

## WEST ST. PAUL PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

August 12, 2020

**Parks & Rec. Members Present:** Bonnie Bellows, Jay DeLaRosby, Bob Gausman, Dave Lynch, Kirsten Mulraney

**Non-voting Members Present:** Sharon G. Hatfield, Parks and Public Works Administrative Specialist; Ross Beckwith, City Engineer/ Public Work & Parks Director Wendy Berry, Council Liaison

1. **ROLL CALL**

2. **REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES**

Co-chair Lynch called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Lynch remarked it was exciting to have minutes that were only a month old. Member Bellows made a motion to adopt the July 14, 2020 minutes. Member DeLaRosby seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes.

3. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **Park Vandalism and Litter Discussion**

Lynch said the problem of vandalism and litter was discussed at the last Council Open Work Session. Clpn. Berry talked about the problem of trash in the parks and how the City could mitigate it. She mentioned the restrooms at Harmon, the tree branch at Harmon and the spray paint at the WSP pool. City Engineer Beckwith mentioned the vandalized ladder at the pool. Berry asked for ideas from the committee. Lynch wondered if City staff were a visible [presence] in the parks with florescent vests. Beckwith said that staff does wear brightly colored West St. Paul logos; they are spending a lot of time picking up trash and not attending to their regular work. Trash is a real time consumer and a big issue. Mulraney asked about volunteer efforts to clean the parks. Beckwith said that Diane Erickson, the volunteer coordinator, has organized numerous groups to do cleanup. The volunteer groups fizzle out after a while. Mulraney asked about how often the receptacles are emptied and if there were dumpsters for trash. She has seen impromptu people pick up trash and often the receptacles are full. Beckwith said that there is a dumpster in Harmon Park. He said City staff is happy to do extra pickups for the trash if need be. Lynch talked about putting extra bags in the bottoms of the receptacles for visitors to use when the trash gets full. Beckwith said that the City can do it; the cans are monitored closely. DeLaRosby said that it is Marthaler and Harmon Parks that are called out for chronic instances. He mentioned the video camera at Harmon Park and asked if it were high definition enough to identify individuals. Beckwith said the City has “caught” people by taking the video to schools and showing them to the principals. They can identify their students. DeLaRosby said that the redevelopment of the north end has attracted more people to Marthaler; he asked if the dedicated parks police officer Jesse could help. Berry said that Jesse is not only a police officer but also a community service officer and [spread thin.] Beckwith said the city is installing a full-mounted camera in the north end of Marthaler. DeLaRosby suggested that the officer speak to the participants in the park and do some community engagement by asking them to help pitch in and pick up litter. Berry said that at the Council meeting, residents from Marthaler Park had talked about community engagement; they had concerns with the shelters. No one is paying for the shelters [right now] because the City is not renting them; so anyone can sit there. Member Gausman said that he is the all-time trash expert; you could call him a garbologist. He was a senior lifeguard at McCarron’s beach and it sometimes had 2,000 people a day. It could be ankle-deep in trash. He worked on some of the main committees for Selby Avenue for twenty years. It looked like a pig pen. He found that if a place looks terrible, people get rebellious. They hate [the surroundings,] and they throw trash. If it is neat and clean and well cared for, they will care for it. If it looks like a dump, they’ll throw trash on the ground. It affects the mood. It is like an avalanche and then you are overwhelmed. If it is clean, it stays clean. You have to get on the trash right away. Get rid of the ribbons on the Marthaler shelter. It looks trashy. Make sure everything is painted and that everything looks loved and cared for. They micro-managed Selby Avenue with landscaping, boarded-up buildings and paint. Trash was picked up immediately. If someone wants to throw trash they will stick out like a sore thumb. They will not do it. Bellows asked how the decision is made as to how many trash

barrels are in the park. Beckwith said that it is trial and error; staff will watch to see how often they get filled up. The problem, however, is not the number of trash barrels. Beckwith said that people are not taking the time to even put the trash in the barrels. Bellows suggested putting the issue in the newsletter. Muraney asked if there was a way to reward people doing good deeds in the parks; perhaps they could be recognized on social media. Kids like that kind of recognition. Beckwith will suggest this to Dan Nowicki. Lynch suggested putting up more signage for picking up litter.

Administrative Specialist Hatfield commented that the littering may be caused by not having shelter permits this summer; there is more traffic in the shelter but there is no (\$50) incentive for shelter renters to pick up after themselves. The problem may go away after the COVID-19 precautions are lifted. DeLaRosby asked about the no rental permit policy; was it for crowd control? He remarked that people are using the shelter anyway and the City is not generating any revenue from the use. Beckwith said the rental permits would open up the City for liability issues with cleaning the shelters.

Carol Keyes Ferrer and Joe Ferrer, (Humboldt Avenue residents) came to the meeting to talk about the problems in Marthaler Park. They are trying to get together a small group to clean up Marthaler. The Ferrers can hear the noise, loud parties and loud arguing; this lead up to the gunfire incident. They are organizing a community group to meet and come up with suggestions for the City. Maybe there should be a \$100 fine for littering; she has not seen many signs for litter pick up. Gausman remarked that Marthaler is run down; it has incredible potential and the [reconstruction] of the park is coming. Buckthorn cleanup would help with the look of the lake. Beckwith said that there is a master plan for Marthaler and the River to River Trail will be going into the park. The City cannot fund the whole master plan now; it will be in pieces. The splash pad was very expensive and the City spent money on the north end of Marthaler Park. They are probably the nicest park in the City system. Sometimes nice does not always equate with clean; nice equates with use.

Lynch talked about non expensive suggestions for improving the park. He would like to restore the vantage point on top of the hill at Marthaler. Ten years ago, he could stand on top of the hill and count the number of water towers. The trees have grown very tall and out of control. Gausman said he would like to see a tower on top of the hill. Lynch said that removing some of the trees from top would be a non capital improvement for the park.

DeLaRosby asked about any data for the park; with greater use comes greater trash. He wondered about what time of day the neighbors saw the trash. Ferrer says that is a good point; the community group does not have any data on the users in the park. They can now start gathering the data. Beckwith said that the Police Department would like to hear from residents. They use the slogan, "See something; Say something." DeLaRosby thinks it will take intervention and people taking ownership of the park [to help with the problems.]. It would take a "Woodsy the Owl" conservation conversation with the users. Lynch thanked Carol Keys-Ferris and Joe Ferris for their comments.

**b. Park Inventory- Mud Lake & Weschcke Park**

Lynch related that Weschcke Park has had a lot of work done recently as part of the Wentworth project; Mud Lake Park is a natural park. Bellows commented that the tennis courts are in good shape but the basketball courts have big cracks and are starting to peel. The basketball court is a full court but it only has the hoop at one end. There are big cracks running across the court. Beckwith confirmed that it was the tennis courts that were resurfaced in 2017, and not the basketball courts. Bellows said that the playground looks to be in good shape. There is a wooden picnic table in rough shape. The warming house is ugly but in good shape. Beckwith confirmed that the warming houses are used for storage for the summer programs. Bellows asked about the overflow of the pond in the park that reaches the street. She also noticed flags for new trees in the

park. Beckwith said that the pond overflow on Kraft will go up and over onto the street before it reaches the houses. The overflow will drain into the street. There was a “goofy” flooding incident during construction when the plug for the drain had not been removed. Bellows asked if there would be additional plantings in the park to make it look nicer. Beckwith said that there is a wetland in the middle of the park. It cannot be “touched.” There was an expansion/excavation done to the south. The area around it was seeded with a native type mix. It may need two seasons to fully grow in. Lynch asked about planting trees as a screen for the homeowners on the south edge of the park/east of the warming house. Beckwith does not know of any plans for more trees. The neighbors can plant trees on their property for screening as well.

DeLaRosby said at one time basketball was not a priority for the park and the court was not resurfaced. At the last committee meeting the increased desire for Pickle Ball was mentioned. The committee could see if there is a desire for full court basketball again in this park, and perhaps convert the half court to Pickle Ball. Berry said that the tennis courts could be stripped for Pickle Ball at a relatively low cost, \$375. DeLaRosby talked about having a park with the Pickle Ball nets set at regulation height for people to enjoy.

Mud Lake has been designated as a wetland. Lynch said that not much can be done for the water quality in the lake. Algae and reed growth is still an issue for the nearby residents. The City has done a great job with maintenance; Lynch mentioned the tree removal earlier this year. Bellows noticed that a neighbor had put down logs on part of the trail because of the muddiness. She asked if there were a master plan for this park. Beckwith talked about the CIP. The budget is small and the list for improvements is large. The City will need to save for six years for the improvements for Marthaler Park. Mud Lake is on the list but lower in priority. Beckwith has not seen a master plan for Mud Lake. He knows that restoring the visibility of trail around the lake is on the list of park improvements. It will not be in the near future. Dave Schletty can shed more light on this. Beckwith is unsure if lily pad removal was performed this year. He thinks the City is allowed to remove twenty percent of the lily pads per year. Lynch said that there are a gazillion more kids playing in the park now, (compared to ten years ago.) In winter, there is a lot of skating and hockey. In the spring, before the reeds take over there is a lot of use. Gausman said that there has not been an Eagle Scout project there recently. Lynch said he has had no luck with getting a permanent boardwalk built. Bellows was curious about adding a playground [per the update report] to the park and where its placement would be. Lynch said that the placement may be indicated in the 2000 Master Plan. It also had a pier listed for Mud Lake. DeLaRosby said the committee’s inventory project was borne out of the recognition that the Master Plan for the parks is now two decades old. In the absence of having funds, what low cost improvements could the committee identify through the inventory? (An example of this is buckthorn removal.) DeLaRosby also wanted to develop an inventory of what amenities would like to see. What is listed on the City website is not necessarily congruent with what is available. The committee can address what is broken or ugly in the parks right now and to see what low cost improvements could be done.

Bellows talked about meeting with the DNR; they told the City what they could and could not do. She would like to know what their plans are for Mud Lake. Beckwith said that the DNR said (two years ago,) that the lake is functioning as it should be. It is not a recreational lake. The committee talked about meeting with the DNR and asking about their plans for Mud Lake. They would not change the lake. Bellows thinks they may have had plans for the lake. The residents are very concerned; they want to know what things they could do to use the lake that would be okay with the DNR. DeLaRosby remembered the conversation from two years ago. A residents used to see a lot more birds on the lake and used to be able to canoe on the lake. The DNR’s response was that the City was interfering with the natural habitat in order to produce that type of lake. It was a healthy ecosystem before. That is the reason for the limit of lily pad removal. He does not know what would be the perfect mesh of conservation and recreation. Beckwith said that he will talk to

Schletty about this. Beckwith does not see the DNR changing their mind about this. The lake has been restored to its natural condition. DeLaRosby said that this may be an opportunity to have a more formalized interactive educational features along the lake trail. Berry said that natural playgrounds are becoming more popular. Gausman said that he will research bringing bullfrogs to the lake. Mud Lake is a real attraction; it is off the beaten path.

4. **OLD BUSINESS**

a. **Art Park Subcommittee Update-**

Gausman said that the subcommittee is going forward with their plans. He does not like the negative appeal of their flyers: "We're surrounded by art in all the other communities," and it's not true. Mendota Heights and Inver Grove Heights do not have a lot of art. It is more of a historic thing. The lack of art is really due to the post war building boom. DeLaRosby said that the online video and survey is ready and responses will be due on August 26. The painting sessions will be on September 12, 10 am-Noon and September 16, 6:30- 8pm. One senior home is very excited by the opportunity. September 19 is the drop off date for the tiles. DeLaRosby will ask Dave Schletty to send out an email to committee members with the information.

5. **OTHER**

a. **City Council Update- NA**

b. **Staff Update-NA**

c. **Park Inventory-** The committee decided to inventory Kennedy and Garlough Parks at their next meeting. Bellows requested that the update information be sent out sooner to committee members.

d. **Park Educational Outreach Ideas-**

Ferrer talked about having a cooperative program with Dodge Nature Center for Weschcke Park. Lynch said that Dodge Nature has done a program for Garlough Park. The Committee can also reach out to the mayor for more information.

Committee members talked about the lack of historical knowledge of residents for West St. Paul. Gausman talked about the interest in geologic history for West St. Paul; all of the land was shaped by glaciers. Committee members talked about making a "passport" game for each of the parks. Residents could get stamps at each of the parks and fill their passports for a prize or social media recognition.

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

The committee members adjourned at 6:47 pm. The next Park and Recreation Committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at 5:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon G. Hatfield