

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
LITTLE CANADA, MINNESOTA**

SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof a regular meeting of the City Council of Little Canada, Minnesota was convened on the 7th day of September, 2023 in the Council Chambers of the City Center located at 515 Little Canada Road in said City.

Chair Howarth called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and the following members of the Parks & Recreation Commission were present at roll call:

PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION: Abruzzese, DeLong Miller, Hipp, Horwath, Mui, Schletty, Williams, and Youth Commissioner Churcher.

ALSO PRESENT: Parks & Rec/Community Services Director Bryce Shearen and Recreation Coordinator Sierra Hietala.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Horwath thanked Commissioner Schletty for chairing the meeting in his absence.

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Commissioner Schletty made a motion to approve the July 13, 2023 Parks & Recreation Commission minutes as submitted. Commissioner Williams seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS: PIONEER PARK UPDATE

The Parks & Rec Director provided an update on the progress of the Pioneer Park project. He noted that although they had a few minor delays, they are still moving along well. He reviewed the upcoming items to be completed, noting that they are aiming to hold a ribbon cutting/grand opening ceremony the third week of October.

Commissioner Schletty asked if the park would be opened earlier than the grand opening.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that while they had done a soft opening in some of the other parks prior to the grand opening, he did not believe they would do that in this instance. He explained that they would like to give sufficient time for final items to be completed and grass seed to start to get established before letting people into that area.

OLD BUSINESS: PARK LOGOS

The Parks & Rec Director stated that at the last meeting, the Commission suggested some changes to the proposed logos and since that time the designer has made the changes to the

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logos. He stated that Pioneer Park received the most discussion internally, specifically on whether they wait to incorporate the new play node in the logo. He asked for input on that park and whether there were additional changes that were desired for the other logos. He noted that if additional changes are requested, he would anticipate that would have an additional cost.

Chair Horwath referenced the Thunder Bay logo, noting that it almost comes across as an advertisement for the power lines.

Commissioner Schletty commented that is what it looks like though.

Commissioner Abruzzese acknowledged the input of the Chair but noted that is what you see at the park and how people find it. She stated that related to Pioneer Park she does like that the playground is not featured. She noted that while other logos feature a playground, that is often the only feature of those parks while Pioneer has many more features.

Commissioner Hipp commented that perhaps the play node could be in the background.

Commissioner Williams stated that they could move forward with this logo now and if a community building is added in the future, the water feature could also be added at that time.

The Parks & Rec Director agreed that they could make changes in future years as things evolve. He noted that Pioneer Park is a big park with a lot of features and perhaps there end up being more than one logo for that park.

Commissioner Mui commented that he likes that the Pioneer Park logo does not feature the playground because it has so many other features, whereas the parks that feature the playground do not have the same level of amenities. He commented that he likes that the Pioneer Park logo is different.

Chair Horwath agreed that the parks that feature a playground, that is the main focus of those parks whereas Pioneer Park has more elements. He stated that he would support including the playground as an element but also recognized that adding too many things could take away from the overall aesthetic.

The Parks & Rec Director commented that he would assume that the designer would be willing to work with the City on future designs, noting that perhaps another logo will be developed in the future for Pioneer Park.

Chair Horwath noted that another idea for the future would also be to have seasonal signs that feature different activities for the season, such as snowshoeing.

Commissioner Mui commented that when it comes to branding, eventually you just have to pick something and start, and you can build from there in the future.

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Commissioner Schletty commented that he does like the placement of the city logo.

The Parks & Rec Director commented that the City does have a new Community Relations Manager who is working on a brand style guide. He noted that if this is approved, this would be added to the brand style guide.

Chair Horwath commented that they could approve the designs as they are today, and they can make changes in the future if they want.

Mui introduced the following motion:

APPROVING THE PARK LOGO DESIGNS AS THE NEW OFFICIAL PARK LOGOS

The foregoing motion was duly seconded by DeLong Miller.
Ayes (8). Nays (0). Motion passed.

Chair Horwath thanked Commissioner Mui for bringing this forward and getting this moving. He commented that City identity is a big priority, and this was a big step forward for the parks.

NEW BUSINESS: TOBACCO AND CANNABIS USE IN PARKS AND PARK FACILITIES

The Parks & Rec Director stated that tonight they are going to look at the tobacco and cannabis-related use in the parks, noting that currently, the City does not have anything prohibiting tobacco use in the parks. He noted that many communities have tobacco-free parks, and with the legalization of cannabis, staff thought this would be a good time to bring forward this topic. He noted that the discussion tonight will focus on parks and park facilities, while the City Council will have continued discussion related to public property and right-of-way use. He reviewed the proposed language to be added to the City Code which would prohibit the use of tobacco and cannabis-related uses in the parks and park facilities. He commented that staff believes that falls in line with other communities and would protect the health of residents.

Chair Horwath noted that the language does not include the word smoking and believed that smoking should be included.

Commissioner Schletty commented that this seems to be more descriptive language to cover all the different products. He stated that people may use cannabis in their homes and then go to the park and asked if that would be in compliance.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that would be fine, as they are just prohibiting the use of those products in the parks, similar to alcohol.

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Commissioner Abruzzese asked if there would be unintended consequences of passing this which could lead to discrimination in the parks.

Commissioner Mui commented that he would be interested in more information, as people of color may be dinged for this more often.

Chair Horwath noted that the intent is to protect children, therefore it should be enforced universally. He commented that the use of these products is pretty equal between people of color and people who are white. He stated that the rules should be in place to protect children and the discussion of equal enforcement could occur with staff.

Commissioner Abruzzese commented that the City has not had a tobacco ordinance and yet that is not an issue. She asked if this would be creating a problem that does not exist.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that tobacco use has been an issue on the back burner since he has been with the City. He noted that typically the complaints arise during events and there is not an ordinance to provide enforcement authority.

Commissioner Mui asked if they could enact this type of ordinance for events.

Commissioner Schletty commented that at a recent event, people were smoking and someone asked if people were allowed to smoke in the park. He noted that he was not sure. He asked how they would prohibit smoking during large-scale events.

Commissioner DeLong Miller commented that Ramsey County is smoke-free and therefore she would think the City would have a similar policy.

The Parks & Rec Director commented that some counties have a blanket policy, whereas Ramsey County leaves it up to each city.

Commissioner Schletty stated that he would be interested in the experience of surrounding communities related to enforcement.

Chair Horwath commented that generally in Minnesota, laws are enforced unequally for people of color. He stated that the issue is with enforcement, but the rule should still be there.

Commissioner Abruzzese stated that she would like that to be acknowledged and once the ordinance is passed there should be tracking to ensure there is equal enforcement.

Commissioner Mui stated that he does like the concept of a tobacco-free zone but wanted to ensure there would not be unintended consequences. He noted that many of his neighbors smoke while on walks and asked how this would be communicated to residents as this would be a big change.

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The Recreation Coordinator noted that many communities use signage identifying the area as a tobacco-free zone.

Commissioner Abruzzese acknowledged that neighboring communities have similar ordinances and therefore this would provide consistency.

Commissioner Mui asked if they could require a clause that the enforcement data is tracked to ensure that it is enforced equally.

Chair Horwath asked who would be in charge of enforcement, whether that is parks staff, police, or residents complaining. He stated that the police can report back on enforcement but residents that feel empowered to inform people may be prejudicial.

Commissioner Schletty commented that neighbors saying something to people in the park would not have teeth in terms of enforcement.

Commissioner DeLong Miller commented that she would think the posting of the area as tobacco-free would be the goal, similar to alcohol use. She noted that some people may still choose to break the rule, but others will abide.

Commissioner Schletty asked what the fine for an ordinance violation of this nature.

The Parks & Rec Director noted that typically when he has told people alcohol is not allowed, people are nice about it and say that they did not know and put the alcohol away. He noted that it is more of an educational action.

Chair Horwath commented that he supports this as an educational campaign but did not think the police would spend their time looking for violators in the park. He stated that as someone who works in a park, he agrees with staff that when he approaches people to tell them that is not allowed in the park, they typically comply.

Commissioner Abruzzese stated that she would be more interested in the police statistics as a misdemeanor on someone's record would have an impact.

Chair Horwath stated he does support this type of ordinance but would like to include the word smoking. He noted that if this is the same language used by other communities, he would support it as is. He commented that he has worked in parks for his entire adult life and has never heard of someone receiving a misdemeanor for smoking in a park and therefore would not require the statistics to be provided.

The Parks & Rec Director commented that he could request data on violations, but doubted that any department would publicly provide statistics on the color of someone's skin.

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Commissioner Mui stated that perhaps this action is tabled for one month in order to gather additional information.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that the City Council will be talking about this in September in the broader discussion related to cannabis.

Commissioner Hipp asked if this would then be added to the park rules.

The Parks & Rec Director confirmed that the signage would state tobacco and cannabis free.

Commissioner Abruzzese commented that it was important to her that they had this conversation and brought forward the concern, as this moves forward to a larger discussion by the City Council.

Commissioner Mui again noted that many people smoke on walks and therefore was concerned that this could have unintended consequences.

Chair Horwath acknowledged the concerns that were raised today and reiterated that they are trying to protect children from the smoke and these behaviors.

Abruzzese introduced the following motion:

RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL ADOPT THE ORDINANCE AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 2601 – CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT OF PARKS AND PARK FACILITIES AND RAISE THE CONCERN OF UNEQUAL ENFORCEMENT

The foregoing motion was duly seconded by Mui.
Ayes (8). Nays (0). Motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS: RECREATION COORDINATOR UPDTE

The Recreation Coordinator recapped recent events and highlighted upcoming events and activities. She also reviewed opportunities for youth and adult programming.

NEW BUSINESS: PIONEER PARK – PHASE II

The Parks & Rec Director stated that in the 2022 Strategic Plan, they identified a desire to acquire the property north of the public works building, located at 2884 Centerville Road. He noted the desire to add a community building to Pioneer Park. He stated that staff has been in discussions with the property owner, who now seems willing to sell to the City with some caveats. He stated that they have developed some concepts of how a community building could

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fit onto the site. He stated that they have five different concepts and welcomed input on those concepts tonight. He noted that while they have identified funding to purchase the property, there is not yet funding identified for a community building. He reiterated that this is all very preliminary, trying to gain consensus on whether a community building would be supported by the Park Commission and City Council. He stated that if there is not agreement then there would not seem to be a purpose to purchase the property because of the cost to purchase. He noted that one of the caveats of the sale would be that the current property owner would like to maintain a small shed on the property for a period of time, which is reflected in the concepts. He stated that once that agreed-upon time passes, the shed would become the property of the City and could be used for equipment storage. He reviewed the different concepts with the Commission.

Commissioner Schletty commented that he likes having the building in proximity of the playground as that provides people holding events with the opportunity to enjoy indoor and outdoor space with children.

Commissioner Hipp asked about the size of the building and estimated capacity.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that the target would be to allow events of 150 to 200 people. He talked about some of the community events that could be held in that space.

Chair Horwath commented that the intent would seem to be an intermittent use type center.

Commissioner Mui asked if there was concern with the parking.

Chair Horwath noted that parking would be flushed out as the design goes forward.

The Parks & Rec Director agreed that would be part of the design process. He noted that staff would also work on scheduling, noting that they would not schedule sports at the same time a wedding may be at the community building.

Chair Horwath commented that he would prefer to separate the basketball court out a bit from the other features but did not want it too far that people may not know it is at the park.

The Parks & Rec Director noted that the court is along the path from the apartments, and a lot of use comes from the apartments. He acknowledged that if a park feature is too far from parking, sometimes it does not get as much use. He stated that he likes the idea of having the building near the play node and also likes the idea of spreading features throughout the park.

Chair Horwath referenced concepts four and five which have the door on the backside, towards the play node which lends itself to day camp programming.

Commissioner Schletty commented that he would love to potentially fit in a dog park somewhere.

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The Parks & Rec Director commented that feature would be tough in this park but perhaps there are some opportunities in other parks for a dog park. He noted that with the tree loss in Spooner, perhaps that would be a good opportunity.

Commissioner DeLong Miller commented that she likes concept three as it opens toward the park.

Commissioner Williams commented that she likes the concept design with the curve in the parking lot to drop people off.

The Parks & Rec Director confirmed the consensus of the Commission to move the tennis and basketball courts.

Commissioner Hipp commented that it would be nice to have the community building overlooking the park. She liked the idea of breaking up the parking with trees. She noted the increased demand for pickleball and asked if additional courts were being considered.

The Parks & Rec Director stated that he has received calls from residents. He explained the noise that is generated from pickleball which often makes it not fit well near residential properties. He believed that there would be a location that could work for a dedicated pickleball court at another park.

The Parks & Rec Director noted that the next step will be a workshop with the City Council to discuss whether to purchase the property for the purpose of a community building.

Chair Horwath confirmed the consensus of the Commission in support of the purchase of the property for the purpose of a community building. He noted that it is great that they are drawing residents from other areas of the city to this park, but again acknowledged the need for additional pedestrian connectivity, via a bridge crossing.

The Parks & Rec Director noted that they are still in the process of reviewing the sidewalk and trails plan which does include those bridge connections.

REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hipp commented that it has been fun to watch the progress of different park and trail projects this summer. She referenced the Spooner nature play area noting that she has done some maintenance throughout the summer. She commented that she picked up trash at Gervais Mill today and noticed a lot of alcohol bottles. She asked if there is a policy related to alcohol use in the parks.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that alcohol use is by permit only.

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Commissioner Hipp asked if a decision had been made on backyard chickens.

The Parks & Rec Director replied that he was unsure and recommended following the Planning Commission on that topic.

Commissioner DeLong Miller commented that she and Commissioners Williams and Churcher walked in the parade collecting canned food and cash donations for Interfaith Action and its food shelf.

Commissioner Williams commented that she enjoyed recent programming on monarch tagging.

Chair Horwath commented on his recent vacation to Canada and Glacier National Park and thanked the commissioners for their assistance in his absence.

STAFF UPDATES

The Parks & Rec Director commented that the goats will soon be back. He reported that Commissioner Churcher was recently reappointed to the Commission for another one-year term.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Staple
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.