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**CITY OF MENDOTA HEIGHTS
DAKOTA COUNTY, MINNESOTA**

PARKS AND RECREATION MEETING

April 14, 2009

The April 2009 meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, April 14, 2009, in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M.

The following Commissioners were present, Chair Paul Portz, Commissioners: Maureen Brackey, Michael Toth, and Steve Commers. Commissioners Tom Kraus, Liz O'Brien and Ray Morris were excused. Staff present were: Jake Sedlacek, Assistant to the City Administrator, Guy Kullander, Parks Project Manager, Teresa Gangelhoff, Recreation Programmer, and Nancy Bauer, Recording Secretary.

Commissioner Kraus was excused for the birth of a new baby, Commissioner Morris was excused for FEMA Training and Commissioner O'Brien is out of town.

MINUTES:

Chair Portz asked about the Rogers Lake Weeds discussion the minutes say that the City Council does not have a line item in the budget for treating the weeds. Then in a memo it is said that money was found in the storm sewer fund to treat the weeds and what is the storm sewer fund.

Mr. Kullander responded that there was no money budgeted in the parks maintenance budget for treating the weeds at Rogers Lake. There is a storm utility quarterly fee collected from each property. The fund then addresses any storm sewer or runoff issues. Rogers Lake falls in this category because off the runoff into the lake from storm sewers and Council does have the discretion to use this fund for the weeds at Rogers Lake.

Mr. Sedlacek said treating the weeds at Rogers Lake is a trial effort at this time and if it is going to be on-going then it would need to be budgeted.

Commissioner Brackey made a motion to accept the March 10, 2009, minutes.

Commissioner Toth seconded the motion.

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RECREATION REPORT

Ms. Gangelhoff passed out the final draft of the park events in the upcoming Heights Highlites that include all the times and dates of the park and recreation programs.

Chair Portz asked if any information about the upcoming golf tournaments was included.

Mr. Sedlacek responded it was not included because of the limited number of openings and it could fill right away with Mendota Heights residents. There are other communities that are interested in participating. It will be posted on-line and promoted to other communities.

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Ms. Gangelhoff said the flyer includes the Parks Celebration information.

Chair Portz said he was looking forward to it and the Friday night telecast of the Twins game.

Ms. Gangelhoff responded that TC Bear will be appearing during the Twins game.

Commissioner Brackey said she really liked the Love the Parks piece.

Mr. Sedlacek said Commissioner Kraus submitted the piece.

Mr. Gangelhoff reported that the Park and Recreation Report lists the past and upcoming youth trips. Simple steps program started April 1st. Mendota Heights is trying to up the number of participants in the program.

Commissioner Brackey asked how people can find out about the program.

Ms. Gangelhoff responded information is in the Heights Highlites, will be promoted at the Parks Celebration, information is on the Dakota County website and school flyer. There will be an article in the local paper and the *Pioneer Press*.

The 55+ program will be in Mendota Heights on August 17th. The Parks Celebration is June 5th and 6th. Friday starts out with the televised Twins game. On the 6th the Police Department has a 5K, and noon to 3:00 P.M. is the celebration at Mendakota Park and the school's 150th anniversary celebration at the High School after the Parks Celebration.

The ice rinks were opened for 44 days in 2008/2009 compared to 78 days in 2007/2008. This year the season was bad because of rain and temperatures. The most used rink was Marie Park rink.

Revtrak online registration is going well and being used. It has taken some business away from the front desk.

A tennis pro will be at the Tennis Block Party at the Park Celebration. He will be here again on June 9th and work with the tennis classes on that day.

Summer playgrounds is a success with only a few remaining spots open.

Ms. Gangelhoff reported that she is working with St. Thomas and planning to coordinate some student volunteers to help with the GPS/Geocaching activities throughout the summer.

Safety camp is full for 2009.

Chair Portz commented a lot is going on in the recreation programs with some new programs.

EUGENIA AVENUE VACATION

Mr. Sedlacek handed out some letters that were received about the Eugenia Avenue vacation. Mr. Burnette, 591 Hiawatha Avenue, requested that the alley behind him and along side his lot be vacated. Staff found out

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it was unused right-of-way. It is a half a road that is platted and the other half of the road was not platted. It was platted with the Cherokee Heights subdivision from 1924. When another subdivision was built the other half of the road was not platted. The Ivy Falls 2nd Addition came in 1989 and it was decided not to do the second half of the street and did not turn back that portion of Eugenia Avenue. The current homeowner asked that it be turned back. It was decided that the City did not need to retain the land. There were some passionate arguments for both sides regarding the vacation. The request from Mr. Burnette is for safety factors - it is a spot where teenagers hang out. The other side of the argument is that it should be treated as open space. This is not usually discussed at a Parks and Recreation Commission meeting but a former commissioner thought it was discussed in the past and decided it was not a valuable parcel to the City. It has come up to the Commission and the Commission makes recommendations to the City Council about parks and land use. It is a City owned parcel intended as right-of-way. The question is "how does it relate to the parks system?" The Commission did not have a strong opinion one way or the other. Mr. Dunnigan would like the Council to consider this space as open space. This issue has been tabled to the April 21st City Council meeting.

Another parks issue is residents being able to access the Bruce Vento Nature Center that runs parallel to Highway 13. Would it be appropriate to have access for pedestrians off of Hiawatha Avenue to Highway 13?

Chair Portz asked if it would be unusual for the Parks Commission to take a position on the request.

Mr. Sedlacek said it would be a little unusual and the Commission should consider whether the land is a value to the community as an open space or park use. The Commission could choose to make a motion with a recommendation to the City Council. The letters that were passed out were in opposition to both vacations with the exception of one that just mentioned one portion of the vacation from Hiawatha Avenue to Highway 13.

Mr. Brian Burnette, 591 Hiawatha Avenue, said he is the resident requesting the vacation. He has lived in his home for 15 years. There have been two break-ins at his home and suspicious activity – beer bottles and trash. He has maintained the property for 15 years and has two young daughters. The biggest concern is safety. It is very accessible to Highway 13. It's dark back there at night. A fence would be put up to cut down the suspicious activity. It would also keep out some of the foot traffic.

Commissioner Toth asked if the land was vacated if the residents on the back side would gain 30 more feet of property.

Mr. Sedlacek responded that the property would be turned back to where it was platted from.

Commissioner Toth asked if it was 30 feet wide and the length of the property being discussed.

Mr. Sedlacek responded that it is 168 feet long.

Chair Portz asked if the thought was that putting up a fence would make it safer.

Mr. Burnette responded that yes it would stop suspicious activity.

Commissioner Commers asked if the 168 feet was from Hiawatha Avenue to the back. And how much land is it from Highway 13 in?

Mr. Kullander responded it is about 180 feet.

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Mr. Sedlacek said if the land is vacated it could create another subdividable lot on Highway 13. It would not create a subdividable for Mr. Burnette.

Mr. Burnette said that most crimes occur at alleys, right-of-ways and in dark areas.

Mr. Bill Dunnigan, 597 Sutcliff Circle, said staff has been very helpful and cooperative with this issue. He enjoys the green space in the neighborhood. To give up green space grades against his philosophy as he is a former Parks and Recreation Commissioner for St. Paul. He would like to see the land left as green space for the community to enjoy. He is sympathetic to Mr. Burnette's safety concerns. His lot is as big as any in the neighborhood and Mr. Burnette could put up a fence on his existing property. He hasn't noticed any vagrants accessing his yard or any cars parked on Highway 13. Giving away right-of-way space is not a solution to the problem. The City shouldn't take a position of removing property that will benefit one individual and be a disbenefit to other individuals and the community as a whole. The corridor may or may not be trail. Giving the property to the property owner to the north will benefit them financially and harm the property owner to the south as their lot will be less valuable. There is a buffer of trees behind his house that borders the green space.

Commissioner Commers asked if the right-of-way was at one time 60 feet wide.

Mr. Dunnigan responded that it was his understanding that it was 30 feet on the Cherokee Park Heights subdivision with the potential to add another 30 feet to the south when the other subdivision was built.

Mr. Kullander responded that the south was a single parcel with six to eight acres with a single family home. When the developer bought the land he took the home down and platted a cul-de-sac down the middle and did not need the existing Eugenia Avenue right-of-way.

Mr. Dunnigan reported that Miriam Street used to dead end and might have been hooked into Eugenia Avenue but that never happened. When Council approved the plat in the 90's there was discussion about the right-of-way. The developer got his development and the homeowners to the north were assured that a road would never go through their property in the Eugenia Avenue right-of-way. It is working fine as green space except for the break in.

Mr. Burnette added that his objective is not to exclude kids or children from playing the area. It's always been kept open and maintained. A fence is wanted in the back for security and safety. Mr. Dunnigan did approach me and asked if the property were vacated would I be interested in selling half of it to him. It's not about property value it's about safety.

Commissioner Toth asked why the City isn't maintaining the property.

Mr. Kullander said that undeveloped right-of-way is not maintained by the City and it is left in its natural state.

Commissioner Toth asked the cost to maintain the property.

Mr. Kullander said it would take about five minutes to mow every two to three weeks and wouldn't cost much after getting rid of any brush that needs to be gotten rid of.

Ms. Nicole Herrmann, 569 Miriam Street, was informed two weeks ago by Mr. Dunnigan about this issue. The backyard of her home will be drastically cut if the vacation goes through. She has three children that play in the backyard. She moved into the home because of the nice backyard. She does take care of the land

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as do the neighbors to the north. If the land is vacated she would like the land split between the two homeowners.

Mr. Sedlacek responded that her home was included in the mailing notifying neighbors of the vacation.

Commissioner Commers asked if it there were two requests for vacations.

Mr. Sedlacek responded that there were two requests. The land reverts back to the landowner where it was platted from.

Ms. Herrmann asked if the neighbors to the north petitioned for the land.

Mr. Sedlacek said yes they asked for the land. The plat was done in 1924 and when your development came in the developer decided to extend Miriam and didn't need that half of the street.

Mr. Dunnigan showed the Cherokee Parks Heights plat and noted there were no houses to the south at the time of the plat in 1924. If the street was not platted the lots may have been 100 square feet bigger. The house on Hiawatha Avenue would have an additional 6,600 square feet if the street is vacated and make it more valuable. There is a mutual benefit to keep it as green space. A fairness issue comes into play because the houses to the south don't get any of the land.

Chair Portz said he can see both sides of the issue.

Commissioner Brackey asked Ms. Herrman if her garage was right on the property line that is being discussed.

Ms. Hermann said it was and would loose her backyard if the land was vacated. She would have about 7 feet off of her deck for a backyard.

Chair Portz said the Commission didn't need to do anything. It was good to hear the residents and people are probably watching.

Commissioner Toth said the question is what does the City want to do with the land? Questions to ask are should there be a trail put there in the future. What is going to happen on the other side of Highway 13? What is the use for the City today? These questions need to be answered before I make a recommendation to the City Council. Why hasn't the City been taking care of this parcel of land?

Commissioner Commers said he doesn't think a trail could go in there because of Highway 13 being so busy. The land is also quite away down from the Bruce Vento Nature Area.

Commission Brackey isn't ready to make a recommendation.

Commissioner Commers said all three people had good points.

Chair Portz said his opinion is that the City buys land for open space and shouldn't give away land. He is glad the residents came and talked to the Commission.

Commissioner Commers said it's interesting that the residents have been taking care of the land.

PAR 3 LANDSCAPING

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Chair Portz introduced Ms. Julie King a landscape designer from Sage Landscape Design. She volunteered to help landscape the Par 3 by the parking lot.

Ms. King is co-owner of Sage Landscape Design. Sage Landscape Design does the design, installation and garden maintenance of gardens.

Chair Portz said the area is from the parking lot up to the club house.

Ms. King said the design plan is colorful and inviting to the patrons. The garden has native plants which are hardy and sustain our temperature conditions. The design is a mix of native and non-native plants. The non-native plants were chosen for their longer bloom time. There is a variety of color and texture. There are perennial plants that will bloom at different times of the year. Many of the shrubs and plants will provide habitat for birds and butterflies. There is access to the putting green and the first tee. There is a secondary path from the parking lot to the club house. There is also a rain garden incorporated into the plan. Rain gardens collect storm water and filters out pollutants. This will be good for the end of the slope.

Some of the plants are shrubs with berries for the birds, rebecca which is a flower that blooms from summer to fall, red shrub roses and grasses. The two rain gardens would contain native plants and grasses.

Chair Portz said the drawing looks like Inver Wood and Highland golf courses with a lot of color.

Ms. King asked what staff has thought of the plan.

Mr. Sedlacek said the City Council looked at the landscaping plan and has given it the preliminary thumbs up. A staff member in engineering has done rain gardens and looked at the plan. His one thought was if we wanted to save some money than smaller plants should be planted.

Top soil has been ordered. The grounds supervisor at the golf course gave it the thumbs up. The Greens Committee suggested that the Grounds Supervisor have his maintenance crew install the plantings.

Chair Portz said using native plants and having a nature habitat are good ideas.

Commissioner Commers asked about plantings for the area that faces Dodd Road.

Ms. King said she wasn't asked to look at that area but plantings could be easily added.

VERBAL UPDATE – 2009 PARK & TRAIL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Mr. Kullander reported that the fencing contractor will start replacing the backstop and installing the outfield fence at Hagstrom-King Park on Monday. The existing player benches will be kept and the fence will be in front and behind them. The fencing in front of the benches will be 10 feet high and behind them will be eight feet high with nine feet between them. This way teams can bring blue tarps and clip them overhead for shade or rain protection.

At Friendly Hills Park the trail will be reconstructed at Decorah Lane to Huber Drive. A new segment will be installed from Decorah Lane over the drainage way to the tennis court. This work will be done this summer.

While the fencing contractor is in the City they are going to install 250 feet of temporary fence at the Pilot Knob site so people can't drive in the area that is being restored.

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In Victoria Highlands Park the playground is being totally reconstructed with a concrete sidewalk and engineered wood fiber surfacing. That work should start in early May.

Chair Portz said he is looking forward to the sun shelter.

The playground at Friendly Hills Park about 2/3 of the play components will be replaced, new border timbers and ADA accessible wood fiber surfacing will be installed. This work should start in May.

Great River Greening has an event on Earth Day, Wednesday, April 22nd at the Pilot Knob site. A volunteer group will work on brush hauling and general site maintenance. On April 25th, volunteers will work in another area planting. On June 25th at 11:30 a dedication ceremony will be held. Phase 2 will be dedicated and the permanent interpretive signs will be installed.

Chair Portz asked if Wiley Buck could come and give a presentation at a Commission meeting to update on the Pilot Knob site.

Mr. Kullander said he would talk to Mr. Buck.

An "open house" is being held at Town Center tomorrow night at 6:30 to discuss various options for pedestrian access from Mendota Plaza across to Town Center (bridge, at grade improvements or tunnel). Council will direct which option(s) should be considered for more detailed investigation at the April 21st City Council meeting.

Commissioner Toth asked if it would be taped.

Mr. Sedlacek didn't think it would be.

Mr. Kullander said Council wanted to get some input from residents about the proposed options or ideas for the intersection. Project funding is still being worked on.

Commissioner Brackey said she couldn't imagine a tunnel under a major intersection.

Mr. Kullander responded that it was possible. There is a tunnel under Highway 13 under the Mendota Bridge.

Commissioner Commers asked if Mr. Kullander preferred a tunnel or bridge.

Mr. Kullander responded he preferred a tunnel, but would need to see the plans. If a bridge were built Council wanted an attractive bridge.

Plans are 95% done for the Dodd Road trail and Highway 13 trail. The City is in the process of acquiring easements. The City Council is supportive of these projects. Both trails should be done in the next couple of years.

Crack sealing and general repairs will be done this summer to trails in the City.

Commissioner Toth asked the average age of the trails.

Mr. Kullander responded when the referendum was passed in 1989 10 or 11 miles of trails were constructed in 1990. Before that the City only had about ½ of a mile of trails. Since 1990 new construction has

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increased to a total of 21 miles of trails. As street reconstruction projects move forward opportunities present themselves and trails are added.

Commissioner Toth asked if the trails that were built 1989 needed to be rebuilt.

Mr. Kullander responded that it depends on the soil conditions where the trails are. If there is good drainage and maintenance of trails a mat can be put down to seal cracks and extend the life of the trail. The City Council puts \$45,000 in the maintenance budget for trail repair each year.

City Council directed staff to use chemicals to treat the weeds in Rogers Lake up to 15% which is what the Minnesota DNR will allow. Two appointments have been set up with applicators. The cost is estimated to be about \$6,00 to \$8,000. The money will come out of the storm utility fund this year. The health of the lake will be monitored and if treatment is unharmed to the lake it may be kept up every year with homeowners sharing the cost.

Commissioner Toth said he would like to commend the City Council and thank them for moving forward with this issue so quickly.

Mr. Sedlacek said if treatment of the weeds is successful a line item will be added to the budget in the future to keep treating the weeds.

Commissioner Toth said there was a lot of information in the community such as St. Thomas studying the lake.

Mr. Kullander asked the Commission to start thinking about the budget for 2010. What should be planned for. The recommendations need to go to Council in August. Usually the Commission asks for 5 or 6 projects and usually 3 or 4 are approved. One thing is the Mendakota Park playground. It is 19 years old and would be a benefit if additional 2-5 year old components were added. There are a lot of kids using the park during the day.

Chair Portz believes that 2-5 year old components would be appropriate at Mendakota Park. Families watch their kids play at the fields.

Valley Park would be another idea to think about such as removing invasive plants, restore open meadows, dredge the pond and aim for oak savannah restoration. In 2002, a Natural Resource Management Plan was done for the whole City. Valley Park has a lot of native plants that are being choked out with a lot of involuntary growth. The park is 95 acres. It could be brought back to a natural state in about 10 years. Mr. Kullander will prepare a memo for next months meeting for suggested projects and the Commission can call him with any ideas they may have.

Chair Portz suggested taking a field trip out to Valley Park.

PAR 3 UPDATE

Mr. Sedlacek reported that the Par 3 is open as of March 31st and business has been good. The course came out of winter very nicely speaking of the turf, well and irrigation system. All systems are working. A new mechanic was hired and he gets an A++. He has gone through all the equipment and fixing things which have been broken for years and finding things that are about ready to break. The machines run smoother than they ever have.

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The start up costs for the 2009 season is approximately \$3,500. Considering the amount of time the mechanic has put in this is great. There has been some nice brisk business. It was a great weekend. Rates did change for 2009. Youth rates are still the same. Seniors is \$9.00 weekdays and \$11.00 on weekends. For everyone else it is \$10.00 on weekdays and \$12.00 on weekends. It is still the lowest rate for a Par 3 or executive golf course in the Twin Cities. Leagues are filling up.

Tom Perkins has come up with some special events for this year. There will be moonlight golf. Glow sticks will be put around golfers necks, glow in the dark golf ball will be given out and glow in the dark tubing will be put on the flags and in the holes. Also birthdays will available for the youth. Hot dogs, chips, pop and access to the greens will be provided. Cakes can be brought in.

Commissioner Brackey asked if a specific age was specifically being catered to.

Mr. Sedlacek responded no. They will be scheduled around slow times.

Commissioner Brackey asked if it would be charged per child.

Mr. Sedlacek responded that it would be charged per child. The rate is posted at the club house.

The Junior PGA tournament will be June 25th. Our own youth invitational will be held on June 13th. There will be two flights going out. The Mendota Heights invitational will be held on May 30th. It will be for the City Council, Commissioners, staff members, spouses and families. It will be a shot gun start. There will be hot dogs, beans and chips provided with dishes brought to share. If you don't golf come for the food and socializing at the end.

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Commers asked if fixing trails would be an on-going process throughout the summer.

Mr. Kullander responded a contract is put out with contractors bidding on it. It is up to the contractor if they do it all at once or in increments.

Chair Portz said he watched the Parks and Recreation sitcom TV show last Thursday night and thought it was bizarre. It was fun to watch though.

Mr. Sedlacek reported that May 2nd is the annual spring clean up behind the Mendota Plaza. It's a good time for folks to clean up their basements, attics and garages. Most everything will be taken but household hazardous waste. Electronics will be collected and there will be a 25¢ per lb charge.

Commissioner Commers made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Brackey seconded the motion.

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The meeting adjourned at 8:50 P.M.