

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rich Bluma, Tiffany Bushland, Bruce Cantor, George Foulkes, Elizabeth Griffin, George Hagemann and Peter May

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

GUEST(S) PRESENT: Jamie Marshall, Friends of the Arts

STAFF PRESENT: Lisa Abernathy, Recreation Supervisor, Debra Heiser, Director of Engineering, Jacqueline Larson, Communications and Marketing Manager, Meg McMonigal, Principal Planner, Jennifer Monson, Planner, Mark Oestreich, Manager of Westwood Hills Nature Center, Cindy Walsh, Director of Operations and Recreation, Jason West, Recreation Superintendent and Stacy Voelker, Recording Secretary

## **1. Call to Order**

Commissioner Bushland called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

## **2. Presentations – Friends of the Arts (*Jamie Marshall*)**

Jamie Marshall, Executive Director of Friends of the Arts, introduced himself to the Commission. Friends of the Arts, Mr. Marshall explained, does a great deal of partnering with the City of St. Louis Park, especially events held at the ROC and Wolfe Park.

*Arts for Life* Scholarships are offered through Friends of the Arts for funding youth who would like to take lessons, dance classes, etc. and is based on financial needs. Scholarships are reviewed and rewarded quarterly. This program, Mr. Marshall advised, is promoted at community events, such as the Community Link event. Commissioner Foulkes asked how many scholarships are generally awarded. Mr. Marshall advised they receive an average of 10-15 applicants each quarter with 6 – 8 being awarded, depending on the amount of the request. Last year they had 56 applicants and were able to award approximately \$5,000 annually. Historically they fund approximately half of requests received.

Friends of the Arts offers a *Gift of Music* program where donated instruments are repaired and offered to students in school. The program is a partnership with the school district, a strong program and they continue to look for ways to promote and collect instruments.

Mr. Marshall advised 2017 was the second year of the *Our Town Sings* program held in Wolfe Park. One of the events was moved to the ROC due to rain. The ROC was a great location with over 250 people in attendance. The program produced performers from various areas of music from the Twin Cities. It was a great way to partner with organizations and use the Wolfe Park Amphitheater, Mr. Marshall indicated. In 2018 FOTA is moving forward with *Unity Sings*, which builds on the most successful elements of *Our Town Sings*. They are working to bring various singers together in the ROC on May 22 to sing together and experience a sense of

community in St. Louis Park through song. If it is successful, it may become an annual event. Commissioner May inquired on the acoustics in the ROC. Mr. Marshall indicated the outdoor, covered space was fine for their event.

Mr. Marshall advised Friends of the Arts is exploring an exciting opportunity for Friends of the Arts titled *Arts Lab*. He has attended learning retreats from Arts Midwest, along with 12 other communities, to learn about leveraging the creative community within an area. *Arts Lab* is also a way to leverage the economy by bringing people into the community. This project will provide free workshops for participants to explore their art form and see what it's like to be an artist. This may provide other opportunities for artists also. *Arts Lab* is still in the development phase.

Friends of the Arts continues to be a strong partner with the City of St. Louis Park. Friends of the Arts assists in organizing the City-School calendar, Arts and Culture Grants, public art in City Hall and others. They are also working on an exhibit with a partnership with Jean Stevens Gallery so artists can feel like they have a home in St. Louis Park.

Friends of the Arts 2017 budget was \$85,000 which included five concerts in the park. A good portion of the budget goes toward artists in the form of grants.

Commissioners and Mr. Marshall traded thanks.

### **3. Approval of Minutes**

#### **a. November 29, 2017**

Commissioner May requested clarification on page 5, last sentence in the first paragraph. The sentence should read "...Aquila fields two and three but lights will be changed to LED." *Commissioner Cantor made a motion to approve the minutes of November 29, 2017 as amended. Commissioner May seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 7 – 0.*

### **4. Business**

#### **a. Comprehensive Plan Discussion (Jennifer Monson & Meg McMonigal)**

Ms. Monson, Planner, indicated a lot of demographic and data collection has been completed. The timeline of the Comprehensive Plan was shown in a presentation to the Commission, along with what's included in the Comprehensive Plan and ways to utilize the information.

Four neighborhood planning workshops were held throughout the City in November with a total of 130 participants. An internet based survey was also available which had approximately 1,000 responders. Staff is currently working on tabulating the data from that survey. Ms. Monson reviewed various areas that pertained to Parks and Recreation, along with the input received from the workshops.

Where are we going? Ms. Monson indicated the city has a denser, more diverse and aging population. Staff took the existing goals and policies and rewrote them as to where they think parks and natural resources are going for the 2040 comp plan. Items included expanding parks (if available), opportunities for the 40<sup>th</sup> & France land, the opportunity

for a new community park should either golf courses be redeveloped, connect existing parks through trails, continue shared use of parks, continue partnerships, privately owned public parks, open space and regional trails. Other items mentioned are to review park and trail dedication fees, partner with other public improvement projects to provide recreational opportunities and partner with other entities for natural resources and recreational opportunities.

Ms. Monson and the Commission reviewed preserving park assets which include implementing the master plan at Westwood Hills Nature Center, staying on the park improvement schedule, promoting volunteer opportunities and providing programs for all ages and diversity through partnerships.

In the Natural Resource section, diversifying tree species is listed along with removing invasive species, offering opportunities for residents, and creating a natural environment that's diverse and sustainable. The Healthy Living recommendations includes community gardening and partnerships and to look at health holistically. All items listed will be viewed through a Race and Equity lens.

City-wide demographics, population growth, age of individuals, household income, etc. was provided to Commissioners by Ms. Monson. The information was taken from the 2010 census or the 2011-2015 American Community survey. Members viewed a map of each neighborhood and amenities. Ms. Monson indicated all information is on the city's website.

Ms. Monson asked the Commissioners to email her with any additional information they would like to add and provided her email address. She will have a draft available in the next few weeks and will email to members for review prior to the April 4 joint meeting with the Planning Commission. Ms. McMonigal advised the final plan will go before the Planning Commission in June for their approval.

Members thanked Ms. Monson and Ms. McMonigal.

**b. Louisiana Oaks Bridge Project and 2018 Projects** (*Debra Heiser*)

Debra Heiser, Engineering Director, introduced herself to the Commission and indicated Engineering has a lot of upcoming projects in the next two years. The Commissioners viewed upcoming pavement management and regional projects. The city and MnDOT work in partnership as roads in the city could be owned by MnDOT or the City. Engineering has a commitment to sustainability: to move traffic efficiently, LED lighting, etc. Roundabouts are great for traffic, pedestrians and bikes as people are going slower and all are going in the same direction. The Louisiana Avenue roundabouts have reduced accidents by 30% since installed.

The city has 25 bridges (excluding park bridges) that are inspected annually. Commissioners viewed the Louisiana Avenue Bridge Rehabilitation project as the bridge over Minnehaha Creek needs to be rebuilt. Funds from the state will assist in replacing the bridge in 2019. As part of this project, staff is researching reconstructing the corridor and seeing how the bikeways and sidewalks fit into the overall plan. Commissioners viewed a preliminary design which will be brought to the City Council in February. Part

of the project is to provide a safe connection for trail users to cross Louisiana Avenue and to develop connections to transit. To accomplish this, the proposal includes a trail built under Louisiana Avenue. This is an \$11 million project. Phase I will be from the hospital entrance to Excelsior Boulevard; Phase II and Phase III will be constructed sometime in the next 10 years. Need to stage phases appropriately to ensure access to hospital at all times. The bridge will be closed July through November 2019. The project will start in July due to creek spawning times. The commission had a question regarding the future of the trail along Minnehaha Creek. The city will discuss with Minnehaha Creek Watershed District.

Ms. Heiser explained how it is determined what bikeway design is best suited for specific roads. Lower volume roads installed share the road for bicycles (less than 1,000 vehicles on road); on-street bike lanes are for higher volume roads and protective bicycle facility is for even higher volume roads. Louisiana Avenue has approximately 16,000 vehicles which protected bicycle facility is recommended. By putting in a protected bicycle facility, there is a dedicated space for bicycles and dedicated space for a pedestrians with green space separating the two. Staff is proposing green grass medians which have a potential for landscaping and public art. Storm water treatment is also being researched in that area as all water from the road enters Minnehaha Creek.

Commissioner Hagemann provided feedback on how bike lane will work in a round-about.

Ms. Heiser went on to explain the proposed modifications for the Wooddale bridge over Highway 7. This project will widen the bridge deck to better accommodate bicycles and pedestrians, and improve the sightlines at the ramp. Also, as a part of the Southwest LRT Project. There will be a tunnel installed so the regional trail would go under Wooddale Avenue and the trail would go over Belt Line Boulevard. Construction on Blake Road begins this year and partnerships were discussed. Texas Avenue (south of Highway 7) will also include bike lanes with a connection to Lake Street.

Commissioners viewed the 2018 pavement management project. When developing plans for projects, Engineering looks at everything in the right-of-way, to determine what needs to be replaced.

Ms. Walsh advised watermain projects are major and may take the entire season to complete. Watermain breaks are prominent with old watermains. Staff reviews the age of the infrastructure below the street when looking at pavement management projects. Also, when asphalt is ground up from one area, it is used in another to save money and for better sustainability.

Ms. Heiser mentioned they also review active transportation connections; they reviewed existing sidewalks and identified gaps. They review all things that may be impacted in the right of way including trees, retaining walls, landscaping, etc. A public hearing will be held to recommend sidewalks.

The City Council also asked Engineering to look at traffic, which is part of the neighborhood livability component. A traffic study was completed using various traffic management techniques to see how they worked. Traffic data was collected and modeled what could address concerns. Traffic control recommendations will be brought to Council. The Commissioners and Ms. Heiser discussed the difference between traffic circles and roundabouts.

The City is committed to making quality infrastructure. Residents are not assessed for any of these projects, Ms. Heiser advised, which changed approximately five to six years ago with the initiation of Connect the Park.

Commissioners reviewed and provided feedback. Members and Ms. Heiser traded thanks.

**c. Communication Plan for Westwood Hills Nature Center Project** (*Jacqueline Larson*)

Jacqueline Larson, Communications and Marketing Manager, distributed the communications plan summary for the Westwood Hills Nature Center Project. The opportunity was outlined and the plan is to build awareness to gain support among various community groups. Also, staff is providing an organized and public process encouraging community engagement. Staff wants to ensure a thorough public process.

The plan was reviewed and Commissioners were asked to provide feedback. The plan can change as the project continues.

Ms. Larson said videos are being created to show what users have experienced at Westwood Hills Nature Center. There will be a two minute video and a 60 second video, which are interview style. The shorter video will be used specifically for social media while the longer video can be used in a variety of applications. The company hired to create the videos did similar work for the St. Louis Park School District referendum that passed successfully last fall.

Users of the Nature Center, volunteers, parents of kids and neighborhood members were contacted, Ms. Larson advised. Commissioners suggested contacting college age kids, which may have been impacted by the Nature Center, visitors with disabilities, preschool kids, birding groups, culture diversity, etc.

Ms. Walsh asked Commissioners to share any additional thoughts with Mr. West, Mr. Oestreich and herself. Members thanked Ms. Larson.

**Westwood Hills Nature Center Update:**

Commissioner Hagemann has been gaining factual data to pass along to individuals that are opposed to the project. He met with Tim Simon, Chief Financial Officer, to obtain answers regarding the funding of this project, as well as other Capital Improvement Projects. Mr. Simon provided funding information, including bonding information, as it relates to the Nature Center and other projects. The City can bond over \$100 million dollars and is estimated to be around 18% of its bonding ability. This is the highest it will be in the current 10 year projections. In approximately two years, the outstanding debt will start to go down, even if all projects are approved. In less than 10 years, the

outstanding debt will be less than it is now, even if all projects, including the Westwood Hills Nature Center project are approved. Another issue that was brought up is this project would inhibit the ability to deal with low income housing and arts. It was stated the bond is for a specific project and can only be used for that; it cannot be used for other items. Commissioner Hagemann feels the information getting disseminated is not always completely accurate. Commissioner Hagemann created talking points for members on the financial aspect of the project. The City Council has approved moving forward with the project (which only requires a simple majority), Commissioner Hagemann indicated, now a super majority (6 of 7) of votes are needed to move forward with the bonding to support the project. The bonds would be for 2019, when construction would begin.

Commissioners viewed the revised plan, which is not the final design, of the Nature Center building. The footprint was reduced slightly to reduce the amount of the project, Mr. West indicated. The City Council wants to ensure there is enough gathering space to relax without being in a multi-use classroom. The gathering space was expanded and one of the classrooms reduced in size to ensure an adequate gathering area. Maximizing space is a priority. Staff has met with Split Rock Studio, the exhibit designers, and are pleased with the progress. When available, Commissioners may view pictures and diagrams of the exhibits at an upcoming meeting.

Commissioner Griffin encouraged that since the Commission is supporting this project, they should talk to their Council members, friends, neighbors and attend the public meetings. Commissioners discussed and suggested reaching out to schools and the school board to gain support for the project since every child in the school district goes to WHNC as a part of their science curriculum.

Commissioner Griffin inquired if the project has been presented to the School Board. Ms. Walsh indicated staff would be happy to do that if the School Board was interested. CEAC has asked for a presentation and Jason West and Mark Oestreich will be presenting there on Monday, February 12. Commissioner Griffin suggested having a table or display at the upcoming school conferences to explain the project. Members reviewed various ways to provide factual information on the bonding and project.

*It was moved by Commissioner Foulkes and seconded by Commissioner Cantor to approve the Resolution of Support regarding the Westwood Hills Nature Center Project. The entire Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) voted unanimously in support of the Westwood Hills Nature Center project process and design schematic. The motion passed 7 – 0. The resolution is as follows*

***Resolution of Support:***

*By unanimous vote the Park and Recreation Advisory Commission whole heartedly supports recognition of the Westwood Hills Nature Center master plan, the needs assessment process and to that end the needs driven schematic plan now in the process of being finalized.*

*The outcome from the needs analysis process showed need and demand for:*

- *Additional, and more flexible, programming space*
- *Additional adequate space for exhibits and exhibit storage and planning*
- *Adult usage both during and without programming*
- *Active and passive programming for all ages*
- *Separation of program space from common space*
- *Better facilities for outside users and after-hour building users*
- *Community space for public or private meetings, events, activities, celebrations*
- *Programming space for up to 150 participants*
- *Reconfigurable rooms*
- *Zero energy (Council request)*

*The plan is in line with both needs, financial analysis by staff (including the City's Chief Financial Officer) and PRAC's unanimous opinion that the cost is justified within the context of other city buildings, similar nature center buildings and the future use(s) expected across its lifespan. Further, the plan in no way restricts the ability of Council to respond to other current or future issues.*

The Commission strongly urges that all parties give their unbiased support and follow through to the remaining planning, public process and decision making steps.

Mr. West indicated public meeting will begin February 21 or 22 and February 28 or March 1. Official dates will be emailed to members; members were encouraged to attend the public meetings.

**d. Annual Meeting, Report and Goals with Council**

Commission members reviewed the report and goals; all approved.

**e. Naming Policy Request**

Ms. Griffin provided the Commission with an overview of the meetings held with the group that would like a field renamed. The request was to have a field at Carpenter or Rotary Park and rename it Marty Hammer field. The subcommittee suggested renaming a softball field at Dakota Park. Marty Hammer's supporters were fine with that suggestions. The requested group has not raised any funding but hope they can raise \$50,000 toward the renaming project. It was suggested the group attend the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission meeting in March to present their request and obtain a vote from the Commission. The requested group's goal is to have the renaming complete and a ribbon cutting on Mr. Hammer's birthday in July.

**f. Dakota Park Lights Update**

Ms. Walsh indicated they would like to add field lights to the Dakota Park fields. With lights, the adult softball league can play longer as well as youth football.

**5. Staff Communication**

**a. Program Update**

Lisa Abernathy, Recreation Supervisor introduced herself to the Commission. Her focus is on youth programs, family programs and special events. Ms. Abernathy provided specifics on activities she oversees as follows:

The 2017 Ugly Sweater Dash was held in December with 171 participants. They received donations to raffle during the event.

The warming house season begin in mid-December and has only been closed one or two days this winter. People enjoy the rinks regardless of the weather. Rentals are lower this year but neighborhoods have held events. Warming houses are open until February 19 this year.

A Saturday Sampler was held on the first Saturday in January for individuals to sample some classes offered in spring. The free Sampler included Yoga, Fun Functional Fitness and an Express Circuit Workout. This was the fourth year it was held.

Ms. Abernathy is currently working on the arts and culture grant process. The grants have been chosen for 2018; are reviewing the application and scoring process for 2019. Applications are available late May for the following year.

Safety Camp will be held every other year, Ms. Abernathy advised. Initially the program was held annually then participation numbers lowered so decided to offer the program every other year. Commissioners learned what Safety Camp offers and were advised a grant from AAA has been received to assist with expenses in the past.

The playground and preschool playground programs are very successful. Staff is thankful to the St. Louis Park Community and Youth Development Fund, and others, for donations received and make it possible.

Junior leaders are volunteers ages 13 – 15 to assist with the summer parks playground program. In 2017, there were approximately 40 junior leaders. Many junior leaders return annually become playground leaders when they turn 16.

Ms. Abernathy mentioned ongoing programs that she oversees which include art programs, youth dance programs, younger kids dance programs, adult fitness programs and the Little Tot Playtime. Little Tot Playtime has been very well attended and intend to move program to enjoy the turf in the ROC in April.

The Lions Club Egg Hunt, sponsored by the Lions Club, will be held in the ROC on March 31. The annual event was previously held in the Middle School.

The department will participate in the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Community Link event held the third Wednesday in August. This is the second year it will be held in the ROC with the option to use the Aquatic Park after hours. Community Link is an outreach event for residents to access resources (i.e. free haircuts, back pack giveaway, food shelf services, etc.).

Ms. Abernathy advised this year she is learning the playground replacement program and participating in the entire process. Mr. West indicated postcards were sent to the neighborhoods three weeks prior to a meeting that is held for residents to choose their playground. Demographic cards are also available at all public meetings.

A new fall event, Teen ROC, had four high school bands play for half-an-hour each in the ROC last year. Lights and sound people were provided; the bands only had to plug in and play. Due to the success of the event, it may be offered in the summer also. Ms. Abernathy has completed the summer concert line-up and is working on hiring summer staff.

Following no questions from the Commissioners, Mr. West advised programmers and supervisors will attend meetings to share what they do with members.

Commissioners and Ms. Abernathy shared thanks.

**b. Minnehaha Creek Clean up: April 28, Knollwood Canoe Landing**

Ms. Walsh advised the Minnehaha Creek Cleanup will be held on Saturday, April 28, 9 – 11 a.m., at the Knollwood Canoe Landing. Members were encouraged to attend.

**c. Other**

Ms. Walsh advised the Minnesota Wild will practice on Sunday, February 11, 11 a.m. – Noon at the ROC.

St. Louis Park Boys will play against Chaska Boys in the ROC on January 30, advised Ms. Walsh. This game was originally scheduled in the Rec Center.

Ms. Walsh indicated the 40<sup>th</sup> and France Avenue area is owned by the Cities of Edina and St. Louis Park. On Monday evening, the City Council will be asked to adopt a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of St. Louis Park and City of Edina. The MOU clarifies the area each city owns and the rights and responsibilities of each in regards to maintaining and improving the property.

The department is in the process of hiring a new staff person, Ms. Walsh indicated, to oversee youth programs and help rent / market the ROC. Commission members interested in sitting in on the hiring panel were advised to contact Ms. Walsh.

**6. Member Communication**

None.

**7. Other / Future Agenda Items**

- a. Board and Commission Meeting with City Council: Monday, February 26
- b. Next PRAC Meeting: Thursday, February 22, 7:30 p.m. at Westwood Hills Nature Center (following the 6 p.m. public meeting)
- c. Joint meeting with Planning Commission and Environmental and Sustainability Commission: Wednesday, April 4

**8. Adjournment**

*It was moved by Commissioner Hagemann and seconded by Commissioner Bluma to adjourn at 8:53 p.m. The motion passed 7 – 0.*

Respectfully submitted,

*Stacy Voelker*

Stacy Voelker, Recording Secretary