

DRAFT

CITY OF WAUSAU – PARK AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Date/Time: January 4, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. Location: Council Chambers, City Hall

Members Present: Tom Kilian-(via webex), Lou Larson-(via webex), Tom Neal-(via webex), Pat Peckham (c), Sarah Watson-(via webex)

Others Present: Jamie Polley-Director, Andrew Sims – City Forester, Greg Freix – Assistant Director of operations-(via webex).

1. In accordance with Chapter 19, Wisc. Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and sent to the Daily Herald in the proper manner. A quorum was present and the meeting was called to order by Chairman Peckham at 4:30 p.m.

2. Public Comment – none brought forward

3. Approval of Minutes – December 7, 2020 – **Motion** by Kilian, second by Larson to approve the Park and Recreation Committee draft December 7, 2020 minutes. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

4. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Emerald Ash Borer Plan – Andy Sims, City Forester gave information that the 2016 plan related to Emerald Ash Borer was to remove thirty percent of all ash and treat the seventy percent that remained over a seven year period. The treated trees are protected for two-three years and the trees that are removed are replaced with viable alternatives. A thirty percent reduction has almost been reached with most of those coming from non-residential areas. He said in the residential areas some neighborhoods have a lot more ash trees than others. Part of his job involves public safety and it's not that easy to identify trees with EAB larvae in it if they have not been in it for very long. Once they have been in it for about four years the tree becomes brittle and fails easily so he is looking to mitigate that risk. Ultimately, all the boulevard ash will be removed either by staff or by the ash borer. Staff has to balance maintaining safety, the canopy coverage, budgets and what staff thinks it can accomplish so they are looking at progressive removal of all of the street ash trees in eight to twelve years. They want to do it in a manner where they aren't removing ash that have just been treated and also do not want to do wholesale removal on the same street all at the same time. He suggested removing half of the ash trees on a street, replacing them and then coming back five years later to remove and replacing the rest. The biggest challenge is the communication of this to homeowners on a large scale.

Peckham thought they should inform property owners that the owners will need to do something about the ash on their private property. Sims agreed and said it is better that trees are taken down before they die because if a truck cannot get into someone's backyard someone has to climb the dead tree which puts that person at risk. Neal hoped that removal of boulevard ash in a neighborhood could be a four or five step transition rather than two or three. He also discussed street reconstruction projects and said that Committee had wanted a policy that protects street trees during street reconstruction projects. Sims was in favor of doing what could be done to protect trees during those projects and was trying to make inroads interdepartmentally. He discussed a product he had been researching that would deflect tree roots and could help lengthen sidewalk life cycles. Peckham had been encouraged to see a request from the Public Works Director for part of a position to be for tree preservation, although the position did not make it through the budget process. Polley said when the previous plan was done the Emerald Ash Borer had not been found in the City limits and now it has been. Once it's found, it's been in the tree for awhile so staff doesn't know how long the tree will live. The suggested plan is to work towards the removal of all ash trees in the City in eight to twelve years. She is hearing Committee say they would like to see it more along the lines of twelve years but that has to be with the understanding that is as only as long as the ash trees are in healthy condition and can safely stand. There may be a worst case scenario where the borer has gotten in every tree on a street and within five years they will all be standing dead and have to be removed. Sims will continue to treat trees but that amount will be reduced as ash trees are removed. She wanted Committee to be very clear in their understanding that staff is suggesting every single ash tree will be removed in twelve years. All of the ash will be replaced with a different variety of species. Also, still part of the plan is that in areas of reconstruction they will not spend any money to save any ash trees. Kilian wanted to make sure Neal's concerns were incorporated in the future. Peckham said in the motion Committee could adopt this modified plan with emphasis on continuing their work to preserve as many trees as they can especially during construction projects. Polley wanted to clarify as part of this plan they are not working to preserve ash trees so when it comes to an ash tree on a construction project those would come out, but they are referring to other trees as part of the directive. **Motion** by Neal, second by Kilian that the Emerald Ash Plan going forward uses more of a gradual phased approach in neighborhoods such as five phases over twelve to fifteen years adjusted based on where the insect is and how much it is being seen. He is not referring to construction projects on streets in this motion. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

5. Discussion and Possible Action on Items to be Submitted for Funding from 2020 Unspent Budget – Polley explained that at recent Finance Committee and City Council meetings certain items have been discussed to be funded utilizing 2020 unspent funds. In these discussions it has been stated that each department should submit their requests for funding and the requests will then be discussed and prioritized. At the end of the year it is anticipated that the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department will have approximately \$700,000. The Department will be submitting the following items to be considered for funding: \$200,000 to renovate and improve the skate park. The skate park is approximately 18 years old. The surfacing is black top which is not a desirable surface for skateboarding. Blacktop is rough and settles with the heat causing cracks and heaves. The desirable surface is concrete. The equipment is also reaching its life expectancy and is in need of repair. Staff has been repairing the surface pieces as needed however the amount of repair is increasing. The City also has the ability to expand the skateboard park if funds allow. A cost estimate from a reputable skate park design firm for repair, replacement and a minimal expansion was \$200,000. This request will replace the request for the playground replacement funding that was not allocated with the 2021 CIP funds. Staff currently has 5 playgrounds to replace in 2021. The other request is for \$79,000 to replace all City drinking fountains with bottle fillers. All County drinking fountains were replaced with bottle fillers utilizing the County's Cares Funding. The City Cares Funding was not available to replace the drinking fountains in the City parks. Replacing the drinking fountains improves safety in the parks by encouraging users to bring their open water bottles and reduce the spread of germs. She asked Committee to consider recommending to the Finance Committee, or committee established to review the submitted requests, to utilize 2020 unspent budgeted funds for the skate park renovation and improvements and drinking fountain replacement. **Motion** by Neal, second by Larson to approve these two requests from the Parks Department. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

6. Educational Items

A. 2021 Staffing Update – Karyn Powers, Recreation Superintendent will be retiring this March after 29+ years. She is in charge of all the pools, Marathon Park Splash Pad, and all programs such as playground, water aerobics, swimming lessons, tennis lessons, etc. Her position is currently funded ninety percent City and ten percent County. Polley would like to make some adjustments in the future because she would increase programming. In her budget update last month she had requested a parks supervisor underneath Powers that would be more of an aquatic position to allow for some increased programming. If the goal is to increase pool attendance, programming, and community events she believes they will still need to look at another recreation position in the future. Staff will take this year to see what candidate they get and see how they move forward with that. She also mentioned that David Patridge, the Administrative Manager who has been with the Department for 25 years will also be retiring in March. His position is funded fifty percent City and fifty percent County and does a lot with budgeting, accounting, and management of office staff.

B. Dog Park Special Committee Update – Polley said the group will meet tonight to discuss fundraising and possibly having a winter event in the dog park.

Update given that the Rivers Edge Trail from Thomas Street to Sherman Street going through Riverside Park will be maintained after snowfall events and the 3M Park parking lot will be maintained on a low priority basis which is within three days of a snow event. Kilian noted that the west side trail is an efficient way to get from Thomas Street to shopping areas on South 3rd Avenue and thanked staff for maintaining it.

7. Future Agenda Items – Ordinance Revisions, Naming Rights Policy, Sponsorship Program

8. Next Meeting Date – Monday, February 1, 2021 at 4:30pm

9. Adjourn - **Motion** by Larson, second by Neal to adjourn at 5:45 p.m. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.