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

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Lisa Abernathy, Recreation Supervisor, Rick Beane, Parks Superintendent, Cindy Walsh, Director of Operations and Recreation, Jason West, Recreation Superintendent and Stacy Voelker, Recording Secretary

1. Call to order

Commissioner Cantor, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. Presentation

None.

3. Approval of minutes

   a. December 4, 2019

   *It was moved by Commissioner May, seconded by Commissioner Bluma, to approve the meeting minutes of December 4, 2019 as presented. The motion passed 8–0.*

4. Approval of agenda

   *It was moved by Commissioner Hagemann, seconded by Commissioner Bluma, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed 8–0.*
5. **Business**

   a. **Program Update**

Lisa Abernathy, Recreation Supervisor, introduced herself to the Commission and explained her main duties include youth activities, family activities, special events, overseeing warming houses in the winter and the Oak Hill Splash Pad in the summer. Ms. Abernathy indicated warming houses opened December 21. It has been a great rink season. Rinks have been closed only a couple days due to the warm weather and poor ice conditions. There are warming houses at Birchwood, Browndale, Nelson, Oak Hill and Parkview Parks. This season, 22 attendants were hired to staff the warming houses, which is an average number of staff. To date there have been very few rentals but feel that number will increase with the holidays in the past.

The U.G.L.Y. Sweater Dash, held December 8, went well and the weather was good, advised Ms. Abernathy. The 5K course followed the trails through Louisiana Oaks and Oak Hill Parks. The 205 participants were fun, energetic and many attended the post party at Park Tavern. Participants received a drink ticket from Park Tavern, raffle ticket entry for prizes, a medal for finishing and swag (mittens or buff). To break even in the program, 175 participants are needed so this was a great year with 205.

The 2019 summer playground program had approximately 918 kids at 11 different sites Morning and afternoon times were offered. Forty-three staff were hired to cover the playground program, preschool playground program and Oak Hill Splash Pad. The preschool playground program offered three hours of activities and all sites filled. Staff is revisiting the playground locations for 2020 to ensure each location is targeting the correct age of children. The Westwood Hills Nature Center site will not be available in 2020 due to the construction. There will also be a full day (8 a.m. – 4 p.m.) playground program offered at Wolfe Park. Wolfe Park was chosen due to the amenities which include the Aquatic Park, volleyball, basketball and playground equipment. Commissioner Hollingsworth inquired if staff work with ECFE groups to which Ms. Abernathy indicated we both market each other’s programs. A summer coordinator has begun working on summer programs. Due to a grant received, staff can offered the playground program for $9 per person for residents.

Staff is also restructuring the Fabulous Friday program since there has been a decrease in participation, Ms. Abernathy advised. The program will be restructured in hopes to increase participation.

Ms. Abernathy advised recruitment for summer positions will begin the end of the month. Summer positions include splash pad attendants, along with preschool and playground attendants. Staff offers the positions to past staff initially, to gain the knowledge of how many positions need to be filled.
Commissioner Cantor inquired on the closing date for the warming houses. Ms. Abernathy indicated they generally close President’s Day (February 17) but have extended the season in the past depending on weather and the staff budget. Commissioner Cantor inquired how that information is communicated to the neighborhoods. Staff works with the city’s Communications Department to utilize govDelivery, social media, the weather line and signs posted on the warming house doors. Ms. Walsh indicated park maintenance staff would continue to maintain the ice for a week or two extra if weather allows.

Ms. Walsh informed the commission that George Haun, the former Parks and Recreation Director, recently passed away. The city received approximately $3,000 in donations for the Access to Fun (scholarship) per Mr. Haun’s memorial.

Commissioner Cantor inquired if offering the playground program on Friday’s versus the Fabulous Friday program would be beneficial. Ms. Abernathy will take that suggestion into consideration.

Mrs. West advised the Commission that Ms. Abernathy recently received one of the most prestigious awards, the Dorthea Nelson Award, from the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA). Ms. Abernathy explained Dorthea Nelson was the director for 14 years in St. Louis Park and Nelson Park is named after her. Ms. Nelson began the recreation school through the University of Minnesota and was an advocate for women in the recreation field. Ms. Abernathy is honored to receive the award.

Ms. Walsh was awarded the Clifton E. French award, which is the highest award that can be received through MRPA, Mr. West advised.

The Commissioners congratulated Ms. Abernathy and Ms. Walsh on their awards.

b. Commission work plan / initiatives for 2020

Ms. Walsh asked Commissioners to review the 2020 workplan and provide comments. Commissioner Cantor inquired if anyone from the school district is included in the community group rotation presentations to which staff will consider. No additional comments were received from Commissioners. Ms. Walsh advised the workplan will be submitted and will advise Commissioners of the date set for the council meeting.

c. Review 2020 Capital Improvement Projects

Rick Beane, Parks Superintendent, explained the big Capital projects to take place in 2020.

- Staff is reviewing trail areas that need to be ADA compliant to ensure they are accessible to all.
• Replanting of shrubs and landscaping will take place this year and in future years at the Louisiana Oaks and Highway 7 interchange. Commissioner May inquired if salt resistant plants are identified for that area. Mr. Beane advised Mr. Vaughan, the city’s Natural Resource Coordinator, looks at salt tolerant plants, as well as low maintenance plants, prior to landscaping.

• The two tennis courts at Northside Park will be rebuilt. Ms. Walsh indicated those tennis courts are heavily used. Commissioner Hollingsworth inquired if courts will be added. Mr. Beane advised no courts will be added as staff feels two is a sufficient number of courts at that location.

• Staff will ensure parks have ADA compliant picnic tables. Some parks have but will identify critical locations.

• There is $15,000 identified for the Historical Society Depot. This will include replacing old, aging wood.

• Webster Park, located on the northwest corner of Highway 100 and Highway 7, will be reviewed in 2020 to be reconstructed in 2021. Ms. Walsh explained the city is in the process of acquiring the property currently owned by MnDOT. The park has potential for additional amenities. The Engineering Department is also interested in having a water treatment facility under a portion of the park. Staff will keep the Commission updated on the process.

• In 2020, four playgrounds will be replaced. Edgebrook, Minikaha Vista and Pennsylvania Parks, along with the Westwood Hills Nature Center, will receive new playground equipment. Staff will work with Kids Around the World to see if they would like the old equipment. Mr. Beane described where each playground structure is located. Staff will host neighborhood meetings and allow residents to vote for the new playground equipment.

d. Westwood Hills Nature Center Update

Jason West, Recreation Superintendent, advised the climbing rock structure was saved and will be incorporated in the nature play area which will be constructed in the fall, after construction subsides. Staff reviewed nationwide designs for the nature play area which will include boulders and a hill with a slide built into it. The city received a $100,000 grant from the DNR to assist with funding of the play area; the city budgeted $100,000. Kids Around the World took the old play equipment.

The city purchased Matterport, a camera and software program, which provides a walkthrough of the building with 360-degree visuals. The 360 images are on the city’s website for all to view. Currently, the walls are up and the ceiling and roof are on the building. Mr. West provided a walk through, and descriptions of the areas, via
Matterport to the Commissioners. Mr. West explained the residents chose names for the three conference rooms – Birch, Aspen and Willow as part of the rank choice voting demo put on by the Clerk’s office. Mr. West showed pictures of the building as of last Friday.

Mr. West indicated the Matterport program will be used for virtual walkthroughs of other facilities including the Rec Center banquet room, park buildings and other rental spaces. Commissioner Bluma inquired if the program could be used to show the location of restrooms, etc. in the parks. Mr. West advised Matterport works with Google maps so may be an option.

Friends of the Arts (FOTA) organized a task force to help create themes for the Request for Proposal for art for the nature center, Mr. West advised. One of the artists, Chris Tully, will create a 16’ x 8’ poly mold, 2D/3D woodland scene on the largest wall upon entry through the group entrance, along with some hanging birds above that space. Another artist, Emily Lavalier, will create a large 6’ original framed high-density collage artwork to go on the wall in the adjacent hallway. Commissioners viewed sketches of artwork, which is very interactive.

Commissioner Hagemann advised cities normally contract with Forecast Artwork; FOTA assisted the city with the contracts in hopes of offering their services for other organizations in the future. The city received a considerable discount. Original goal was to have one artist, but task force was torn between two artist proposals so decided to hire both artists for two smaller pieces versus one large.

Mr. West advised staff is interested in having outdoor art and possibly some art pieces in the water area in the future. Ms. Walsh indicated the Rotary is interested in partnering with iconic art structure in the front.

The Commissioners inquired on the feedback received of the new building to which Mr. West indicated the feedback has been positive with the visual aspects provided.

Mr. West advised the keys to the building are scheduled to be in hand May 1 which is when staff will start moving in. The ribbon cutting date will be provided. Commissioner Cantor inquired if the ribbon cutting will be part of the Parktacular event. Mr. West indicated it has been discussed but do not want residents torn between the two events.

6. **Staff communication**

Ms. Walsh advised the Minnesota Wild practiced at the ROC on January 2 with approximately 1,000 people in attendance. They enjoy the venue and want to come back in future years. The players do a great job at public relations by handing out pucks, sticks and signing autographs. Commissioner Bluma inquired if staff has a feel for how far people traveled to attend the
practice. Staff is unsure but know their season passholders are from all over. The players were not required to stay around the venue but they did.

Commissioner Cantor inquired if Hockey Day Minnesota has booked with St. Louis Park. Ms. Walsh indicated they use Target Field for their outdoor winter classic series. They are aware St. Louis Park wants them, but the city has not been selected.

Ms. Walsh advised the local Chinese immersion school came to talk with China’s Olympics team and the Olympic team went to their school. Both enjoyed the collaboration.

The ShamROC Ice Bowling event was described to the Commissioners by Mr. West. This is the first year of the event. Commissioners were invited to get a team together or volunteer at the event. Members were encouraged to contact Jason Eisold or Jason West if interested in volunteering.

Commissioner Hollingsworth inquired if the commission can get a quarterly update on volunteer opportunities. Staff will have Laura Smith, the city’s volunteer coordinator, attend a future meeting also, Ms. Walsh advised. Commissioner Hagemann suggested adding volunteer opportunities to the agenda monthly to reference.

7. Member communication

Commissioner Hollingsworth shared she had a baby girl and all is well.

8. Other / future agenda items

Next meeting: February 19, 2020

9. Adjournment

*It was moved by Commissioner Foulkes, seconded by Commissioner Hagemann to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 p.m. The motion passed 8–0.*

Respectfully submitted,

*Stacy M. Voelker*

Recording Secretary