

WEST ST. PAUL PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Parks & Rec. Members Present: Kirsten Mulraney, Jay DeLaRosby, Bonnie Bellows, Mike Petrasek, Sara Blair, Kelly Hagler, Kelly Gibbons
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

1. ROLL CALL

2. REVIEW/APPROVE MINUTES

Chair Petrasek called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Member Bellows made a motion to approve the February 3, 2021 meeting minutes. Member DeLaRosby seconded the motion. The motion carried. All Ayes.

3. NEW BUSINESS

a. Introduction of New Members, Sara Blair, Kelly Gibbons and Kelly Hagler

Member Hagler introduced herself to the committee. She lives in Ward 3 by Harmon Park. She has two little children. They use a lot of parks. Member Blair, a new resident to West St. Paul, (July 2020), said she loves the City so far. She wanted to get involved. She has a five-year old. She is super excited to have her mom talk about parks and playgrounds. Member Gibbons is Executive Director of SEIU, Local 284. She has been a resident of West St. Paul for about 20 years. She wanted an opportunity to be more involved in the community. Petrasek said that he remembered Gibbons; they were colleagues together in ISD 197.

b. Emerson Park Public Meeting

Assistant Parks Director Schletty reported that the Committee had talked about replacing the tennis court at Emerson Park with dedicated pickleball courts at a previous meeting. Currently there are no dedicated pickleball courts in West St. Paul. The YMCA closed and the City lost the pickleball space in their building. Mendota Heights and Inver Grove Heights both have dedicated courts; it is a very popular, growing sport. The Committee wants to provide this amenity to its residents as well. Schletty showed a redrawn outline for the proposed pickleball courts in Emerson Park. The Committee talked about having courts in either Emerson Park or Haskell Park. Both have single tennis courts. The tennis courts are used but not heavily used as other facilities like Marthaler and Weschke Parks. The pluses for Emerson Park are location (close to the street) and parking off the alley and on the street. Haskell Park's court is not very accessible; it is tucked away and hidden from view. Parking is also an issue for Haskell Park. Emerson Park's courts have not been resurfaced for many years; the resurfacing is scheduled for this year. It would be easy to repaint the court for pickleball after the surface has been repaved. It would not cost the City any additional funding; the "budget is there." Schletty said that notice has been sent out to the residents who live around Emerson Park to inform them of the improvements to the park and to invite them to the Committee meeting. Petrasek invited residents to speak before the Committee. Jason Smock of 1016 Gorman Avenue spoke. His house is on most of the diagrams that Schletty presented to the Committee. He lives north of the courts, literally ten feet away. He said he looks out at the courts daily; he reported that the basketball courts are used every day. Pickleball is interesting. However, people still use the courts for tennis. His concern is that the tennis community is not being addressed. He would like the Committee to consider this community as well. Dave Lynch of 1301 Ottawa spoke before the committee. He visited Emerson Park and had some questions. He wondered if the basketball court would be resurfaced. Schletty said yes. Lynch asked about rotating the pickleball courts. Schletty said potentially they could be rotated; it would be tight on the backlines. One reason Schletty did not rotate the proposed courts is that pickleball players prefer north-south orientation. There are issues with the east-west orientation because of

sunlight. Lynch asked about having a backboard for practice. Schletty will have to check about the backboard. Lynch said a backboard would be a good feature. Jane from 195 Stryker Ave came to speak. She has played pickleball at the Emerson court. She and her husband play about five times a week. She has noticed that the basketball court is usually used by skateboarders. This may be because basketball players are using the courts at the middle school. The middle school court is always being used. Neighbors that want to play tennis always prefer other tennis courts to Emerson's court. She does not know the reason for this. She is very excited for a pickleball court. Schletty had two emails from residents regarding the pickleball court. In the first email, the resident said they would love to have a pickleball court put into Emerson Park. They currently go to Inver Grove Heights to play pickleball. Inver Grove Heights has very nice but very crowded courts at North Valley Park. As a physical education teacher, they teach a pickleball unit. The proposed court would be nice for West St. Paul kids to play. The other email was from a resident who lives across the street from the park. The resident said the court is in disrepair. Tennis and pickleball were nearly impossible to play in 2020. Despite the condition of the court, the resident has consistently used the court for tennis. The resident and his mother tried to play pickleball and the ball bounced everywhere, and it was no fun. The resident has practiced tennis every evening with José. The resident is excited for the 2021 tennis season in Emerson Park. The resident has purchased a tennis ball machine; it should be fine on the cracked surface. A fresh surface would be amazing. The loss of the tennis court would be, "a bummer. Please, please, please keep the tennis court." There is land to the east of the basketball court that could be converted to a pickleball court. Petrasek opened the meeting for residents to call in. With no other comments from residents, the Committee discussed the proposed pickleball courts and the residents' comments. DeLaRosby commented about the removal of the tennis amenity from Emerson Park. The removal of an amenity from a park is a discussion that the Committee has all the time. The Committee wants to expand and democratize the park system and diversify the City's spaces and make them exciting to people of all walks of life. The Committee does not want to eliminate an amenity willy-nilly. The City is in a situation where there are no pickleball courts that meet the needs of the community. This has been a request for a number of years. The Committee is concerned about displacing tennis players at the Emerson Court. The research that has been done shows there are a number of tennis courts within the City. [With the addition of a pickleball court,] the City would serve as many people as possible and in as many ways as possible. Petrasek remarked that his first priority is to put people in the park. If he can put two pickleball courts into one tennis court, it would scratch that itch. He also makes decisions based on age. Recently the City has made Little League Fields and the Splash Pad. These amenities are geared for families and the younger folk. The City needs to appeal to pickleball-aged people as well. Petrasek also tries to make decisions geographically. He does not want to load the north end of the City and [ignore] the south end. He thinks of the City by Ward. This part of the City has been neglected a little bit. Bellows remarked that the physical education teacher is teaching pickleball to her students. The younger people are getting involved with this sport. It sounds to Bellows that not only older but younger people are playing. If the City can do something that can attract all ages, it is a really good thing. Schletty commented this is an easy way to install pickleball; the City was already scheduled to resurface the court. The City does not have the funding to build a new court. The City knew that something would have to be sacrificed in order to provide the pickleball amenity. Petrasek asked if it were possible get the process for the court up and running in mid-June. Schletty replied yes. Petrasek addressed residents and said that the Committee's recommendation is not final. The recommendation will come before Council. There is one more chance to voice your opinion.

A motion was made by DeLaRosby (based the previous conversations and weighing the pros and cons), to reconfigure the tennis courts at [Emerson Park] into dedicated

pickleball courts, a missing amenity for this community. Bellows seconded the motion. The motion carried. 7 ayes, 0 nays

Schletty said residents who feel passionately about this subject should contact their Ward representative directly. This topic will not be a Public Hearing for Council. It will probably be an agenda item.

4. OLD BUSINESS

a. Kennedy Playground Replacement

Schletty gave some background on the playground. Staff has money budgeted for playground replacement. There were three possible locations for replacement: Kennedy Park, Emerson Park and the park at the West St. Paul pool. The Committee decided that Kennedy Park would be the preferred location. The plan was to move the location of the playground and to add walking trails for easier accessibility of the park. Letters have been sent out to residents living near Kennedy Park. This included residents from both West St. Paul and St. Paul. One resident remarked that they would like the improvements as long as the improvements did not interfere with the sledding hill. There was one additional letter. The resident supports improvements to the park, but the new location of the playground is problematic. Locating the playground at the north end of the park would change the park from a multi-use park to a single use park. In the summer when there is no sledding, people will walk and run around the park because it has a nice flat surface. People play kickball, kick the can and other field games like badminton, soccer and football. The open flat green space is used for many things. The resident proposes leaving the playground where it is and making improvements to the turf in the flat space. Other improvements the resident suggested are tether ball and a gaga pit. Schletty showed a map of the park and the proposed location for the new playground and where the current playground is located, (one-half in West St. Paul and one-half in St. Paul, straddling the storm sewer pipe line.) The City of West St. Paul has maintained the “green space” border between cities; there is no agreement, however, on which city would maintain the border. The proposed trail would be an 8-foot asphalt trail that from Dodd Road connecting the sidewalk to the playground with in. It would give parents easy access with strollers to the new playground. There are some infrastructure concerns in the park. There is a storm sewer that runs directly under the current playground. It is a five-foot diameter pipe that carries storm water all the way to Harmon Park and distributes stormwater from West St. Paul down to the Mississippi River, (eventually). There is also another smaller storm sewer line that is connects perpendicularly to the first line. The City does not want to build playgrounds above the sewer lines. If there were ever an issue with the sewer lines, the playgrounds would need to be “torn up.” The present playground is built above the sewer line. Schletty is not sure why the playground was built in this location. It may have to do with its small size and/or minimal cost. West St. Paul staff has contacted the City of St. Paul to see if there are any plans for the storm sewer and right of way section that runs through the park. Schletty showed a picture of what the new playground would look like. It is a unique design that features a number of obstacles, monkey bars, climbing things, slides, climbing wall, and a swing set. Schletty asked if there were any questions. Bellows said she commiserating with the resident who wrote the letter to the Committee; it sounds like the flat park area is well used during the summer time. She is not sure what the answer is with the storm sewer situation. Schletty said if the playground is relocated to West St. Paul property there is no need to wait for a response from St. Paul. If the new playground were to be located over the storm sewer, West St. Paul would definitely need to wait for a reply from St. Paul. Member Mulraney asked if a lot of green space would be lost with the new playground location. Schletty said that the picture is deceptive. The new location would prevent games like kickball which would require a lot of field space. Bellows asked about the sledding hill and if children would run into the new playground with their sleds. Schletty said that Park Maintenance staff

have done measurements for the sledding hill. If there were any issues, they would build a protective ramp of snow to prevent safety issues with the playground. Petrasek said that there are a lot of options. Because of the complication with St. Paul, the Committee could postpone improvements in Kennedy Park. The City could also make the playground smaller. The concrete slab of the former warming house could be used for the new playground area. The Committee could also choose to replace the playground instead in Emerson Park. Schletty said, "Since you mentioned Emerson..." Schletty showed a map with the current playground at Emerson Park. The proposed playground would bump a little to the north, 7-8 feet. It would approach the edge of where the old rink used to be. The new playground would extend 2-3 feet beyond the present playground's eastern border. The new playground would not affect any other activity in the park. Hagler asked if there were a budget for a new playground every year. Schletty said that the City has a Capital Improvement Program (CIP); there is money in the CIP for new playground equipment for 2021, 2022 and 2023. After that, there is a gap of 6-7 years for new equipment. The replacements for the playgrounds have to be done in the next three years. Now that the snow is melting, the Parks Foreman has been performing the playground inspections, and they will be meeting soon to do a full inventory of the playgrounds. Schletty will bring the inventory of the playgrounds to the Committee next month. Petrasek has visited Kennedy Park recently; the playground equipment should be able to last another season. DeLaRosby said that this is the park in 40 Acres. The Committee said that there is a historical plaque explaining the history. The Committee is trying to incorporate education and/or history into the parks so that residents can feel connected to the space. This park is very relevant to the history and identity of West St. Paul. It would be good to build upon this. That is the reason the Committee talked about installing a pathway through the park. The Committee is trying to make the park more accessible. The Committee has talked about the neighborhood "pocket" parks that are nestled between residents' homes. The City does not want raucous activity in these parks. However, these parks spaces are not an extensions of the neighbors' backyards. They cannot dictate the use; the Committee has to investigate to see what is available in the area. Putting a playground in the space would not preclude other activities, and a pathway through the park may make the park more walkable. A small pickup game would still be possible in the park. One half mile north is Baker Park, which has fields and Humbolt to the east and Harmon to the south. They are all within a half mile and have field space. The time is right to replace the equipment. Petrasek asked if the neighbors know about the possible improvements. Schletty said that they have been informed and cones have been put out showing where the new playground would be constructed. Mulraney said it might be a good time to hit the pause button and find some kind of compromise for Kennedy Park. Maybe more natural elements and a smaller foot print should be considered. Berry said that the Council Rep who lives in 40 acres from the Ward II has not heard of any concerns. There were concerns on how similar the proposed playground is to the one in Cherokee Heights. There are some concerns about the accessibility on the playground itself. Berry's own concern is the timeline with the City of St. Paul and their response. Petrasek said he would like something done in 2021; costs will only go up after this year. It will not get cheaper waiting. However, "this is not Mike Petrasek's committee." Schletty said as of March 15, steel prices will go up and as of March 15 the price of the playground will go up. If the it is not ordered this week, the City is already looking at higher costs. Petrasek said, "No pressure!" Schletty went on to say, that if the Committee waits longer, the installation of the playground will be delayed even further in the construction season. Waiting a month could mean a longer delay of two months. DeLaRosby asked if there were a way to split up the playground equipment in the park. Schletty said that playgrounds these days require a lot more space for fall zones. For this park in particular, Schletty feels that the proposed layout is the most compact. Berry asked about the timing of the installation of the playground and the pickleball courts if the Committee were to choose Emerson Park. This would be a whole new rebranding for Emerson Park. Schletty said

that the Committee could even choose new colors for the courts to match the playground. The courts and the playground would not necessarily be done together but they would both be done this summer. Mulraney asked about the age of the equipment at Emerson and Kennedy. Schletty that the equipment was installed at roughly the same time, 2004. Petrask asked about the desire of the Committee. Hagler said that it would be economically responsible to make a decision now. Petrask agreed. Mulraney said if the City were to overhaul Emerson, it would be a good use of the funds. The Committee can look at Kennedy next year, get more feedback, and find a way to maximize the green space. Green space is important but the City has a lot of green space elsewhere. The Committee would not want to make a decision based on only a few people's opinions that live there. The park is not just about them but about a whole lot of other people that will use the park. DeLaRosby asked if this was an either/or situation. Schletty said that another option is to do nothing this year and install two playgrounds next year. Or the Committee could install smaller playgrounds in Emerson and Kennedy parks. Berry asked about putting in a play area with natural features like logs in Kennedy Park. Thompson Park is installing this type of park.

DeLaRosby made a motion to recommend that the City “put the focus on Emerson Park,” and put a new playground in Emerson Park, and that the Committee revisit Kennedy Park at a later meeting to discuss the selection of playground equipment for accessible features and/or natural features. Mulraney seconded the motion. Discussion followed. Petrask asked if this recommendation moves now to City Council. Schletty said that it does not need to move to Council because the funding for the playground has already been approved by Council. The City has received a bid for the playground equipment. The vendor the City is using is on a State bid. The City has the best price possible. The most difficult decision the Committee is making tonight is the color choice for the playground. Schletty could send a color palette to Committee Members if they do not like the color that chosen for the proposed playground. Members deferred the color choice to city staff. The motion carried. 7 ayes, 0 nays

b. Marthaler Park Redevelopment

Schletty suggested tabling the discussion for next month when other Committee Members return to the meeting. Bellows asked if the Harmon Park Neighborhood Center was used frequently during the winter. Schletty replied yes. Bellows said that this would influence decisions made for the Marthaler Park Redevelopment. Schletty mentioned the trail project; the bid opening was last week. Seven companies bid for the project, and the City received a bid that was lower than the City estimate. City Engineer Beckwith added that the trail construction is moving forward. Dakota County is funding the majority of the project. It must pass the County Board first on March 16. The trail should be done by this year. Bellows asked if the County would pay for the trailhead building. Schletty said that the City is hoping they will pay [at least partially] for the building. They have committed to the funding for both the trail and the building previously. Bellows asked if there will be additional shelters in the park with picnic tables. Schletty said yes; there will be smaller picnic shelters spread out through the park. They could be used by families or smaller groups informally. They would be available on a first-come first-served basis. The shelters would be smaller like the ones at Oakdale Park or at the Sports Complex. The plan for the big shelter would be for only one group to rent, so that the park would not be over programmed. Schletty will put together more concrete budget numbers for the new redevelopment timeline. Bellows asked about which segment of the redevelopment should be prioritized. Schletty suggested constructing the new parking lot first. Bellows said that the parking lot would include the boardwalk and trails. Schletty said that this makes sense. Petrask asked if the County is doing the trail head. Schletty said that the County does want Marthaler Park to be a trailhead location, and that they would provide funding for it. The building would be separate from the picnic shelter. Schletty said that in the packet for

tonight's meeting was a copy of the rough draft of the Master Plan for the Marthaler Park redevelopment. It was never formally adopted by Council. It was not finished. The Committee needs to finish the draft and get it formalized. Next month the [full] Committee can work on getting the draft done. Another option for next month's meeting is to have a work session instead of a full Committee meeting.

5. **OTHER**

- a. **Skate Park Subcommittee Update-** Mulraney said that there has been some activity on the West St. Paul Neighborhood page. It is "totally unprovoked" by Mulraney. She did issue an impromptu survey. One of the options was "You may not use the skate park, but would your kids use it? Over 155 people responded yes. Twenty-six people responded that they travel outside the City to use a skate park. Nine people are unsure and one person said they do not want a skate park. Petrasek said there is always one. Mulraney said the survey is less than 24 hours old. She will work with Robin Gulley for outreach. She has received a lot of response from people who wanted the skate park in the past including past Committee Members. There is a lot of public interest. Petrasek said there is momentum behind the skate park. There was a prior skate park subcommittee. Schletty said that funding was an issue at the time and that the Harmon Park location fell through. Petrasek added that the survey response also included enthusiasm for pickleball.
- b. **City Council Updates-** Berry said that Council voted to add two more members to the Parks and Recreation Committee. Lynch and Gausman will be back with the Committee in April.
- c. **Staff Updates-** Petrasek tried to adjourn the Committee meeting, and Schletty said, "Hey!" Schletty reported that the YMCA will continue running the pool for the City. Most likely the pool will be up and running this summer. Registrations for summer programs opened; the number of registrations was unbelievable. Over \$5,500 was brought in one day. People should not wait to sign up for the summer programs. The Covid-19 restrictions are still in place and there are limits on many of the programs for this summer. The Egg Hunt is active on line as well. The event is for Saturday, April 3. 9am- 11 am. Committee Members are encouraged to volunteer. Schletty will send out reminders. Schletty said that the Park Department is looking for Summer Temporary workers in both Recreation and Park Maintenance. Positions are open online. The minimum age is 16 years old.

6. **ADJOURN**

The committee members adjourned at 7:08 pm. The next Parks and Recreation Committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, April 13, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sharon G. Hatfield