

**WEST ST. PAUL PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**6:00 PM, Tuesday, August 8, 2023**  
**West St. Paul Council Chambers**

**Park & Rec. Members Present:** Chair Dave Lynch, Luke Abrahamson, Bonnie Bellows, Sara Blair, John Cronin, Kelly Hagler, Teresa Smock, Emily Vergin, Nadine Wenzel

**Non-Voting Members Present:** Councilmember Wendy Berry; Assistant Parks Director Dave Schletty; Parks, Recreation, & Environment Director Eric Weiss

Chair Lynch called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

**1. Roll Call**

**2. Citizen Comments**

- a. An anonymous resident spoke regarding the importance of West St. Paul pool, lifeguard certification, and support for the expansion of the disc golf course.

**3. New Business**

**a. Adopt July 11, 2023, Minutes**

The July 11, 2023, minutes were approved by the committee.

**b. Introduce New Parks, Recreation, and Environment Director, Eric Weiss**

**c. Lothenbach Ave Sidewalk Presentation**

City Engineer/Public Works Director Beckwith talked about the updated bike pedestrian plan, and the plan to install sidewalk on Lothenbach Avenue in 2027. Lothenbach Avenue runs from Robert Street to Oakdale Avenue in the city's industrial area. There is a regional solicitation grant opportunity for funding in 2027. The city needs to do some preliminary work on Lothenbach Avenue to be eligible for the grant. The city has a proposed plan for sidewalk on either side of Lothenbach Avenue (north side or south side) within the city's existing right of way. The city has met with the local businesses/residents (The Sanctuary, Holiday Acres) and talked to them about the plans. Lothenbach Avenue often has pedestrians walking in the roadway going to the Target store and other businesses. The city has spoken with Dakota County regarding the need to create a pedestrian crossing on Oakdale Avenue to Lothenbach Avenue. The County is amenable to a crossing and would like the crossing to be on the northside of Lothenbach Avenue.

**d. Smoking in Parks**

Parks Director Weiss related that there have been big changes in state legislature with the passage of the Cannabis Act. Beginning in August, anyone, 21 years of age and older, is allowed to possess up to two ounces of cannabis in public spaces, including outdoor park spaces. The new statute grants cities the ability to adopt ordinances establishing a petty misdemeanor offense for persons unlawfully using cannabis in a public place. West St. Paul currently has an existing tobacco-free policy for certain areas of parks. People are restricted from using tobacco near children's play areas, and around fields in both the Sports Complex and Harmon Park. The emphasis is on eliminating secondhand smoke exposure to children.

Council has asked the committee to update the city's current policy (and not ordinance), regarding smoking in the parks. City staff considers Dakota County cannabis policy to be sufficient in addressing cannabis use and that the policy meets Council's intentions. Staff also feels the city smoking policy should change from tobacco to all smoke. This would

include all smoking-related items, (cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, other tobacco, cigars, and cannabis). Staff recommends that smoking only be allowed in city-owned parking lots and roadways, city streets and street right of ways, and in parks, except within 100 feet of playgrounds, ballfields, and the pool. Smoking would be allowed if part of Native American spiritual and cultural ceremonies. The policy would be promoted through signage, awareness efforts and education.

The committee discussed the new policy. Chair Lynch asked if smoking should be disallowed in city parking lots, as cannabis is an intoxicant like alcohol. Councilmember Berry said this would not stop people from driving under the influence. Member Vergin said she would not want the city policy to be “too strict”, and a surprise to visitors to West St. Paul. The Dakota County policy would be a good starting point for the city policy. Member Cronin said that the city has not received complaints about smoking in the parks. It is still not allowed for children to smoke in the parks. This would be enough of a restriction for police to enforce. Member Blair asked about the awareness of the tobacco-free policy. Member Smock said children play everywhere in the park; they would not be protected from secondhand smoke if they stepped outside of the designated areas. Member Vergin asked if there were places in the park to put out cigarettes safely. She suggested having signs that said, “No smoking beyond this point,” and to have ash receptacles at these points. Member Wenzel suggested having a blanket smoke-free policy in the parks, (except for parking lots, sidewalks, and streets) to avoid confusion for the public. Tobacco-free should change to “smoke-free” except for use of barbecue grills. Member Hagler asked about the equity standpoint of the policy. Cannabis cannot be smoked in any multi-unit housing complex. There is a question of fairness with income disparity and the ability to smoke cannabis.

Chair Lynch said that it is important to be consistent with policy, be it tobacco, cannabis, or vaping. Member Wenzel said that litter, lighting a fire, and dropping cigarette butts need to be considered. Member Smock said some people like herself, live right next to the park. Keeping the parks clean and user-friendly is important.

Chair Lynch asked if committee members wanted to table the discussion to study the policy and apply it to the committee’s core values. The committee could reconvene on the policy at next month’s meeting. Parks Director Weiss said this is an option. He cautioned members that currently, it is legal for people to smoke cannabis at playgrounds in West St. Paul. The city does not have policy in place.

Member Vergin said the committee could look at how Colorado, Michigan, and Illinois for examples of public policy. Councilmember Berry said that state law currently prohibits cannabis use, “in a location where the smoke, aerosol or vapor of a cannabis product could be inhaled by a minor.” Councilmember Berry suggested following state law and not adding more restrictions. The city could educate the public with this policy through signage. Member Cronin said that the city does not currently have a problem with people smoking cigarettes in the parks. The committee may be diagnosing a problem that does not exist presently. The committee should not get “caught in the weeds.” Chair Lynch said it could be as simple as expanding the current tobacco free policy to include all smoking products and all items pursuant to state law. Member Vergin supported the expansion of the policy and not putting anything into ordinance. It would also give residents of multi-unit homes a way to partake. Parks Director Weiss said that it would be

important to have policy in place for park rental permits and group gatherings, especially with the athletic associations.

The committee came to a consensus that a motion was not needed. A summary of the committee discussion forwarded to Council would be sufficient. The policy would only cover smoking and not edibles. Edibles could still be consumed in the park.

#### **4. Old Business**

##### **a. Park Naming Update**

Chair Lynch said the city has one final event to solicit public input in naming two park spaces, this Thursday, 6:30 pm, August 10. The spaces are at Oakdale Avenue and Butler Avenue, and at the West St. Paul Pool. There will be a “dauber display” at the park space at Oakdale Avenue and Butler Avenue to get further input for the park names. “Art Park” and “Poolside Park” are the leading name contenders.

##### **b. Possible Disc Golf Course Expansion**

Chair Lynch said that the committee discussed the possible expansion of the disc golf course at Garlough Park at its last meeting. He has met with a disc golf designer who created an expanded design for the course. Chair Lynch has submitted material and budgetary numbers for the new design to the city. Assistant Parks Director Schletty said that the city has the proposal for the expansion. Before a decision is made to expand the disc golf course, the city needs the parks’ system plan in place.

#### **5. Other**

##### **a. Council Updates**

###### **i. No updates provided.**

##### **b. Staff Updates**

###### **i. Sports Dome Turf Replacement**

Assistant Parks Director Schletty reported the replacement was completed. The Dome reopened Tuesday, August 1, and is available for walking/jogging Mondays through Friday. Rentals are also starting again.

###### **ii. Marthaler Park Reconstruction**

Work is on-going. This week, storm sewer lines are being installed. There is some poor-quality soil that needs to be removed. The project has been slowed down by the permitting process through the State of Minnesota. The project, however, is still on track to be finished by this fall.

###### **iii. Thompson Oaks Trail Restoration and Construction**

The work is wrapping up. A grand re-opening will take place on August 21.

###### **iv. Park Systems Plan**

Parks Director Weiss reported that the plan is moving forward. Staff is pleased with the preliminary recommendations from the consultants.

###### **v. Athletic Field Rental Policy**

City staff is reviewing the policy now and making some changes from the version previously reviewed by the committee. The process includes website changes, the application process, and notification of the maintenance crew. It should be ready for the winter season rental period. Staff is also looking at processes for renting the park picnic shelters, pavilions and indoor spaces. Staff is also reviewing the inclement weather policy and likely to bring recommendations to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee soon.

##### **c. Environmental Committee Liaison**

Member Vergin reported that the Environmental Committee did not meet this month.

##### **d. Commissioner’s Park Updates**

Member Hagler asked about the water fountain being installed at Harmon Park. Assistant Parks Director Schletty said that the city would investigate a new fountain next year with summer season being almost over. Chair Lynch asked if more wood chips could be scattered in the disc golf course. Assistant Parks Director Schletty said he would check with Park Maintenance to see if it could be done. Assistant Parks Director Schletty said that an update report on the pool operation will be done at the September meeting.

**6. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Sharon G. Hatfield**  
**Administrative Specialist**