

CITY OF FRIDLEY
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING – JANUARY 9, 2017

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson Heintz called the January 9, 2017 Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Greg Ackerman, Michele Barrett, Mike Heintz, Shanna Larson, Dave Kondrick

Others Present: Jack Kirk, Director of Parks and Recreation
Craig Andresen, Natural Resources Restoration, Inc.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 5, 2016 PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

MOTION by Mr. Kondrick, seconded by Ms. Larson to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2016 meeting.

UPON A VOICE VOTE, ALL MEMBERS VOTING AYE, CHAIRPERSON HEINTZ DECLARED THE MOTION CARRIED.

APPROVAL OF PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION AGENDA FOR JANUARY 9, 2017

MOTION by Mr. Kondrick, seconded by Ms. Barrett, to approve the agenda for the January 9, 2017 meeting as submitted by staff.

UPON A VOICE VOTE, ALL MEMBERS VOTING AYE, CHAIRPERSON HEINTZ DECLARED THE MOTION CARRIED.

1. STAFF REPORT

a. Program Update

Mr. Kirk stated that the Program Update is a report of activity that took place in December. The skating rinks and the Commons warming house opened recently, but the weather conditions have posed some challenges for our maintenance workers.

Mr. Kirk further stated that the Fridley Lions Club sponsored a holiday party again this year for the senior citizens at the Banquets of Minnesota facility. There were 350 seniors that participated in this event. The Lions Club has been sponsoring this annual event for many years now and it is something that the seniors really look forward to. We appreciate the on-going support of the Fridley Lions Club members.

Mr. Kirk stated that the ZONE continues to draw nice participation from the middle school students. This is an after school drop in program that gives the teens a safe, supervised environment to socialize with their friends.

b. Park Maintenance Report

Mr. Kirk stated that a report on park maintenance activity in the last month has been provided by Jeff Jensen, Operations Manager for Streets and Parks. The Park Maintenance employees have been busy getting the ice rinks up and running. The fluctuating weather has made it difficult to keep good ice at the rinks. When the weather has been too warm for ice maintenance, the park workers have been removing some dead trees from various parks.

c. Springbrook Nature Center Report

Mr. Kirk stated that Springbrook Nature Center has been awarded a \$25,000 grant from 3M to fund a sustainability exhibit at the nature center and to help fund an educational partnership with the Alexandria, MN school district. Staff is currently getting quotes for providing the new exhibit which will educate visitors on energy use, geothermal energy, storm water management, and other green building features.

Mr. Kirk further stated that the Springbrook Nature Center has received a venue grant from Twin Cities gateway in the amount of \$10,000 to develop new brochures for Springbrook. One of the brochures promotes the rental opportunities of the nature center and the other promotes environmental education field trips.

d. WinterFest

Mr. Kirk stated that the annual WinterFest event will be on Saturday, January 21st at Commons Park and the Fridley Community Center. There will be outdoor activities, as well as indoor activities at the Community Center. The outdoor activities include a medallion hunt, horse drawn hay rides, a bon fire and possibly sledding/ skating if the weather cooperates. Indoor activities include a kid's carnival room, a kid's dance with a DJ, arts and crafts and bingo.

Mr. Kirk further stated that one of the goals that the Parks and Recreation Department set for WinterFest many years ago was to have a low cost, fun family event. He wanted Commission members to know they are invited to attend.

2. NEW BUSINESS

a. Moore Lake Sand Dunes Park Land Management Proposal

Mr. Kirk stated that back in the late 1960's, the City of Fridley wanted the sand dunes area on the western shore of Moore Lake to remain in its natural state and be a natural history area. That land was representative of what much of Anoka County was like before development, as it was known as the Anoka sand plain. The Fridley JayCees provided for the installation of a wooden boardwalk trail through the park, which remained in place until about 10 years ago when it started to deteriorate.

Mr. Kirk stated that in the mid-1990's, Craig Andresen started working with the City in helping to manage this natural area. He has done a lot of volunteer work at the West Moore Lake Sand Dunes Park and at Springbrook Nature Center over the years. Craig is the Owner/President of Natural Resources Restoration Company based out of New Brighton. He recently sent a proposal to our Nature Center Director Mike Maher, offering to provide some on-going management and restoration work at the Sand Dunes Park at no cost to the City. Mr. Kirk introduced Mr. Andresen to the Commission.

Mr. Andresen stated that the West Moore Lake Park is a place he values and wants to make a difference. He has always been interested in nature and learned a lot about habitat work by doing it on-site at the ammunition site in Arden Hills. He worked with Ramey County Parks as a volunteer and now has established his own business called Natural Resources Restoration. He further stated that he has crews that work for him and he augments that sometimes with Sentence to Service crews out of Lino Lakes prison. He occasionally will get a crew from Faribault or Stillwater, depending on where the work is in the State.

Mr. Andresen stated he is licensed to do control habitat burns in Minnesota, on sites that the Minnesota DNR manages. He has been doing this natural habitat restoration full-time for twenty years. He has done work for Ramsey County, the Nature Conservancy, the Minnesota DNR, the City of Maplewood, Great River Greening, Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. Andresen said the West Moore Lake Park is about seven acres in size and is a dunes habitat. That means the land rolls just like the ocean. The wind blew the sand and formed these waves or dunes. The park was established in the 1960's and some people were not happy that all the sand dunes land was disappearing.

Mr. Andresen stated that he worked in the 1990's with Dr. Morley, a U of M professor who has now passed away, on habitat restoration. Dr. Morley put out a booklet that identifies plants of Minnesota and where they are found. There are three main biomes in the State with prairie, savannah and pine forest.

Mr. Andresen stated that the plants that you would find in the dunes area are much different than what you would find in the big woods of Hennepin County or in the heavier soils of southwest Minnesota. Buckthorn has invaded the dunes area and is crowding out our native plants. The list of plants in this Fridley park is pretty neat because of the diversity of plants and the unique plants found here.

Mr. Andresen stated that in some ways this park is a pristine site and he would recommend trying to keep this unique resource in proper condition. The trees in this park are pretty much pine or burr oak. There are also some unique native grasses in this dunes park. There are not very many sand dune areas left in the state -- that is what makes it so special. He got involved with this park because it is near his home, he lives in New Brighton.

Mr. Andresen stated that what he is proposing is to do prescribed control burns, with one third of the park burned in a given year. Some years you may not get the appropriate weather to do the control burns. There has to be a northwest wind to blow the smoke out over the lake and not into homes or the school buildings. The burning recycles the dead grass, so the nutrients are put back into the soil.

Mr. Andresen stated that he would also be willing to cut out some of the buckthorn. While it would be a big job to deal with the buckthorn, it is needed to properly restore this habitat.

Mr. Andresen stated that he is 67 years old and this offer to do the work at this Fridley park is contingent upon him continuing his business operation.

Ms. Larson asked what we would do when Mr. Andresen and his company no longer would be able to do this work in the park.

Mr. Andresen stated that there are other companies that do this type of work, but would likely require being paid.

Mr. Heintz stated that we could get started with the control burns and the buckthorn removal to help improve this park. We could then evaluate the results to determine if they are being effective.

Ms. Larson stated she is supportive of removing the buckthorn and the other invasive species. She would like to see us continue to preserve a native park in our community.

Mr. Andresen stated that he is involved with doing the same type of thing at Springbrook Nature Center. He is under contract to do controlled burns for all four prairie areas at that park. They burn only two of the prairies each year.

Mr. Kirk asked if Mr. Andresen worked closely with the Fire Marshal when conducting the control burns.

Mr. Andersen responded yes and that he had a good working relationship with area fire marshals. They have monitored his work and there have been no problems.

Mr. Andresen stated that the contractor doing the controlled burns will contact people living in the vicinity to notify them of the pending burn. He also has signs that are put up near the burn site to alert people that the controlled burn is happening.

Ms. Larson asked how long it would take to do the exotic tree and plant removal from this park.

Mr. Andresen stated that the burning itself would take a few hours and the hand work to remove all the non-native trees and plants could take 8-10 man hours of work. Since this would be a "pro-bono" job, they would fit this work into their schedule when they had the time.

Mr. Andresen stated that his company is conducting controlled burns just about every day that they can in the spring of the year. The weather conditions must be favorable for the burns to take place. In the Twin Cities metro area, the wind must be under 10 miles per hour, the humidity has to be below 60 percent, but they can't burn if the humidity is below 25 percent. There are a lot of restrictions on the burns, including the direction of the wind and how the smoke will affect neighboring properties.

Mr. Heintz asked why they don't burn in the fall of the year.

Mr. Andresen stated that it is just too humid. Water in the air plays a big part in how fast a fire will burn.

Mr. Kirk asked Mr. Andresen if the average person would notice a difference in the Sand Dunes Park after say three years of working with them on park management.

Mr. Andresen stated that the average person would likely notice the reduction in the buckthorn plants in the park. There would be more native plants in the dunes area after the management work.

Mr. Kirk stated that it seemed to him if we entered into a working relationship with Mr. Andresen and his company, that we would have an opportunity to educate the public about the native sand dunes area and the impact of invasive species.

Mr. Heintz stated he would like to see us educate the public on why we have a natural area like the dunes as part of our park system.

Ms. Larson stated that telling about the interrelationships between the plants and animal life in this unique habitat would be an important story to tell our community.

Mr. Kirk stated that if they would proceed with working on this park with Mr. Andresen and his company, they would need to coordinate any use of sentence to serve prison work crews with the City due to the close proximity to the schools.

Mr. Andresen stated that he would do that. He has used these type of work crews throughout the Twin City area and different communities have different requirements. Those participating in the work crews are not violent offenders and they are at the end of their sentence time. He likes to think of this as a successful program. He has actually hired a number of people from these work crews after their release and they have done a good job for him.

Mr. Andresen stated that he would suggest that the City no longer allow the school district to plow and deposit the snow from their parking lots into the Sand Dunes Park. The road salt that is in the snow material is detrimental to the plant life in the dunes. The area would recover if this dumping of the snow was to be stopped.

The Parks and Recreation Commission thanked Mr. Andresen for his presentation and for the willingness to provide free services to the City of Fridley at the West Moore Lake Sand Dunes Park. Mr. Kirk stated that he would like to get together with Mr. Andresen and Mike Maher, our Nature Center Director, to discuss management plans for the Sand Dunes.

Mr. Andresen offered to give an on-site tour and presentation at the Sand Dunes Park to the Parks and Recreation Commission, so they could learn more about this habitat and the need for managing it properly. There are birds at this site that you won't see anywhere else in town, because it is a unique environment.

Mr. Kondrick stated that he has heard from several people that work at Medtronic, that they like to walk in the area and would like to see a trail installed in the Sand Dunes Park. He believes it is something that should be considered for a future project.

Mr. Heintz stated that if the Commission wants to have a natural park such as the Sand Dunes, it makes sense to him that we try to improve that habitat. He would be supportive of working with Mr. Andresen and his company to help manage the park.

Mr. Kondrick stated that he would want the City to educate people on why the natural area is important and why we are taking steps to improve it.

Ms. Barrett suggested signs along the western boundary of the park explaining what type of natural area this is and why it is valuable would help with the education process.

MOTION by Ms. Barrett, seconded by Ms. Larson, to have staff further investigate working with Mr. Andresen and Natural Resources Restoration, Inc to provide free services to the City of Fridley at the West Moore Lake Sand Dunes Park.

UPON A VOICE VOTE, ALL MEMBERS VOTING AYE, CHAIRPERSON HEINTZ DECLARED THE MOTION CARRIED.

4. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Larson, seconded by Mr. Kondrick to adjourn the January 9, 2017 meeting at 8:20 p.m.

UPON A VOICE VOTE, ALL MEMBERS VOTING AYE, CHAIRPERSON HEINTZ DECLARED THE MOTION CARRIED AND THE JANUARY 9, 2017 MEETING ADJOURNED.