

DRAFT

CITY OF WAUSAU – PARK AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Date/Time: July 6, 2020 at 4:30 p.m. Location: Council Chambers, City Hall

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

Others Present: Jamie Polley-Director, Greg Freix-Asst. Director of Operations, David Patridge-Administrative Officer, Katie Rosenberg-Mayor, Anne Jacobson-City Attorney, Paula Meadows, other interested parties

1. In accordance with Chapter 19, Wisc. Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and sent to the Daily Herald in the proper manner. It was noted that a quorum was present and due to technical difficulties the meeting was called to order by Chairman Peckham at 4:49 p.m.

2. **Public Comment**

Paula Meadows 1302 Madison St. Wausau – Her suggestions for the extra pool funds included a grand reopening event at the pools next year, more free days at the pools or a free month, giving some funds to the furloughed lifeguards, or for playgrounds or tennis courts.

3. **Approval of Minutes** – June 1, 2020 – **Motion** by Neal, second by Watson to approve the Park and Recreation Committee draft June 1, 2020 minutes. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

4. **Discussion and Possible Action Authorizing the Execution of Lease for Radtke Point Park and Grace Park with the City of Schofield** – **Motion** by Neal, second by Larson to authorize the execution of the lease for Radtke Point Park and Grace Park with the City of Schofield. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

5. **Discussion and Possible Action Regarding the Usage of Funds Not Expended on City Pool Operations** – Staff had brought forward some different options which included continuation of the playground replacement program (playgrounds left to replace include Riverside, 3M, River Highlands and Westview Terrace), skate park upgrade, Sylvan parking lot replacement, tennis court replacement, and Memorial Park seawall replacement. A majority of members supported putting the money towards playground replacement. Lengthy discussion ensued about the playgrounds and how to distribute the funds. **Motion** by Larson, second by Kilian for staff to utilize the \$110,000 to continue the playground replacement program by splitting the funds to prioritize one playground and then putting the remainder towards another that is a distance away from the first. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

6. **Discussion and Possible Action Requesting Funds for an Environmental Consultant to Prepare Recommendations to Test the Waters of the Wisconsin River** – Peckham thought that some citizens would appreciate knowing the results if testing were done on the Wisconsin River. Neal had concerns about the necessity as rivers and lakes are inherently unsafe with ongoing concerns about Blastomycosis along shorelines and what disturbed riverbeds can unleash. Kilian thought the City should have a municipal environmental justice policy and use the most protective standard, such as the codified State standards, when dealing with environmental matters. He gave past history regarding drinking and ground water issues that Wausau had in the 1980's. He would rather have a more solidified environmental policy at the municipal level and doesn't necessarily agree with saying things are safe based on a toxological opinion but thinks they need to use the most protective standard. He noted a recent Supreme Court decision (County of Maui v. Hawaii Wildlife Fund) which he said made clear that ground water discharges were covered under the Clean Water Act and has questions into the DNR about how that may impact their approach to local issues. He thought it would be wise to have a working group on this matter and future environmental matters and would like to table this item. Larson would like to see the sediment tested as well and wanted to have suitable guidelines regarding exceedances and non-exceedances in front of them. Peckham felt the Department of Health Service's letters have been valuable because it gave everyone a better handle on what the DNR's numbers meant. Originally he had asked the DNR if they would come and address a community meeting to field concerns about the contamination in Riverside Park and they wouldn't do it because they said it was a public health issue. That was how they ended up with the State who he felt has helped them to understand what they are dealing with. Kilian added that if they look at this item in the future he felt they should look at the sediment versus the surface water if they have to choose between the two. Neal said as they consider testing the sediment they have to know full well that remediation would be almost non-existent and impossible as there are regulations to disturbing that riverbed. They can do a lot of testing to find out there is a lot of stuff that they can't do anything about. **Motion** by Kilian, second by Larson to table this item to an indefinite date when a broader approach can be taken. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.

7. Educational Items

A. Dog Park Special Committee Update – The waterline for the drinking fountain will be installed sometime during the week of June 29. Following the installation of the waterline Park staff will prep the parking lot area with gravel base for paving. Pubic Work is coordinating the paving and concrete work. Fencing is scheduled to be installed in early August. The committee will review fundraising amounts and signage at their meeting following this meeting. Freix explained that staff is aware that some of the areas need reseeding and discussed some of that work.

B. Project Update – Pleasant View Park: Installation of the new playground is underway by park staff. City Ball Diamonds: Baseball and softball diamonds are being groomed and prepped for use which will begin July 6. Athletic Park: Facility is being prepared for the start of the Wisconsin Woodchuck season July 2. This includes modifications for COVID-19. Oak Island Park: Contractor has just completed the playground installation and PIP colored safety surfacing. Park staff will begin site remediation next week. Barker Stewart Island: Staff is preparing for vegetation management activities per work plan. Isle of Ferns: 6 wooden pole lights are being replaced with 11 decorative and energy efficient (LED) pole lights along the existing path. (project was put on hold since last meeting). Routine Operations/Programs: Mowing Operations; all three mowing crews are in routing mode with full staff. Urban forestry program; EAB treatment in progress; tree trimming, removals, stump grinding, Building and structure maintenance. Shelter reservations and Special Events; Equipment maintenance and repair. Restroom Maintenance; increased maintenance (daily) and staffing due to COVID 19 recommendations.

C. Riverside Park Testing Update and Next Steps – To date, after all the tests in the park, an exceedance was found in one location (culvert). The WDNR is now asking for a few more tests in that one area to outline the exact boundary of soil which is above standards. No other action is required in the rest of the park. Once that is completed and the outline of soil is identified, remedial options (most likely digging out the small area of contaminated soil and replacing with new clean soil) will be completed. After this the site would be ready for closure. Peckham clarified that the toxicologist had sent two letters and the first letter had to do with the testing in the rail corridor and the second letter was in regard to the testing in the park area. He believed this item has moved into a different phase where the DNR has decided to take more of a role and has told the City what it is going to do. Kilian felt what was happening now was positive. The DNR has laid out clearly that they have State soil standards and there were three samples around the culvert area in the park that exceeded those standards for a non-industrial setting. The DNR has asked the City to delineate the extent of that contamination and then remedial options would be discussed. He felt it's been a long process but is important because it kind of sets a precedent of how they deal with contamination that exceeds State standards. Ultimately it has satisfied the State standards and the communities concerns. He thanked everyone that had been involved and worked on it.

D. Update on City/County Parks Agreement and Role of Parks and Recreation Committee and Park Commission – The City of Wausau and Marathon County have a unique relationship as it pertains to Parks and Recreation services that dates back to 1925. During COVID-19 and the ever changing orders and recommendation as it pertains to City park facilities the authority to enforce these recommendations was questioned, raising further questions about the County Department and the roles of the City Parks and Recreation Committee and County Park Commission. Staff has reviewed close to 100 years of documents to get a clearer understanding of the relationship and the operations of the Department. Polley gave history that a study was conducted in 1971 of both the City Park Board and the County Park Commission for the purposes of combining them as one single unit which became effective in 1975. The Mayor appointed three members of City Council and County Board appointed three members to the seven member Park Commission. There is also one member at large on the Commission. The City transferred all Park Department personnel to the County and the salaries of non-represented employees and equipment was shared 50/50. Subsequent resolutions took place, one in 1983 that enabled park rangers to enforce rules consistently whether it was in a County or City park. Over the years there have been multiple discussions on the joint venture and what the Department does. In 2002 under Mayor Lawrence the City Park and Recreation Committee was created to increase advocacy of park and recreation needs on the City Council. The Marathon County ordinance was amended to create this Park Committee but nothing was done on the City side to create it so there's been question on not only the Director's authority but the authority of the City Committee because it doesn't look like it's an actual Standing Committee. The Committee that should govern the parks operations is the joint Park Commission.

Polley said it's only her second year as the Director and there is a new Mayor and County Administrator so they had a meeting with the City Attorney, County Corporation Counsel, and the Chair's to talk about clarifying some things because staff has been practicing under the rule that City related items go to the City Park and Recreation Committee and County related items go to the Park Commission. She felt if they operated under the assumption of how it should be operated it's that they don't look at City versus County and they look at the park system as a system and that is what the original joint Park Commission

was originally set up to do. The next step would be to bring this to the Committee of the Whole to give the background, what they are operating under and clarifying the vision going forward.

Jacobson felt this was a good opportunity to look at the purposes for which the Commission and the Committee exist so that efforts don't overlap and for Polley who sometimes has to present things twice while attending double meetings. It's an opportunity to discuss the agreements and whether or not they want a Park Committee to continue to exist on the City side and then what functions they would want to maintain. She believed under the statutes they did give all authority to the joint Park Commission to manage and control the City parks, but over time certain habits have developed. There will be ongoing discussion to clarify the roles and make things more efficient. Mayor Rosenberg wanted to make sure that staff time is being used effectively and efficiently and started to figure out what the duties of this Committee should be and if it is the right use of their time. When she looked at how this has been legislatively delegated throughout the years it made the most sense to her to consider maybe transitioning towards using the Park Commission model to its fullest potential sometime in the future. There were personality conflicts in the past and threats to split up the Department and she wanted to clarify that that is not what this is about, it's about being effective and efficient which is important for all of their time. Neal saw their reason for being a Committee as representing the city taxpayers who have neighborhood issues and could only see going to a Commission model if it were representational about the distribution as to not load rural against urban or vice-versa. He did not want to see his advocating for City parks diluted by potentially having less control about what's inside their limits. Rosenberg said they still have three people from the City Council on the Park Commission and the ultimate power lies in budgeting. If the City wants something repaired in a City park it gets fixed because the City budgets for it. Peckham wanted everyone to know that this isn't already a done thing; that it is something being discussed. He also wanted to point out that if a portion of the Park Commission wanted to fix something in a City park and the Park Commission said no that the City members could still bring it back to City Council. Polley said future discussion will need to be about how they want to function and it may be the same way that they have been doing but some things will need to be cleaned up on both the County and the City side.

E. Update on Wildlife in City Parks – The Wausau Marathon County Parks Recreation and Forestry Department manages properties and facilities in both urban and rural locations and are responsible for minimizing damage from any known source. Occasionally that damage or potential damage may come from wild animals. Some past examples of animal damage encountered by the Department include: Rodents; includes mice, voles, rabbits, squirrels, beavers and deer. Primary damage is from chewing/browsing on building material, plant material which includes small ornamental varieties to trees. Deer also cause damage from rubbing. Canadian Geese; primary damage is from droppings left on hardscaped walks/trails and sports fields. Bats; primary damage is from droppings left in building interiors. Raccoons; primary damage is nuisance garbage spreading (i.e. dumpsters and trash cans). Bears; Primary damage is nuisance garbage spreading. The Department does not have a specific policy on animal control but rather identifies if action is needed on a case by case basis. If control is deemed necessary based on damage potential a determination is made as to the method most applicable to the situation and animal species involved. In addition to property damage staff also considers the potential risk of disease transfer from the presence of any wildlife species. The Department also follows the Nuisance Animal Guidelines as recommended from the WDNR. The primary methods of control used by the Department include: exclusion; i.e. fencing, tree wrapping, sealing building cracks and holes; habitat modification / alteration; i.e. selecting non desirable plant species, shoreline riprap; frightening devices; i.e. predator decoys, lighting, sirens/horns; trapping; includes live, lethal and hand capture; Repellents.

Neal mentioned staff should be careful about what they consider a clear and present problem as some people had been upset about beaver being bothered in Bluegill Bay Park. Freix said that wildlife control is a subjective thing. He felt Fern Island was a perfect example of what beavers can do as there is still evidence today of the trees the beavers took down over a couple week period last year. Staff had to make a decision about what to do at Bluegill Bay Park because they know what can happen in a short period of time and in that particular instance no beavers were removed because there were none present when they tried locating them. Staff tries to make the best decision in the most humane manner but they do need to protect the resource because there are also people that would say those trees are very valuable too and they need to be preserved.

8. Future Agenda Items – Riverside Park Soil Remediation

9. Next Meeting Date – August 3, 2020 at 4:30pm

10. Adjourn - **Motion** by Neal, second by Kilian to adjourn at 6:20pm. Motion **carried** by voice vote, vote reflected as 5-0.