OFFICIAL MINUTES
Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission
December 4, 6 p.m.
Rec Center Programming Office

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rich Bluma, Bruce Cantor, George Foulkes, Elizabeth Griffin,
George Hagemann and Dahlia Krebs

MEMBERS ABSENT: Leah Hollingsworth and Pete May

GUESTS PRESENT: Bill Beyer and Ted Ekkers, Historical Society

STAFF PRESENT: Rick Beane, Parks Superintendent, Jason Eisold, Rec Center
Manager, Jacquelyn Kramer, Community Development Associate
Planner, Cindy Walsh, Director of Operations and Recreation and
Stacy Voelker, Recording Secretary

1. Call to order

Commissioner Bluma, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. Presentation – Historical Society

Ms. Walsh introduced the Historical Society members present and advised the society is
reviewing what their future may hold. There are some core people doing a lot of work for the
Historical Society; they could use more volunteers to assist. Introductions were traded.

Ted Ekkers has been president for the past five years. His start with the society was to save the
historic depot building from demolition (was ultimately purchased by the city). The Historic
Milwaukee Road Depot is now in the National Register of Historic Places as is the Nordic Ware
grain elevator.

The Historical Society is comprised of all volunteers. They rely on city support, which includes
maintenance of the Depot. The organization is independently funded through donations and
membership fees with no revenue received from the city. Currently, the Depot is used as a
storage facility and the organization offices out of a building in the Walker Avenue area. The
Society would like the Depot to be a welcoming place, one used to visit and share stories.

Bill Beyer, a resident of St. Louis Park since 1986 and retired architect, is the trustee for the
Historical Society. He explained the Society looked at the Walker Building (oldest building in St.
Louis Park) to utilize for office space but they were unable to afford the purchase.
Mr. Beyer mentioned the Depot is an underutilized venue in the city as there are no restrooms nor staff on site. They would like to make use of the facility and leverage light rail. The Commissioners viewed a presentation on the historical rails and history of the Depot area. The presentation included an 1895 map of the Elmwood neighborhood, Jorvig Park and an 1890 map and history of the railroad.

The Society feels, Mr. Beyer mentioned, with the new regional rail connection by the Depot, a shared pavilion would be beneficial in the area of Wooddale. In addition to the pavilion, they would like to make the Depot available to the public.

Mr. Ekkers indicated the city name is routed in the railroad and is excited to see the rebirth of passenger rail back to St. Louis Park. He reviewed the public sidewalk area and feels the triangle of land on the corner of Walker and West 36th (northwest corner) as an optimal site for the new pavilion. Mr. Ekkers reviewed other pavilions in the city and proposed a shared pavilion concept. The new pavilion would include public restrooms and two rooms for the Historical Society. One room would be utilized as a conference room to seat 40 people for presentations and the other room would be for storage. All the Historical Society items would be consolidated in that storage area. The Society feels this is the best place for them in St. Louis Park as it’s next to the Depot. The Historical Society began conversation with Sean Walther from Community Development regarding the specifics of this option. Another aspect is for the Society to figure out where they can office. They currently office on the second level of a building on Walker Avenue.

Commissioner Cantor inquired on the exact location of the proposed pavilion and feels the pavilion would fit in the location specified but wants to ensure there is enough room for wheel chair access.

Commissioner Bluma inquired when the Depot offers tours to which Mr. Ekkers indicated early December for the holiday lighting and they offer an open house in mid-summer. Mr. Beyer indicated the Depot is completely restored and is a close to being original as a good registered property could be.

Ms. Walsh shared that the Historical Society has been great in providing a potential concept and asking for advice. They have shared communication with the Community Development department and Rick Beane on the details of the proposed concept.

Ms. Walsh asked the Commission if they feel the proposal is appropriate. Commission members discussed the bike trail location, grade and proposed tunnel on Wooddale Avenue in relation to the proposed location of the pavilion. Commissioner Bluma asked if there would be enough historical content for a lesson plan or field trip for school aged kids. Mr. Ekkers and Mr. Beyer agree St. Louis Park has a lot of history and would provide plenty of content. Commissioner Griffin likes the location and is in favor of having more of a presence in the city. Commissioner Hagemann inquired where the nearest covered picnic shelter is located to the proposed area. Mr. Beane advised there is nothing in that area. Justad Park has a small shelter and the closest
park building with restrooms is in Parkview Park. Mr. Beane indicated the Historical Society has a vision for the future and the infrastructure of the area appears to be sufficient for the proposal. Ms. Walsh mentioned the Historical Society has done fundraising for a building fund, not specifically toward this proposal, but expects to continue raising funds.

Mr. Ekkers inquired what other things the Commission would like to see included in the proposal. Commissioner Foulkes inquired if the vision is to create museum-like exhibits to which Mr. Ekkers indicated the preference is to have more hands-on options and less items encased; or more via digital technology. Mr. Beyer shared brief information on Golden Valley’s new Historical Society Museum building and how more historical societies are utilizing digital technology to share the story of history.

Commissioner Hagemann inquired if the proposal is to create a city-owned park building that is partially funded through the Historical Society of which Ms. Walsh confirmed. Mr. Ekkers feels the Society is not in a place to own their own building; he feels it makes sense for the city to own the park building as the city owns the park and the Depot. Mr. Beane mentioned the city would also like the park building to have a consistent look with the other buildings in the parks.

Mr. Beyer showed the members a teaser of a newly released 64-page book on the history of St. Louis Park. Mr. Ekkers indicated the book will be available beginning on Saturday, December 7 at the Depot open house. The fifth annual ceremonial holiday lighting event will celebrate the 50th anniversary of placing the Historic Milwaukee Road Depot on the National Register of Historic Places. The book “Places in the Park” will sell for $20 and be available for purchase at other locations, including The Rec Center. Funds received from the book sales will go toward the building fund and administrative fees. Mr. Ekkers also mentioned a lot of the preservation work on the Depot can be funded through grants specific for historical restoration.

The Commission and Historical Society members traded thanks.

3. Approval of minutes

   a. October 23, 2019

      It was moved by Commissioner Cantor, seconded by Commissioner Griffin, to approve the meeting minutes of October 23, 2019 as presented. The motion passed 6–0.

4. Approval of agenda

      It was moved by Commissioner Hagemann, seconded by Commissioner Cantor, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed 6–0.
5. Business

a. Park and trail dedication for Holy Family Academy

Jacquelyn Kramer, Community Development Associate Planner, reviewed an application received from The Church of the Holy Family of St. Louis Park for the expansion of Holy Family Academy. The project includes a 20,500-square-foot building expansion (new gymnasium, locker rooms and classrooms), a new drive isle and 12 more off-street parking stalls, a new playground and open field, and improved landscaping. Since there are no parks in the area and not a good place for a park, staff recommends cash-in-lieu of land is recommended for the unplatted portion of land. Commissioners discussed.

*It was moved by Commissioner Foulkes, seconded by Commissioner Cantor to accept cash-in-lieu of land in the amount of $14,402.80. The motion passed 6-0.*

Ms. Kramer provided a brief update on the light rail project. Per Federal rules, the light rail trains will need to perform safety runs with no passengers prior to opening for passengers.

The “Place” development project fell through due to financing Ms. Kramer indicated. It appears the south side will be mixed use, similar to what was proposed by “Place”. There are 218 units of affordable housing and some retail places placed for the north side.

Commissioner Cantor inquired on the status of the Louisianan Avenue project by Methodist Hospital. Mr. Beane indicated the project will be in full construction mode in early spring. During construction, the trail and roads will be shut down. Mr. Beane mentioned public art will be added to the Methodist bridge also.

b. 2019 Commission work plan and initiatives

Ms. Walsh briefly discussed the 2019 work plan outcome and indicated the 2020 work plan and initiatives will be discussed at the January meeting.

c. Election of officials

Ms. Walsh mentioned it’s time to elect officials for 2020! Past practice has been for the vice chair to become the new chair but that can be changed at any point. Commissioners discussed.

*Commissioner Bluma moved to nominate Commissioner Cantor as the Chair for 2020; Commissioner Griffin seconded. A motion was made by Commissioner Hagemann to nominate Commissioner Hollingsworth as Vice Chair; Commissioner Bluma seconded. The motions passed 6-0.*
d. Aquatic Park and ROC summary

Mr. Eisold, the Rec Center Manager, provided an update on the ROC’s operation in 2019. The facility had 1,200 rented hours in 2019 which was 80 more hours of ice rented and a double in the hours of dry floor rental from 2018. The ROC was utilized for weddings, art fairs and other various groups. Overall the venue’s revenue was $124,000, which is an increase of $24,000 from 2018. Rates have minimally increased since inception and yet the revenue is ahead of projections. In 2020, the ROC plans to host a “Show your KOI” event in July where people from round the country join in. On January 2, for the third year in a row, the ROC will host a Minnesota Wild hockey practice. Overall, ROC operations are going great!

Staff is currently working on a first-time event which will be held on March 14 titled ShamROC Ice Bowling, Mr. Eisold explained. This event is a prototype of a Sheboygan, WI event. Ten bowling lanes will be set up on the ice, teams of four will bowl four frames and participants will bowl for prizes. There will be music and food at the event. Donations have been received with Park Tavern as the main sponsor. Park Tavern has donated a great deal of bowling balls and pins. The sheet of ice will be removed following the event so damage to the ice is not an issue. Mr. Eisold mentioned volunteers are being sought to assist with the event which will be from held from noon to 9 p.m. Members were asked to contact Mr. Eisold is interested in volunteering at the event.

Commissioner Hagemann inquired if the Gopher’s women’s hockey group is skating in the ROC. Mr. Eisold advised staff has been in contact with them, but they do not appear interested. Commissioner Hagemann advised he’ll pass along contact information for the group to Kori Shingles.

Mr. Eisold explained the Whitecaps are currently utilizing the Rec Center day-time ice to train the Chinese women’s hockey team for the 2022 Olympics. They were sent to the United States for training and reside in The Verge during this time. Typically, they have not had a good hockey team but this year, since they are hosting, they will participate in the Olympics. Ronda Engelhardt, Whitecaps player, is part of the coaching team.

The Aquatic Park season went well for 2019 explained Mr. Eisold. Even though attendance was lower in comparison to 2018, revenue increased. Concession revenue was approximately $10,000 above past years and season pass sales increased. A reduction in staffing due to a cold month of June assisted in lowering expenses for the season. The filter system install in 2018, saved 1.2 million gallons of water in comparison to 2018, operated flawlessly.

Mr. Eisold mentioned the U.G.L.Y. Sweater Dash will be held this weekend. Participants receive mittens, a medal and can enjoy an after-race party at Park Tavern.
e. **Westwood Hills Nature Center update**

Ms. Walsh provided an update of the project by showing recent photos taken. The photo’s included indoor exhibits and the roof/ exterior of the building.

At a future meeting, Mr. West will show a 360-degree video on the progress of the construction. The project is approximately two to three months behind schedule due to rain delays. This means funds from the contingency fund will pay for winter work which includes roof shoveling and pumping water. Commissioner Griffin inquired when the building is scheduled to open to which Ms. Walsh advised the first part of May. There will be work outside of the building to be completed but staff will have moved in and it will be open to the public. Unfortunately, some of the fall tree plantings were destroyed by the deer and the landscaping firm will not cover replacement.

Ms. Walsh advised staff has been pleased with RJM and HGA’s work.

6. **Staff communication**

Ms. Walsh advised Commission members the Capital Improvement Projects (“CIP”) will for 2020 will be provided at the January and February meetings. The proposed CIP and 2020 budget will be presented to the city council at their December 16 meeting. Two new council members, Nadia Mohamed and Larry Kraft, will begin in 2020. At the January meeting, staff will update the Commission on the public art process and who was selected for the Westwood Hills Nature Center project. Jamie Marshall and Friends of the Arts facilitated the selection of the artist.

7. **Member communication**

Members welcomed Commissioner Hagemann back to the Commission.

8. **Other / future agenda items**

Next meeting: January 15, 2020

9. **Adjournment**

*It was moved by Commissioner Foulkes, seconded by Commissioner Hagemann to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 p.m. The motion passed 6–0.*

Respectfully submitted,

*Stacy M. Voelker*

Recording Secretary