental value as permanently protected natural places. The idea is to preserve Duluth's natural heritage for the public good by ensuring the city can better manage Duluth's forests, streams, and wetlands. Natural Area designation currently exists for Magney-Snively forest and is concurrently also being considered within Hartley Park.

The proposed St Louis River Natural Area consists of 9 specific project areas along the St. Louis River estuary, from Grassy Point to Chambers Grove in Fond du Lac. The City, in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust, is in the process of collecting plant community and bird survey data and reviewing parcels to evaluate lands that meet the intention of the natural areas program. The adoption process for the management plan, a requirement to finalize the nomination, is as follows:

- Parks and Recreation Commission Action – January 2020
- Planning Commission Action – January 2020
- City Council Action – March 2020

Further details on the Duluth Natural Areas Program and the St Louis River Natural Area nomination may be found at: <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/natural-resources/dnap/>

In other actions, a proposed schedule of Commission meetings for 2020 was adopted. It will involve holding one of the Commission meetings in Morgan Park and one in the Lester Park neighborhood.

Director Jessica Peterson also reviewed a proposal for the membership, mission and activities of a new Golf Subcommittee of the Commission. After much discussion and consideration of significant amendments to the proposal, action on this item was tabled.

Submitted by, Thomas Burns, Lane Palmer, Ronald Regal

Parks and Recreation Commission, November 13, 2019

The commissioners approved the minutes of the October meeting without modification. These minutes will be soon be available on the Commission Website. <http://duluthmn.gov/boards-Commissions/parks-Recreation-Commission/>.

Commission president, Amanda Crosby, introduced Noah Cramer, the newest member of the Commission.

The Commission then took up the request for action from the Department of Parks and Recreation, as presented for the Department by Lisa Luokkala, concerning the Western Waterfront Trail, henceforth named the Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail (pronounced, waa-bah-zhay-kin-nun). Ricky DeFoe, an elder of the Fond du Lac Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa, explained the naming process which pays tribute to the Marten Clan who settled here and began construction of the first system of trails and portages. The plan being presented to the Commission for its recommendation before proceeding to the City Council is the result of over three years of planning and consultation with stake holders and design experts and represents a balance of indigenous culture, civic needs for recreation, historic heritage, and the natural environment. The plan incorporates the

design of the historic and scenic Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad and preserves the full length of its route. The current 3.3-mile path will ultimately measure 10 miles in length and run roughly parallel to the railroad. In one section the distance of separation will be quite close, as little as 4.5 feet, but the trains will yield right-of-way to pedestrians and be limited to 10mph. Equestrians and motorized vehicles will not be allowed on the trail. The path will be built over the course of the next decade, and it will include a section passing through the lands of the former US Steel plant, now listed as a toxic chemical site. When complete the trail will link Jay Cooke SP and the Gitchi-Gami Trail along the north shore. Negotiations between the City, US Steel, and the EPA are moving ahead. Citizen comment was universally enthusiastic in its support. The representative from the railroad underscored that the railroad was now poised to take advantage of its newly established security to raise funds in order to make needed repairs and begin many improvements, including paying much greater attention to ADA compliance. The Commission voted unanimously in favor of passing the plan along to the City Council.

Next, Jessica Peterson, Manager, Parks and Recreation, then gave an **Update on Duluth Public Golf**. The present plan has been developed over the course of many meetings with stake holders, especially the Friends of Duluth Public Golf, and was drafted only after the City Council had given its approval to key aspects. Succinctly, the city's two golf courses are in extremely poor shape, needing over \$4 million dollars in repairs and renovations at the Enger course alone, where the club house needs emergency repair merely to open for the 2020 season and where 80% of the sprinkler heads are irreparable because at their age replacement parts do not exist. The City plan, as it now rests, proposes as a goal the retention of 27 holes of golf at Enger and 18 at Lester Park. The Lake 9 course at Lester alone would cease to exist. The fundamental question boils down to money. How can the City raise the necessary funds within a short enough time frame to continue operations while making crucial repairs and renovations to essential infrastructure at both courses?

The plan is to sell a 10-acre parcel of park land at Enger, mainly in the area of the current parking lot, and 50 acres of undeveloped land at Lester. The Council has approved rezoning these parcels: those at Enger to R.2 (Residential – Urban) and at Lester to R.R.1 – MU – N (Mixed Use Neighborhood) and P.1(Park and Open Space). In exchange the City will seek to acquire 450 acres of unprotected tax-forfeited land adjacent to Lester Park and formally

designate it as protected park land. Requests for Ideas [RFIs] and Requests for Proposals [RFPs] have gone out. The RFPs went out to housing developers; the RFIs to a wider audience. Responses to the RFPs are due on the 20th of November. The resulting proposals will then be reviewed by a Citizen Review Panel comprised of 5 members to include representatives from various stake holder groups and the prior advisory committee. Any sale of public park land always requires a super majority vote of approval by the City Council, something not easily obtained. The Council will have to vote accordingly should the issue of sale be formally requested in this case of public golf. The City will also have to hire a new management company to oversee the public golf courses.

The commissioners, the citizens, and members of the Parks and Recreation staff exchanged ideas in a spirited and constructive manner, primarily over whether alternative income streams could be found that would not require the sale of public park land, and whether a master plan should be initiated immediately, Jim Filby- Williams, Director of Public Administration, did not believe that such funding could be found in the scale necessary, especially given the desperate condition of our golf courses and the cost of even basic repairs. He also noted that too many unknowns still exist to warrant the diversion of our limited funds and staff to produce a meaningful master or mini-master plan at this time.

The motion to adjourn was approved unanimously.

Submitted by, Thomas Burns, Lane Palmer, Ronald Regal

Parks and Recreation Commission, September 11, 2019

Erik Simonson, Chief Executive Officer, presented the Lake Superior Zoo Master Plan for information study. A News Tribune summary can be seen at <http://www.duluthnewstribune.com/business/2297487-Duluth-Zoo-unveils-40-million-master-plan>. Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator, presented the proposed plan for the current Chester Parks Shared Use Ski Trail for action by the Commission. Parks finds that a shared pedestrian and ski trail is not working, with degradation of the ski trails being a primary issue, and recommended building a separate pedestrian trail as in other parks at a cost of around \$15,000 with sufficient volunteer efforts. Nowhere else in the state are there any shared use trails requiring a Minnesota cross-country ski pass. Parks would not continue to request state funding for grooming of these trails given the degraded condition of the ski trail. Extensive public comments were widely divergent. A recurrent comment by some commissioners and the audience was skepticism that walkers would stay off a groomed trail when the walking trail is more difficult. Parks and Rec Manager Jessica Peterson said that social enforcement is working in other parks areas with separate ski and pedestrian paths. The motion to construct a separate pedestrian walking path received a tie 4-4 vote which was not sufficient to go forward with the recommendation.

Lisa Luokkala presented the Western Waterfront Trail Mini-Master Plan for future action. This was the seventh time this topic has been presented to the commission, but parts of the plan have changed overtime. In particular, there will be a Rails and Trails theme in concert with the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad rather than a required shortening of the rail line to accommodate the trail. See the News Tribune article <https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/news/government-and-politics/4612982-City-recommends-western-Duluth-rail-line-be-preserved>. The next time the trail plan is on the agenda, the commission will be voting on the proposal.

Submitted by Ron Regal

Parks and Recreation Meeting, August 14, 2019

Jessica Peterson, Manager, introduced Chris Severson, the new Parks Permit Coordinator. This was followed by three important presentations that will come before the Commission for action and a vote at the fall meetings (two on 11 September and one on 9 October) with but two weeks for public comment prior to each.

Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator, presented the current “Chester Park Shared Use Ski Trail Recommendation” calling for an abandonment of the shared-use the trail, currently used by both pedestrians and Nordic skiers, and the building of a separate pedestrian only trail while maintaining the existing trail for the exclusive use by skiers. The need for a new pedestrian-only trail follows several months of study concerning the usage and compliance levels of the existing shared trail. The new pedestrian-only trail would require building about 2700 feet of new trail, but most of it would use existing footpaths, of which there are a great many. Citizen comments reflected a general support for the continuance of the shared-trail concept. Commissioner Demmer pointed out that the principal non-compliance issue related to hikers with unleashed dogs, in clear violation of city ordinance. Jessica Peterson pointed out that the problem of dogs off leash was a contentious issue and serious problem in all city parks. The department will come before the Commission on **11 September** requesting a vote on its recommendation. **There is now a two-week period for further citizen comment.**

Next, Jim Shoberg, Senior Parks Planner, assisted by Jennifer Moses gave a short review of the Campus Connector Trail Mini-Master Plan. In general this trail will ultimately connect various educational institutions throughout the city. When completed the trail will also offer a vertical integration (up and downhill towards the Lake) for use by pedestrians and non-motorized transportation such as bicycles.

The trail will begin in close proximity to the Lowell Elementary School, connect the College of Saint Scholastica, UMD, and end at the Lakewalk at 32d avenue East. No cost projections have been developed, but many sections of this trail already exist. No funds are presently available and none are expected for at least eight years. Citizen comments were generally favorable, but issues of privacy and security remain to be explored fully. The department will come before the Commission on **11 September** requesting a vote. **There is now a two-week period for further citizen comment.**

Finally, Jessica Peterson and Lisa Luokkala presented an update on the “Western Waterfront Trail Extension” for future action. The recommendation is for a “Trail with Rail Alignment.” This dual and parallel separation of a traditional trail and the continued existence of the historic tourist train route is new and represents a guarded solution for the difficult trail sections 1 and 5. Outside experts continue their work. The department is “cautiously optimistic” that solutions can be found in each case. Citizen comment noted that, if the causeway is eliminated, no study has been made as to the impact this would have upon existing plants and animals that live in the areas long protected from wave action by the causeway. In general, comments from both commissioners and the citizenry were highly supportive. The department will come before the Commission on **11 September** with the presentation of a full draft. That meeting will be followed by a two-week period for public comment. **The department plans to request action from the Commission at its meeting on 9 October 2019.**

Submitted by Tom Burns, Lane Palmer and Ron Regal

Duluth Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, July 10, 2019

The plan revision for Brighton Beach discussed at the June meeting was brought up for a vote. A commissioner raised concerns that the setback of facilities from the lakeshore may not be enough to avoid future damage. City staff clarified that the setback line represented 10 vertical feet elevation above the mean lake level, and was considered adequate damage protection. After some further discussion, the plan was approved 6-1 and sent to the city council for action at their August meeting.

An update was provided on the plan for extension of the Western Waterfront Trail from Munger Landing to Fond du Lac. The focus was on feasibility for trail construction on several segments of the trail. BNSF railroad right-of-way issues exist for Segment 1, from Spring Street to Munger Landing. Segment 3, which involves an EPA superfund site, will require funds from EPA and US Steel. Segment 5, which includes shoreline along Mud Lake, involves decisions on the retention/removal of a causeway used by the excursion railroad (LS&MR). Public comment mainly favored retention of the causeway for railroad use, with some suggestion that a parallel trail was feasible. Further discussion of the plan update is scheduled for the August Commission meeting.

More detail on the location of the Segments is available from the 2017 WWF Plan at:

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/7325/final-draft-public-meeting-2-presentation-61317.pdf>

Submitted by Lane Palmer

Duluth Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, June 12, 2019

Parks and Recreation staff presented a draft revision to the plan for Brighton Beach which focused on extension of the Lakewalk through the park, connecting to the Scenic Drive, and a significant relocation of the existing road through the park. The general plan is to move the road and other infrastructure inland, including the new path, in light of recent and periodic damage from high storm waves. The road would also become one-way, with designated parking and new intersections with the Scenic Drive. The result would be more usable green space and reducing conflicts among cars, bikes, and walkers, as well as reducing future storm damage.

Grant funds have already been secured for the Lakewalk extension, and the proposal is to begin construction in the summer of 2020. However, the road relocation has yet to be funded. Since the Lakewalk extension will be located partially on the existing roadway, road access will be closed off or restricted at times until the new road is funded and built. Staff acknowledged that the sequencing of the Lakewalk project ahead of the road project was not ideal, but apparently the trail funds need to be spent soon.

Further information about this project is available at: <https://duluthmn.gov/parks/parks-planning/progress-in-the-park/brighton-beach/>

Submitted by Lane Palmer

Parks and Recreation Commission, May 8, 2019

Two informational presentations opened the meeting. Cheryl Skafte, Volunteer Coordinator, led off with a discussion of the "Poop Fairy Campaign," which is trying to lend a bit of humor to the terribly important problem of pet waste in our public areas. According to the Veterinary Medical Association there are roughly 19,350 dogs in the Duluth area, generating 4 million pounds of feces being "dumped" in yards and public areas, mostly in the later. The Poop Fairy Campaign's post on Facebook reached nearly 48,000 people with 236 likes and 317 shares, plus numerous posts decrying the problems in their neighborhoods. Dog wastes hold dangerous bacteria, viruses and parasites. These effects are much more long lasting with canine feces than any other household pet.

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/featured/duluth-takes-foul-issue-humor-and/whimsy>

Over 25 "No such thing as a Poop Fairy" signs have already been installed around the city and more are on the way.

Next, Cheryl Podtburg, YMCA Aquatic Safety Coordinator, and Jesse Schomberg from MN Sea Grant gave an overview of where Duluth stands on "Waterfront and Beach Safety." Sea Grant's mission is to educate the public on the risks Lake Superior can pose for swimmers, especially rip currents and what to do if trapped in one. Posters along Park Point, in the Maritime Museum and a billboard lit at night along I-35, have been quite successful in educating the public as to these issues. Ocean waves on average come every 10 seconds; on Lake Superior every 3. In 2019, there will be expanded lifeguard hours and Red Flag services.

Next the meeting shifted to two matters coming before the commissioners for "Action".(1) Vacating a section of Lincoln Park Drive from 6th St down to 3rd, permanently closing this section of the street to all motorized vehicles, in order to enhance and connect the southernmost section of Lincoln Park to the rest of the park. The plan is already well advanced with detailed analyses, and the funding is in place. The City Council approved a mini- master plan in February 16. The newly improved section of Lincoln Park is expected to be operational by the end of the 2020 construction season. The main entrance to this section will be off 25th Avenue West. There will no longer be an entrance from 3rd Street. Once opened this section of Lincoln Park will become the most accessible Park in the city (totally ADA compliant, except for one short strip along one trail). Discussion followed led by Lisa Luokkala, Stewardship Assistant Manager. The Commission voted unanimously to approve.

Finally, (2) the meeting turned its attention to a "Recommendation for Duluth Golf, a plan for the protection and use of Green Space." Jim Filby-Williams, Director of Public Administration, presented the city's request for ACTION. Two years ago the Planning Commission recommended that the entire Lester Park Golf Course be sold to private ownership for development. Parks and Recreation Commissioners and the golfing community raised numerous concerns with this proposal to sell parkland and to eliminate Lester Park Golf entirely. Friends of Duluth Public Golf arose in response and is now a 501(c)3, non-profit entity. The City, working with the Friends and other stakeholders, has abandoned selling the entire Lester Park parcel and now proposes (1) to place 50 acres into private hands with the goal of addressing some of Duluth's critical housing needs; (2) offer a firm commitment to 250 acres of the existing Lester Park Golf Course; (3) acquire 450 acres of tax- forfeit property adjacent to the Park. Not

including the tax-forfeit property, this proposal retains 81 percent of the existing golf course, while selling only the Lake 9 holes. The remaining 18 holes at Lester are to be repaired and upgraded. Although most of the discussion centered on the Lester Golf Course, Enger Golf Course was mentioned. There the plan is to reconfigure 16 acres of the driving range to improve Skyline Drive and to provide 10 acres for multi-family housing.

Filby-Williams made it clear to the commissioners and the citizenry in attendance that he was requesting a vote of support for moving forward with planning, specifically he was requesting approval to develop and submit a RFP, Request for Proposal. He also pointed out that legally the City did not have to seek the advice of the Parks and Recreation Commission (P&R), only Planning and the Council, but that it was doing so because of the role of P&R in coordinating citizen involvement to date. If approved as a recommendation to proceed to the next step, the city hoped to return to P&R in July or August of this year with a detailed proposal with time and cost estimates. Commissioner Isernhagen concluded the discussion among the commissioners urging that the city should conduct a full master plan and explore both properties in question for fuller recreational use, especially during our inclement weather months. In the public comment period, several citizens expressed concern that any parkland be sold for any reason. The Commission voted 6 to 2 in favor of approval to move forward; Commissioners Breeuwer and Edmondson voted in dissent. Clearly, discussion will continue.

Submitted by Tom Burns, Lane Palmer, and Ron Regal

Duluth Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting of March 13, 2019

This meeting was full of topics, presentations, and public comment. Agenda item presentations on the Zoo Master Plan Schedule Update and the Dog Education Campaign were delayed until later dates. Gini Breidenbach of the Minnesota Land Trust presented on Nominating the St. Louis River Corridor to the Duluth Natural Area Program. Extensive information on natural attributes of the affected area included for example many birds species as determined by contracted bird sampling. The 3/7/2019 draft is at <http://duluthmn.gov/media/548425/final-draft-version-for-comission-dwp-trail-technical-use-and-standard.pdf>.

Jim Shoberg presented the DWP Trail System Technical Standards & Trail Use Recommendations. The presentation and handout were extensive, covering multiple use issues combining hiking, mountain biking, snowmobile use and equestrian use. The report includes many regulations such as speed limits and picking up horse manure for which the enforcement will be self-regulation. More information is contained in the February 2019 draft at http://www.duluthmn.gov/media/548509/slrna_nomination_only_draft_3-7-2019.pdf.

Public comment was heard on the Findings of the Golf Citizen Advisory Committee which had also been presented at the City Council Committee of the Whole Meeting on Monday, March 11th. This presentation can be viewed at <http://www.duluthmn.gov/media/548524/march-11-committee-of-the-whole-final.pdf>. The entire document can be seen at <http://www.duluthmn.gov/media/548523/golf-study-citizen-advisory-committee-findings-final.pdf>. Sparring and questions from commissioners to Jim Williams preceded tonight's comment period. The public comments were spirited with a common theme of asking for preservation of green space. Discussion centered in large part on a proposal the city is entertaining to sell part of Lester Golf Course to a private developer. After the public comments Jim Williams said in answer to a commissioner's question that, although not required, the Parks Commission will be asked to weigh in concerning any sale of park property and the future plan for golf courses. There would be multiple steps to approve implementation of any proposed plan.

Submitted by Ron Regal, Lane Palmer, Thomas Burns

Duluth Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting, February 13, 2019

The Commission discussed the newly-created Duluth Natural Resources Commission and its potential impact on city parkland. This Commission takes the place of, and expands the duties of, the former Urban Forest Commission. The basic mission of the new Commission is to provide science-based guidance to protect the ecological health of city-owned and city-managed lands, e.g. the park system. Concrete examples of Commission involvement will be a strategy for dealing with the Emerald Ash Borer problem and advice and support for Natural Area programs in Hartley Park and the St Louis River area.

A recent City Council rejection of a Parks Commission recommended action led to a proposed protocol on communication from the commission to the Council, prior to Council action.

The protocol is designed to provide a fuller explanation of the reasoning behind Parks Commission actions, including more detail on input from individual commission members. The Parks Commission voted unanimously to adopt the protocol for future recommendations sent to the City Council.

Staff presented a draft of the DWP Trail Technical Use and Standards Plan. The DWP Trail consists of an abandon rail bed located parallel to and uphill from the Munger Trail. The scenic trail goes from the base of Spirit Mountain southwest for six miles to a point along Becks Road, and includes numerous rock cuts and a 500 foot tunnel. The city acquired the land in the 1980's, and it has been used on an informal basis by a variety of human-powered and motorized groups. As a part of formalizing the trail within the city park system, the Technical Use and Standards plan will dictate the construction and maintenance standards as well as the permitted uses, e.g., hiking, biking, horse riding, and snowmobiles (on limited sections). Public comments at the meeting were very positive about the development of the trail, with some divergence of opinion on permitted uses and where they should be limited, suggestions on signage and development of more access points. There will be a two-week public comment period, with Commission action at their March meeting, then subsequent City Council action. The draft plan can be accessed at: [DWP Trail Technical Use and Standards Draft Plan \(public comment period: 2/14/19 - 2/28/19\).](#)

Finally, the Commission learned of City plans to improve beach safety. Signage and media announcements for dangerous water conditions will be improved, along with closer coordination among the police & fire departments, first responders, etc. Public comments included suggestions for lifeguards at more of the public beach sites and a higher level of training for rescues in dangerous water conditions.

Submitted by Lane Palmer

Parks and Recreation Commission, January 9, 2019

Amanda Crosby, the vice-president, called the meeting to order and the minutes of the November meeting were approved. There were no items on the agenda that required a formal vote of the commission, but the various members of the Parks and Recreation Department briefed the commissioners and the citizens in attendance on several programmatic developments.

1. Lisa Luokkala, interim assistant manager, introduced Matt Andrews, the new Trails Coordinator. Matt has a wide range of interest and experience in a great many outdoor activities. He looks forward to working with volunteers and clubs to enhance the community parks.
2. Lisa and Kraig Decker then outlined a pilot program for Kayak/Canoe Rack Rental. The idea is to create an appropriate and seasonal outdoor/on-site storage opportunity for individuals wishing to leave their watercraft on city property at parks along Lake Superior and the Saint Louis River at Park Point, Chambers Grove, and Brighton Beach, with one more to go into service at Spirit Landing, which is scheduled to open in 2020. Rental fees for Duluth residents will be \$100 per season; non-residents will be \$175. Each rack will accommodate up to 6 watercraft. Registration will be done on-line only and through the Parks and Rec website, and will be on a first come/ first served basis. Use is at the user's risk as to theft, damage, and liability. The racks are a gift from the iron workers.
3. Kraig then moved on to explain the new Commercial Use Permit program for city parks. This is a collaborative effort with parks partners, such as businesses regularly operating programs in the parks. These might include, for example, fitness classes, guiding, youth camps, etc. The primary reason for this program is to be sure that commercial (for-profit) operators do not thereby reduce the opportunities for the citizens to use their parks or to detour "open access" to them. The start date was January 1, 2019 with annual and monthly permits available for both resident and non-resident businesses. Applications are linked to the department's website.
4. Finally, Lisa announced that two applications supported by the department had received very substantial Legacy Grant Awards: (1) the DWP rail (along the line of the former Duluth Winnipeg-Pacific Railroad) along with the Duluth Traverse rail received \$900,000; and (2) Hartley Park/Hartley Nature Center had received an award of \$1,300,000, primarily to aid in the expansion and renovation of the Center, but also to enhance overflow parking and way-finding signage in the park. There followed an open discussion of public safety and appropriate levels of lifeguard training. New officers were nominated and elected. Amanda Crosby was elected the new president of the commission. The next commission meeting will be on Wednesday, February 13.

Submitted by Thomas Burns