1. Call to order

Commissioner Bluma called the meeting to order at 6:09 p.m.

2. Introduction

Introductions were traded between Dahlia Krebs, the new youth Commission member, Commissioners and staff.

3. Presentation

None.

4. Approval of minutes

a. August 21, 2019

_It was moved by Commissioner Hollingsworth, seconded by Commissioner Foulkes, to approve the minutes of August 21, 2019. The motion passed 4–0._

5. Business

None.
6. **Staff communication**

Mark Oestreich, Manager of Westwood Hills Nature Center, provided members with a recap of nature programs from summer and fall. Summer camp ended three weeks prior with 170 participants. There was lower participation from past years which may be due to the extra walking to the building. This year, staff provided outreach to Hopkins ECFE and JCC, which means staff goes to their location. In the future, they’d like to add raptors to the outreach program. The city partners with Reach for Resources to offer monthly nature programs. The alternate access during construction (Franklin Avenue through gate) has worked great. Staff discuss the alternate access with groups prior to their arrival.

This year, the annual Halloween party will be combined with the little Goblin Bash and held at the Rec Center, Mr. Oestreich advised. Next year the annual event will be back at the nature center. Ms. Walsh indicated the event is a non-scary, nature-based, educational party which is very popular.

Mr. Oestreich advised the Junior Naturalist recognition was held with the city council recently. The program is for volunteers in grades 7 - 9 to be a mentor and serve participants. This year there were 65 teens that participated, totaling approximately 1,700 hours of volunteer time. Volunteers in the program are scheduled as though it’s a job. They need to find a substitute if they cannot attend. The program teaches them job readiness skills.

Staff has meet with staff from the City of Golden Valley to partner on a preschool program, Mr. Oestreich advised. This new partnership program would be held at Westwood Hills Nature Center.

The city received an award from the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association for “Be the Light” program held at the nature center. The program is held on December 21, the shortest day of the year, and focuses on mental health.

Mr. Oestreich advised Split Rock Studio is working on the exhibits for the new building. The new building will have a separate exhibit space, with three exhibit designs (woodland, wetland and prairie). The exhibits will be permanent, include audio, visual and physical things to do. Commissioners viewed 3D examples for each of the three exhibit types. Once staff approves the exhibits, creation will begin. Mr. Oestreich advised there will also be a history exhibit located in the lounge area. This exhibit will be a timeline of how Westwood Hills Nature Center, as an organization, has changed over time, the history of Westwood Hills Nature Center and ways people have connected with the nature center. The exhibit will include stories of people’s experiences at Westwood.

Another aspect to be included in the new building is public art. Staff is working with Friends of the Arts and a committee to determine which three artists, out of 26 that applied, will be selected. The three selected will provide their proposals last in October or early November.
Commissioner Bluma inquired if the artists are all local to which Mr. Oestreich advised some are from St. Louis Park but all are within the metro area. All three finalists have different types of art which include a mosaic, recycled and acclimation artist. All three of the pieces of art will be in a public space for touching. Mr. West indicated the walls have been reinforced to ensure they can hold the pieces of art. In addition to these three pieces of art, there will also be custom laminated/floating glass panel.

The playground located at Westwood Hills Nature Center was removed due to the construction, advised Mr. Oestreich. The Capital Improvement Program includes funding to replace the playground, but staff also applied for a grant from the Department of Natural Resources to assist with the cost. The $100,000 grant will assist in funding a nature-based playground which will be a hybrid between a regular playground and a nature-based playground. Commissioners viewed a visual of a potential playground.

Mark Zembryki, a long-time naturalist employee, retired in July Mr. Oestreich indicated. The position was filled with an internal candidate, so her position is now open to fill.

Mr. West reminded members of ROCtoberfest, which will be held September 28 in the ROC.

7. Member communication

None.

8. Project tour – Westwood Hills Nature Center

Mr. West provided and reviewed handouts to attendees which included various views of the new building. A building plan was also provided which the Commissioners viewed during the tour of the proposed building. Mr. Oestreich provided mud boots, bug spray, hard hats and reflective vests for the tour. Commissioners then toured the construction site.

9. Other / future agenda items

Next Meeting: October 23, 2019

10. Adjournment

It was moved by Commissioner Foulkes, seconded by Commissioner Hollingsworth, to adjourn the meeting at 7:08 p.m. The motion passed 5–0.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy M. Voelker

Recording Secretary