

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

**Parks & Rec. Members Present:** Bonnie Bellows, Bob Gausman, Dave Lynch, Mike Petrasek

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

**Guest Speakers:** Josh Kinney, Dakota County  
CJ Fernandez, Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects

1. **ROLL CALL**

2. **REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES**

Assistant Parks and Recreation Director and acting chair Schletty called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Member Bellows made a motion to approve the November 10, 2020 meeting minutes. Member Lynch seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes.

3. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **Presentation on Thompson Park Master Plan and Upcoming Project**

Schletty related that about a year ago, a representative from Dakota County showed the Committee the preliminary Master Plan for the Thompson County Park. The Plan has since been approved and is being carried out to fruition. Josh Kinney, a landscape architect from Dakota County, presented to the Committee and gave some background to the project. Kinney works in capital projects management. His primary role is to manage the design and construction of park and greenway projects for the county. Kinney introduced CJ Fernandez of Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects. The County has been working with Aune on a number of projects since 2015, including Lebanon Hills and White Tail Woods.

Kinney reported that the Thompson Park Master Plan was approved by the board on January 21, 2020. The County immediately started implementing the work on the design. The Master Plan addressed enhancing the lake, restoring the natural resources, expanding gathering opportunities, making the park more accessible to people with mobility issues, and providing additional recreational opportunities. The Plan also recommended the addition of more fishing options, lake trails and more picnic areas, and building a new more accessible playground. The schematic designs were approved by the Board on November 10, 2020. There have been 2 open houses (virtual). The first open house was to raise public awareness; the second was to present the schematic designs. There was good turnout; 145 comments were gathered, and they were predominantly in favor of the designs. The project will be bid in March/April and they would like to start construction shortly thereafter. Completion would be hopefully in November 2021.

CJ Fernandez said that is great to be working in West St. Paul; his cousin grew up in St. Paul and Fernandez spent a lot of time visiting the area as a child. This project is a rewarding piece of work. Dakota County tends to take the work of the Master Plan and package together a number of projects; some projects are done together with other projects; some are done remotely from each other. The mission of the Master Plan as well as the interpretive plan is about bringing the community together and bringing the community to nature. Its focus is on gathering. A lot of attention was put upon the demographic of the park, and the charge was to create an equitable park through design. Three artists were brought in for the design concepts; one of the artists grew up in West St. Paul. She currently lives right outside of West St. Paul; The County has also been working with St. Croix Lutheran on the project.

Most of the work will occur in the area just north of the Dakota Lodge building. The playground will be redone. A new plaza will be built. There will also be a lakeside space that will be redone to create an open green "linear" plaza. The goal of the new trail work will be to create a series of

bench locations along the path that tell an interpretive story. Various components of the environment/restoration work will be told in panels in the locations.

The team of artists for the project have roots in community process; the process is used to inform their work. They are the design collaborators. Chris Harrison, Pa Her and Jonathan Herrera Soto were the artists. The architects asked them to focus on culture and community, and how people gather. Features include jumping rocks, unique bird bath opportunities and a table that is shaped to the shoreline of the lake. One of the areas near the lake will talk about the water community and will feature an etched map with a portion of West St. Paul, Thompson Lake and Simon's Ravine down to the Mississippi River. Jumping stones will have etched pictures of pollinator plants to inform about native habitat. Two elders from the Mdewakanton Sioux tribe were consulted for a map of their homelands.

Some of the ideas generated were rather old ideas for gathering spaces like chess tables. There will be a terrace that extends into a pier out to the lake. The lake plaza will have a series of different types of seating. On the welcome wall there will be unique artist-inspired tables. There will also be a viewing area along the lake with a fire pit.

Fernandez gave a short tour of the pathway through the final plan. There was a request from the county for a pollinator-friendly playground. There will be pollinator plantings along the edge of the new playground and a jumping rock area as well. A lot of attention was paid to the existing trees in the park. Only one oak will be removed in the project. In the lake plaza, there will be a lot of new tree plantings. There will be seating along raised planters around new plantings in the plaza. There will be seating along the pier edge for park programming, educational classes, and gathering. It will function as a secondary fishing pier. Fernandez showed the new green area leading to the picnic shelter. They will be introducing more native planting in this area; a savannah berm planting that will provide buffer from the parking lot. On the walkway will be artist-inspired shelters and tables. The county had a request for a welcoming wall with various languages. It will say welcome in different languages. One of the community tables and shelters is located behind the wall. It will allow larger groups and families to gather. The tables will mirror shoreline shape. Fernandez pointed out that the lake loop trail will not be changed; it is functioning. The improvements will come with the "story loop," and the interpretive trail/themes. The improvements were done to highlight the best views and highest experiential values around the lake.

Fernandez said that Dakota County is committed to embracing natural resources; [their parks] do not have a lot of open green spaces and more traditional active recreation. The entry to the Thompson Park does not speak to natural native environment. The plan for the entry will remain the same, but the trees in that area will be restored to native prairie. It will create a unique space on Butler and differentiate itself from its neighbors. The area near Sperl Street will also be restored to native prairie. There will be a new walkway and storm water work done in this area.

Schletty said that the plan looks really fantastic. He thanked Kinney for the presentation as well. He asked the committee for comments/questions. Bellows said she was fascinated by all of it and she is pleased that trying to connect people with the nature is an aim/goal of the park. Lynch asked about the trees between the lake and the linear green; he asked if there were a design purpose with the tree location. Fernandez said that the intention was to define the walkway through the edge of the lake loop and the edge of the linear green. His firm has not developed a planting plan yet. It will be a deciduous tree species. The views of the space will be more free flowing. The trees will provide additional shade for the linear green. One of the county directives was to provide more shade opportunities with trees and structures. Lynch asked if there were any plans to "dress up" the outlet on west side of Thompson Lake. Fernandez said that the plan will not address this area; the work will be done south of the paved trail. Kinney said that some stones will be placed in the area to alleviate erosion and to provide access for fishing. Lynch said that he

liked the chess tables; he suggested having cribbage tables as well. Fernandez said that he loved the idea. He is more of a cribbage player too. He will look into this option. Chair Petrasek said that a half-mile west of the entrance on Butler, is the West St. Paul Art Park. He wondered if there were any collaboration opportunities with Thompson Park. He likes the mix of active and passive features in the plan. He asked if the DNR stocks the lake. Fernandez says that the DNR does stock the lake; it was stocked this spring. With the draw down that was done for the restoration, there was some die off. The DNR will continue to restock; he does not know if it is every year or every other year. Petrasek said everything looks great and that West St. Paul is lucky; everything the county does is first class and the plan is an example of this.

Clpn. Berry asked about the accessibility of the playground equipment. Fernandez said that accessibility was the cornerstone charge for the playground. The pathway down is fully accessible and the pads and other areas in this project are fully accessible. There is an opportunity on the back edge for second level of play on the raised area; there is a ramp that will access this level. It will be a major improvement. Berry said that her three-year old is very excited by the plans. The improvements will make the park into more of an attraction to the City. Member Gausman said that the plan is very well thought-out and he is interested in following it. Lynch asked if anything will be done for the trails that go off the lake loop and toward Hwy. 52 and to Kaposia Park. Fernandez said not with this project. Kinney confirmed this. However a tandem project coordinated with the transportation department will replace the existing failing trails. There will be new bituminous services. They will marry to the old trails. Lynch said that the connection with Thompson Park and Kaposia is a marvelous one. If the City could highlight the pedestrian connection, it would increase its use. Kinney agreed and mentioned the partnership between the County and St. Croix Lutheran School. The County is building a water access that pedestrians and the school can use; the school will do some monitoring on the water species for the county.

#### **4. OLD BUSINESS**

##### **a. Park Inventory Update**

Schletty said that the committee has been working on the inventory for about a year. As Schletty was looking through the list, he discovered that the Committee had skipped Haskell Park inadvertently. Haskell Park had been set for the March meeting and then the shutdown occurred. It got missed, and our committee has not looked at Haskell Park. It could be done next month. Petrasek said he would prefer the committee to take the next month and look at each park and prioritize what they would do with each park. The committee would then come together in January and come to a consensus on what the top 5-10 priorities for the parks are. Personally, Petrasek would like to see the addition of 2-3 pickleball courts to one of the parks. Schletty mentioned that at the last Council meeting in which Schletty presented, Council said they wanted to make Marthaler Park a priority. It should be a focal point of the discussion. Marthaler Park cannot be done in one year; the City does not have the funding for it. The improvements would be broken into manageable parts and adjusted to being done in 2025-2030. Petrasek mentioned a donation for Marthaler Park from Mr. Timms, the goose guy. Petrasek asked if that "coffee can" of money was still available. Schletty said that this was a good question. He will have to ask Finance about the money. He assumes that the money went into the Park Improvement Fund. Whether or not it was earmarked for a fishing pier, Schletty will have to investigate. Lynch likes Petrasek's idea of using the month to prioritize. Bellows said that at looking at Kennedy Park, one of the things she noticed is that the benches and tables seem to be in good shape. She was wondering how the committee can tell if some of the benches and tables need to be replaced more than in other parks. Schletty said the park staff does evaluate the condition of the equipment, (i.e. rust, graffiti) There is money set aside every year, (about 8K) to replace picnic tables benches trash cans. Part of the reason to have the replacement in Kennedy is if the City were to install a new playground, the tables and the benches will ultimately need to be moved as well. It does not necessarily mean they need to be replaced, but it might be a good time to do it. That was the rationale for earmarking the money in that park. For the next meeting, Schletty can go over the CIP plan for the next few years and fill in

the dollar amounts for certain years and where the funding is earmarked. It will give the committee a starting point. The City will not necessarily replace equipment, especially if it is in good condition. Some of the replacements will be pushed out further to prioritize Marthaler Park. Petrasek said the Committee can focus first on Marthaler Park and then the other parks in February March April, etc. Petrasek said that it would be nice as a committee (in a perfect world, non-Covid-19,) to hop in a van and go park to park and look at the parks. Petrasek suggested that the Committee work on Marthaler primarily for the January meeting and secondarily think of the improvements they would like to see in 2 or 3 or 4 other parks. The Committee can circle back to the other parks after they look at Marthaler. Petrasek asked about the park dedication fees and how they relate to the improvements. Schletty said the park dedication fees do wrap into the improvement funds. Council did talk about this specifically. They do want something special to be done with these funds. Berry said the Council is focusing on Marthaler; they know that the changes are coming. It is a good idea to prioritize what the Committee would like to see in the park. There are two big projects happening right now with sizeable dedication fees. West St. Paul is very developed and the City may not see this type of funding again. Berry loves Petrasek's idea about touring the parks. Bellows talked about how the Committee previously worked on the Master Plan in parts; she wanted to know if Schletty still had this work. Schletty said yes. He will dig it out.

## 5. OTHER

- a. **Skate Park Subcommittee Update**- Petrasek said that there was nothing to report on at this time. Schletty said that the skate park was not on the priority list but the Committee could figure out where it might fit in the system. Petrasek said, "the skate park and pickleball."
- b. **City Council Update**-Berry reported that Council did not talk about the parks very much at the last meeting. The last Council Meeting for this year will be this Monday. Hopefully Council will be doing strategic planning early in the year. The Park Committee should meet before this planning; Berry will bring ideas from the committee to the planning meeting. Petrasek asked Berry to stay with the Committee. He appreciates Berry's enthusiasm and the way she works with the Committee. Petrasek would like her to keep it rolling.
- c. **Staff Update**- Schletty said that the City is working on the final trail design for Marthaler and Garlough Parks. The City Engineer and Schletty have been working with WSB on the design. He is hopeful that the design will be done by the end of the year. Construction may be as early as next year. He will bring the final design back to the committee. The City is still planning on opening the warming houses this year. It is dependent on having some snow and some cold weather. With the children being confined inside, the City wanted to make sure there was an opportunity to play in the parks in the winter, just as they did in the summer. To do this, staff decided to flood two more rinks this winter. This will enable children to skate in all the neighborhoods. Lighting timers as well as benches have been added to the skating rinks. Depending on the Covid-19 precautions, the City will also open two of the warming houses. (Harmon and Orme Park) These are the two busiest [outdoor] rinks in West St. Paul. Sam Murphy, the Recreation Programmer is working on some ideas to get kids busy over the winter. One is a sledding event in Marthaler Park. There will be a morning of sledding and then the group will head back to City Hall chambers to watch a movie and have some hot chocolate. There will also be a couple of sports camps as well.

Lynch said that it was good to see everyone without their masks at the meeting. He has had a couple of people approach him about the outdoor bathrooms. There will be more people using the trails this winter. Schletty said that he too has had requests for the outdoor restrooms. Normally the bathrooms are pulled in October; some are put back wherever there are outdoor skating rinks. There was a request to have one left in Marthaler and in Garlough. The location of their porta-potties is in the middle of the parks. Servicing the units would be very problematic access-wise

during the winter months. It would be tough to get serviced on a regular basis. Park Maintenance staff are trying to find a good solution to this.

Bellows said that a couple of ladies approached her and said how much they liked the display at the Art Park. Schletty said that there is now a permanent sign at the park. He would like to improve the lighting. It is tough to charge the solar battery during this time of year.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

The committee members adjourned at 6:51 pm. The next Park and Recreation Committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sharon G. Hatfield