

**PARKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES**

**MONDAY MARCH 22, 2021**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Peterson called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Committee Members present: Scott Creighton, Kristi DeCamillis, Ken Halverson Scott Marotz, Jack Merwin, Doug Peterson, and Laura Talvitie.

Also present: Recreation and Communication Coordinator Corrie Scott, and Streets, Parks, and Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels.

**3. ADOPT AGENDA**

Committee Member Marotz motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Committee Member Talvitie, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Committee Member Talvitie motioned to accept the February 22, 2021 Parks Advisory Committee minutes as presented. Seconded by Committee Member Marotz, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

**5. BUSINESS**

**5A. CODE REVISION TASK FORCE – MEMBER SELECTION**

Scott reviewed that the Code Revision Task Force is in need of a Parks Advisory Committee liaison. She asked the Committee to choose a Committee member to serve on the Code Revision Task Force.

Jack Merwin volunteered to be the PAC liaison. Creighton stated that he would be an alternate if other members aren't able to attend meetings. Scott confirmed that Jack Merwin will be the Parks Committee liaison for the Code Revision Task Force and that Scott Creighton will be his alternate if he for some reason is unable to attend meetings.

## **5B. BROM PARK QUESTIONNAIRE DISCUSSION**

Scott reviewed a draft questionnaire that will be mailed out to residents living near the current City owned parcel off of Brom Lane during the month of April. She asked the Committee to review the questionnaire and provide direction.

Halverson asked if a note should be made in the questionnaire about the park potentially being handicap accessible as there were discussions of potentially applying for grants that support handicap accessible park equipment. Marotz recommended including the words 'handicap accessible' along with the Astroturf option on the questionnaire. Halverson asked if the City has any other parks that are considered handicap accessible. Michels stated that Sanford Select Acres is handicap accessible because it has concrete all around the park equipment making it easier to access.

Merwin asked if there is a wildlife education option included. Scott confirmed that there is an educational center option that could potentially include wildlife educational information. Peterson asked when the questionnaire will be sent out. Scott stated that she plans to get it mailed out in April. Merwin asked if questionnaires have been given out for feedback prior to the construction of other City parks. Scott stated that she isn't aware of other parks questionnaires, but that questionnaire regarding streets projects have been sent out. Marotz stated that in his time on the Parks Committee, he hasn't seen any other questionnaires go out. Michels stated that because the City already owns a parcel that has limitations for equipment and layout, it is important to get feedback from the neighborhood to see what is valued in order to make the park effective for the area that it will serve.

Talvitie recommended notifying residents of the costs for certain park equipment in an effort to put into perspective how expensive some of the equipment can be. Halverson stated that information on costs can be controversial. He recommended abstaining from that type of conversation unless prompted. Peterson stated that displaying costs of certain park amenities would be more important if a park is being constructed in phases. Halverson stated that another instance it would make sense to bring up costs is if grants are involved.

Talvitie stated that multiple residents have complained about the zip line being broken at Sanford Select Acres Park. Michels stated that the zip line broke in November 2020 and that the equipment necessary to fix the zip line was covered under warranty, but that it is on backorder. Peterson stated that it is important for the Parks Committee to have information on parks equipment that isn't working because Committee Members are considered liaisons to the City's park system. Talvitie recommended that if residents ask questions that a Committee Member doesn't have the answer to, then they should refer them to Michels.

Halverson stated that there are issues at Sanford Select Acres Park regarding vandalism and individuals who intimidate families from attending the park after it gets dark out. Marotz stated that part of that problem could be the vacant land near it and that he sees the

problem solving itself once more houses are built near the park and it becomes less isolated of an area. Halverson commented that he believes the broken zip line was likely caused by intentional misuse. Merwin asked if it would help preserve the zip line if staff took the equipment down in the winter months. Michels stated that it is not likely to help as the equipment was damaged prior to winter months in 2020. He stated that it was likely broken due to misuse. Creighton asked if the City notifies residents when certain park equipment is broken. Scott stated that she has the ability to update the park amenities subpage of the website when a specific park has broken equipment. She stated that she would rather post this type of content on the website rather than Facebook as it could spur negative discussion on the City's page.

Merwin recommended limiting the number of amenities that residents can choose to their top four favorites due to the limited size of the City owned parcel. Marotz recommended rephrasing the question so that it is asking the residents to rank their top favorite amenities. Scott confirmed that she will rephrase the question regarding amenities so that residents can rank all listed amenities on a scale from 1-10. DeCamillis recommended adding a separate option labeled 'handicap accessible,' because AstroTurf doesn't clearly represent handicap accessibility to the average resident reading the questionnaire. Talvitie recommended also adding an option for park equipment, such as swing sets, specifically being handicap accessible. Scott confirmed that she will include two separate options: 1) ADA Compliant Surfacing (i.e. AstroTurf), and 2) Handicap Accessible Park Equipment.

#### **5C. PARK BROCHURE DISCUSSION**

Scott reviewed that she created a brochure for the Parks Advisory Committee in 2018 to hand out at events and to keep in the lobby of City Hall. The information in the brochure includes a list of parks, information on the newest park in Big Lake, meeting information, a list of Committee Members, and information on the Community Gardens. Scott asked the Committee to review the current brochure and recommend changes to the information included.

Peterson asked when it is likely that Brom Park would be completed. Michels stated that the biggest factor is completing wetland surveys with the DNR. After these surveys are completed it can be decided which equipment is feasible for the space. Halverson asked when the DNR wetland survey process will be completed. Scott stated that she will get an update from City Engineer Layne Otteson and bring it to the April Parks Committee Meeting. Scott also confirmed that she will keep the brochure as it is presented for the Chamber Community Fair taking place on May 8, and once a timeline is set for Brom Park, it can be added to the brochure at that time.

#### **5D. STAFF UPDATES**

Scott reviewed the status of various projects regarding the community's parks, trails, 2021 and programming.

Talvitie stated that she reached out to Big Lake Ambassadors regarding the Fairy House event and that they seemed interested, but that she hasn't heard back with a confirmation. DeCamillis asked about the Fairy House event. Scott reviewed that the purpose behind the event to help Public Works staff and to limit litter on the McDowall Trail System by only allowing residents to place fairy houses on the trail system during a weeklong annual event. DeCamillis stated that in previous years she has found a lot of garbage that has fallen off of various fairy houses that is dangerous to wildlife. Scott stated that the Committee is planning to put emphasis on using natural items in the fairy houses in an attempt to reduce potential litter. Talvitie stated that she will follow up with the Ambassadors and update the Committee in April.

Marotz asked about food trucks at Lakeside Park and how frequently the City will be offering this option. Scott stated that she will start in 2021 with Saturdays and Sundays and that she will only allow 1-2 Big Lake based food trucks at a time. She stated that there will be a clause included that allows for City staff to cancel food trucks up to two weeks in advance if there are issues with limited parking or significant litter at Lakeside Park similar to the 2020 summer season. Marotz asked which months food trucks will be allowed to sell at Lakeside Park. Scott stated she will start with June-August in 2021 and go from there. Marotz stated that he expects questions from residents once food trucks start to set up at Lakeside Park. Scott stated that she doesn't plan to advertise the food truck schedule as Lakeside Park is already busy on weekends and she believes that the food trucks will do their own advertising. Talvitie asked Merwin if Lupulin advertises their food trucks as she noticed that they tend to be busy. Merwin stated that they put a food truck schedule on their website and that the individual food trucks generally advertise on social media as well.

Scott stated that many of Big Lake's previous food trucks have moved to brick and mortar or are no longer setting up their food trucks. She stated that this limits the food trucks available for scheduling because she has been directed by City Council to only allow Big Lake food trucks at Lakeside Park. Halverson stated that the reason for this is because food trucks that aren't from Big Lake do not pay property taxes to the communities that they travel to. Talvitie asked if food trucks need to pay fees to set up in Big Lake. Scott stated that there are Mobile Food Unit Licenses that food trucks need to obtain to set up in Big Lake, but that Lakeside Park has a separate licensing process that was very costly in previous years. Due to the high costs to obtain licensing, the City hasn't had any interested food trucks until recent years.

Creighton stated that the fees for parking at Lakeside Park are very low. Halverson stated that in 2020 there was a large increase in the number of vehicles towed from Lakeside Park. Creighton stated that he specifically believes the cost for seasonal passes is too low compared to the daily fees. Marotz stated that the idea behind keeping seasonal passes low is that mainly residents obtain the seasonal passes and that individuals coming from outside communities will then have to pay a higher price to park daily. Creighton stated that parking fees in other communities charge hourly rates that are much higher than what is currently being charged at Lakeside Park. Halverson stated that there aren't any communities within 100 miles of Big Lake that charge for parking at a City park. Creighton

stated that he feels anyone parking at Lakeside Park should be charged the same fee. Creighton stated that the Police Department is paid too much to monitor Lakeside Park parking violations. Talvitie stated that there are residents who support and do not support the previous parking structure and the current parking structure.

Halverson stated that the Police Department is often being paid overtime and holiday pay to monitor Lakeside Park and issue tickets. He stated that in previous years park attendants were paid a low amount to take payment for parking fees. Creighton stated that he prefers park attendants as he felt it was more organized than with the parking kiosk. Halverson stated that there are loopholes to park in a stall that was previously paid for by another vehicle owner. Creighton stated that he isn't sure how much was invested in the kiosk, but that he is unsure of its success. Marotz stated that an option to solve the issues with parking at Lakeside Park is to remove the kiosk and not charge any parking fees. He stated that the impact on taxpayers to make up for the revenue generated by the parking kiosk would likely be minimal. Halverson stated that the revenue generated in 2020 from the parking kiosk is what made it possible to hire an additional full-time police officer.

Michels stated that prior to the installation of the parking kiosk attendance at Lakeside Park was decreasing annually. He stated that in some years the parking fees were not covering the costs to employ parking attendants which sparked conversation on how to recoup those losses. Michels stated that the year the kiosk was implemented was exponentially busier than in previous years. He stated that because of this, he recommends having a backup plan to be able to cancel food trucks in 2021 in the case that it is as busy this year as it was in 2020. Scott stated that the Police Department has been in support of the kiosk system since its inception and that regardless of the parking kiosk, the Police Department has a frequent presence at Lakeside Park. She stated that 2020 was an atypical year and that how it operated in 2020 is not an accurate representation of whether or not the parking kiosk is successful during a normal year. Michels stated that most complaints regarding the parking kiosk took place at the beginning of the year and that it came from lack knowledge on how to use the equipment. Scott stated that staff is continuing to make changes to the parking kiosk system to ensure that it runs smoothly in future years. One of these changes includes changing seasonal passes from stickers to window hangers that are more easily identified by Police when monitoring the park.

Scott asked the Committee what next steps they would like to see from staff regarding the Lakeside Park kiosk. Creighton stated that he would like to see this taken to a Council Workshop. Marotz recommended that Creighton attend a workshop as an individual resident. He stated that the Parks Committee doesn't seem to have a consensus on what direction they would like to go regarding the parking fees at Lakeside Park. Scott recommended that Creighton speak with City staff that participated in implementing the parking kiosk project to get more information prior to attending a Council meeting. Talvitie stated that in 2020 she felt there was more of a presence from the Police Department at Lakeside Park and that she appreciated that they were there. Creighton stated that he does want to see a police presence at the park, but that their attention shouldn't be on parking violations.

## **6. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' REPORTS**

Halverson stated that he is meeting with City staff to look into the potential acquisition of land in Big Lake for softball fields. Marotz stated that the Planning Commission recently reviewed the concept plan for CommonBond. He stated that there are some residents that attended meetings and do not want to see certain parcels in MarketPlace rezoned to medium-high density residential. Marotz stated that the Comprehensive Plan was approved by Council, however, and that it guides those parcels to be rezoned. Marotz stated that it would not be wise to deny any formal application for this land as it could be a legal liability for the City.

Halverson stated that the BLEDA met regarding the City's rebranding project and that they are still finalizing some logo options. Peterson stated that he would like to see the PAC start meeting at parks starting at the April meeting. Creighton recommended meeting at the City owned parcel off of Brom Lane. Marotz recommended meeting at River Oaks Park. The Committee agreed to meet at River Oaks Park at the upcoming April 26, 2020 meeting, weather permitting. Michels recommended that Committee Members bring chairs as seating is limited.

## **7. OTHER**

Michels stated that Public Works has started the process of inspecting playgrounds.

## **8. ADJOURN**

Committee Member Marotz motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m. Seconded by Committee Member Creighton, unanimous ayes, meeting adjourned.