

MINUTES

City of Lake Elmo Parks Commission January 23, 2019

Members Present: Commissioners Mayek, Nightingale, Olinger, Schumacher, Weeks, Zeno and Ames (arrived late)

Staff Present: Public Works Director Weldon, City Planner Prchal

The meeting was called to order by Weeks at 6:30 PM.

New Commissioners Steve Schumacher and Isak Nightingale were sworn in.

Pledge of Allegiance

Motion by Olinger to follow the format of the Council meetings and say the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of the meeting, seconded by Weeks. Motion passed 5 to 1.

Select Chair and Vice Chair

Mayek nominated Weeks as Chair, seconded by Olinger. Motion passed unanimously.

Weeks nominated Olinger as Vice-Chair, seconded by Mayek. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Agenda

Motion by Zeno to approve the agenda, seconded by Mayek. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Zeno to approve the December minutes, seconded by Mayek. Motion passed.

Review Sunfish Lake Park Mountain Biking Proposal

Prchal stated that the funds that have been set aside for trails for Sunfish Lake Park would only cover the cost of one of the trail options outlined in the packet. Staff is looking for feedback as to which trail option to spend more time on.

There is a conservation easement across the park and the proposal must be run past the MN Land Trust. Location of the trails, who is constructing it, how it being constructed, and who will maintain the trails.

Zeno asked Prchal to address concerns people have raised about tree removal, wild life disturbance, and the removal of sense of wilderness. Prchal explained the trail would be moved to accommodate existing trees with minimal removal.

Schumacher asked about Ebikes, he asked about the liability to the City for accidents that may occur. Prchal stated that staff has asked the insurance company and mountain biking is an assumed use within a city and is already covered in our policy and will not increase rates by allowing the use in our parks.

Mayek explained about level one Ebikes do not have a throttle and are more like regular bikes. He also made some comments about his experience using trails in other parks. He said he liked Route 1.

Judith Blackford, 9765 45th St N, is a long-time resident that served on the Parks Commission for 14 years, she worked to ban mountain biking in Sunfish Lake Park. The code was changed and it was sent to the MN Land Trust. When the code was re-codified the banning mountain biking was not included. Blackford talked about the wildlife in the park and the highly erodible soils. She also stated that a previous administrator had suggested that Sunfish Lake Park name was changed to Preserve or Reserve to better reflect the use instead of the word Park that carries with it the ideas of recreation.

Deb Krueger, 4452 Lake Elmo Ave N, said she would like to give her minutes to Judith and suggested that Sunfish Lake Park should be named Preserve or Reserve to better reflect the use or type of park.

Jim Blackford, 9765 45th St N, neighbors the park. He has concerns about how these trails will be maintained in the future. He said that the current trails are not maintained due to lack of funding, the current erosion that has gone into his property is not cleaned up. He talked about how residents have protected this park from other development and should protect it now as a place of nature - that mental health professionals are saying people need. He is concerned about lack of enforcement in the park now with bikes that travel into his property and is concerned what the increase in activity.

Susan Dunn, 11018 Upper 33rd St N, is a long-time resident that served on the Parks Commission for 16 years, Planning Commission, City Council, and Washington committees. She asked if staff and the Commission are aware of the fragile areas of Sunfish Lake Park. She asked that the Commission think of the elderly population in the City and provide trails they can use and enjoy. She asked if the Commission received a copy of the Conservation Easement with the MN Land Trust. She read section 3.4 "Sunfish Park may be used for hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, nature observation or study, and other non-intensive recreational and educational programs or activities that have no more than minimal impact on the conservation value of the protected property". She asked if the gravel pits could be purchased and used for biking or if the money coming from the Tartan Park ballfields could be used. (Prchal explained it is strictly for the replacement of ballfields in Lake Elmo, not for general parks.)

Susan Saffle, 11180 50th Street N, had been established as a passive park. She asked the Commission and staff to reconsider mountain biking in the park. She had a number of questions. What are the costs to repair erosion and loss of unique topography? What are the risks to habitat loss to wildlife and sensitive species? What is the cost of loss of peace and serenity? She feels there is a need to preserve open space and wooded areas. What will happen if there is conflict on the trails? How will enforcement happen? Is the park too small to allow for separate trails? Where in the Land Trust does it allow mountain bike trails to be constructed? She stated the DNR has called Sunfish Lake Park has called it a high

quality hardwood forests as has the Nature Conservancy. She mentioned that the Blandings turtle is a threatened species that inhabits the park.

Mike Pearson 2805 Lisbon Ave N, said he was not there to advocate one way or another on the issue and to make a decision on its merits. He apologized to the new people that tonight had a tough issue and said that not all meetings are like this one. He thanked the commission for volunteering.

Jill Lundgren 8282 Hidden Bay Court N, thanked the commission for volunteering. Asked to pause and consider if we need a second park that allows mountain biking in a sensitive park if have a park with mountain biking trails in Reid Park. Where is the need coming from, was there a petition?

Arlo Frost would like to give his time to Jim Blackford. Blackford thanked Lundgren for asking, "where did this come from". He is concerned about the growing interest in Ebikes. If we ban them, there is no enforcement in the park. He is also concerned about people traveling in the right direction for safety. Blackford would also like to have the Commission to think the decision through and decide if they want to drive all other uses away and make this only a bike park.

Dick Weir 3645 Laverne Ave N, said he was watching the meeting and home. He feels that there are people that only want the park used for what they want it used for and he thinks that it should be for all the people in Lake Elmo. He said that he would have greater concern with horses than with bikes.

Ames apologized for arriving late as he was traveling. He asked if his comments he emailed to the City Administrator had been shared with the Commission. He asked if winter use had been discussed. He explained he has used Sunfish Lake Park in the winter for years and there is a natural conflict between skiers and walkers on the existing trails. He said he has been to other parks where ski trails are separate from other types of trails to avoid the conflicts.

Mayek asked if option one was in place, if there could be more interconnected to the north allowing access from the fire station. He explained if the trails are constructed properly, little erosion occurs, unlike the existing trails.

Zeno mentioned there is a lot of passion for and against the trails. He asked what has the City done to find out from residents where they stand. He asked if the meetings alone are the way to find out what people in Lake Elmo really want. Typically, people that attend the meetings are passionate on one side or another. He would like to know what the City as a whole feels.

Mayek made a motion to approve Route one and Ames seconded the motion to open discussion.

Zeno asked if there is any data on impact to wildlife or if there was a way to know and feels they should try to get this information before a decision is made. He asked how other parks handle intersections.

Ames said the Carver Lake Park in Woodbury they have design features like narrow split rail fence openings that force bikers to slow down at intersections

Mayek responded that nothing says biking has a larger impact than hiking on wildlife.

Schumacher asked how the Land Trust Easement plays into this decision and if any decision could be overturned.

Prchal explained that MN Land Trust wants to see a specific plan before they make a decision. So, staff is asking for a trail to bring to them for an opinion. To this point they have not said mountain biking cannot occur.

Weeks said he would not vote for the motion on the table of approving Route 1 as presented but would support amending it to include reducing the number of crossings, length of trail, and adding a connection point to the northwest and northeast.

Mayek withdrew his original motion and made a new motion to approve route one with a connection to the fire station and to the north east all while minimizing trail crossings and reducing overall length and Ames seconded the motion. Motion passed 5 to 1.

Tony Mazara, 5050 Kirkwood Ave N, stated that he thought people should have a chance to talk and hear what their neighbors think before anything is decided.

February 2019 Meeting

Sunfish Lake Park

Development proposals

Communication

Prchal stated that Council made the change to eliminate a water extension into the Pebble Park as part of the 2019 project. Weldon explained with the stub at the street and the water hydrant, it would provide the opportunity to extend water in the future if needed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

**Respectfully Submitted,
Tanya Nuss**