

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

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

AUGUST 8th, 2006

The August 2006 meeting of the Mendota Heights Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Tuesday, August 8th, 2006 in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 1101 Victoria Curve. The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

The following Commissioners were present: Vice-chair Paul Portz, Missie Hickey, Raymond Morris, Tom Kraus and Larry Craighead. Commissioner Richard Spicer and Dave Libra were excused from the meeting. City staff present: Operation and Projects Coordinator Guy Kullander and Recreation Programmer Teresa Gangelhoff. Mr. Kullander took minutes.

Also in the audience were (from MHAA) Doug Vanasek, Dave Vierling, Scott Applebaum, Jeff Thames, Jack Conway, Pat Sienko, Brian Hallman and Joel Johns. Also attending the meeting were Pat Smith and Grady Smith, Steve and Mary Strafelda, and Ellie Strafelda, Martha Hubbell, and Rachel Broos.

MINUTES

Commissioner Morris moved approval of the July 11th, 2006 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes.

Commissioner Hickey seconded the motion.

AYES: 5
NAYS: 0

Vice Chair Portz noted that addition of Pet Show, which was very much enjoyed at the June 3rd, 2006 Parks Celebration, should also be included in the 2007 Parks Celebration if it is expanded as was recommended by the Commission last month.

DISCUSSION WITH MHAA REGARDING PARK FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Vice Chair Portz explained that he and most other Commissioners have been involved in prior years with the Mendota Heights Athletic Association as a parent, coach and several as a sport Commissioner. He went to thank the MHAA representatives in the audience for attending this meeting and explained that the Commission has on numerous occasions invited MHAA to attend commission meetings.

Mr. Joel Johns, President of MHAA addressed the Commission and distributed a three page handout to Commission members and City staff (attached). Mr. Johns thanked Chair Portz for his comments and like him and other Commission members he and all of the volunteers that are part of MHAA have the same goal, to support the youth of the community.

Mr. Johns proceeded to review and explain the items contained in his handout.

Mr. Johns, during his presentation, emphasized the desire to have exclusive use of the Mendakota Park fields Monday thru Thursday for youth games. He envisioned several age groups playing on different fields and that this would create a great social gathering place as well as a huge financial opportunity for us with the concession stand, something we do not have when we travel to use the fields at Visitation/St. Thomas. He felt that this could be there “number one” asset and acknowledged that this would displace the current adult softball programs, which are a mix of resident and non-resident ballplayers, and suggested that there games could be played on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. Johns also elaborated on the need for covered dugouts, not only at Mendakota but other fields and said that during their weekend tournaments during several of our very hottest days MHAA expended considerable funds purchasing temporary shade covers to protect the players.

Mr. Johns expressed a desire to improve communications between MHAA and the Parks Commission and for MHAA to have input into facility improvements (construction of a ballfield vs. a walking path or tennis court).

Vice Chair Portz thanked Mr. Johns and stated that the Commission supports better communications with MHAA. He further stated that these are very good ideas and that the Commission has some history on many of them and the Commission would evaluate and prioritize their suggestions and needs.

Commissioner Morris said that the Special Park Fund currently contains \$270,000.00 and the Commission goes through a very complex process when prioritizing park needs and that many of our existing trails and tennis courts are nearing the end of their usefulness. He explained that the Commission has to look at all park needs for all age groups because of the limited funds to work with.

Commissioner Craighead commented that in 1989 a Parks Improvement Referendum for \$2.7 million dollars was approved that resulted in many improvements throughout the City including the ballfields at Sibley, development of Mendakota and Kensington Park, improvements in every neighborhood park and extensive trail segments. He also said that when he came on the Commission the Special Park Fund balance was \$300,000.00 and that if this fund were to be spent down to nothing there would be no need for this commission. He also said that the City and the Commission try to maintain the fields in a safe playable condition and that without an increase in property taxes doing more then this is not possible.

Mr. Johns suggested that if the City discontinued the adult softball leagues at Mendakota the \$8,000 to \$10,000 the City receives in registration fees could be made up by MHAA from concession sales if they were allowed exclusive use of the fields Monday thru Thursday. He also suggested that funds be re-prioritized so that skating rinks could be maintained in better shape and open more then twelve weeks each year so that Mendota Heights kids would not have to go to West St. Paul to play hockey where they have better ice conditions.

Commissioner Morris explained that the Commission is an advisory body and the City Council makes decisions on what programs are offered or where and how maintenance funds are allocated. He went on to say that the City appreciates the vital role that MHAA plays in providing sports opportunities to Mendota Heights youth but that many of the issues raised tonight involve tax revenues and policies that can only be changed or modified by the City Council.

Vice Chair Portz asked Mr. Kullander if he wished to make a comment.

Mr. Kullander said that the City Budget does not include funds for new capital improvements in the Parks or trail system, but does include funds for maintenance of existing facilities and recreation programming. Funding for capital improvements or construction of new park facilities is funded from the Special Park Fund which relies on Park Dedication Fees required when a new building lot or housing unit is approved by the City Council and that this number is quite low because the City is essentially fully developed with very few open areas that could be developed.

Mr. Kullander explained that to develop the sports complex proposed by MHAA, multiple lighted baseball fields, dome for basketball, youth ball fields, parking, concessions, etc. would require in excess of 15 acres of land with construction costs in excess of one or two million dollars, not including the cost of the land, but that there are only a one or two vacant parcels of land left in Mendota Heights which is almost totally developed. The request to upgrade one or more of the neighborhood parks to a “higher” use level would mean pushing current usage/activities to some other park that has existing activities and where would these uses be move to or would result in a reduction of the current programs or activities offered.

Commissioner Hickey asked Mr. Johns if MHAA could prioritize there short range requests.

Mr. Johns said that they would do that he would like to continue this discussion and be part of the Commissions long range planning of issues.

Vice Chair Portz said that the materials presented was good information and that he or Chair Spicer would get back to MHAA so that a dialogue could continue and this issue will be placed on the September agenda for continued discussion.

Patrick Sienko (MHAA) approached the podium and asked the Commission to clarify what funding was available for future facility improvements like those included in the MHAA short range and long range plans.

Commissioner Morris suggested that MHAA may want to approach the City Council and said that some sort of bonding by the Council would be necessary to fund these types of projects.

Vice Chair Portz explained that the Commission has funds and would prioritize their requests and review other requests to arrive at a plan that they can present to the Council and see what funding is available. He went on to say that projects the Commission prioritizes will be ones that they can possibly fund from the Special Park Fund and larger projects would require bonding or tax money from the City Council.

Commissioner Kraus remarked that the Commission deals with financial restraints and have limited capabilities. He said that when he read the MHAA list he got “sticker shock” and wanted some cost breakdowns to help the Commission figure with this balancing act of trying to find the overall scope of the situation.

Mr. Sienko agreed that defining the overall scope of the problem was necessary but that he comes realizing that everyone wants nice facilities but why do all the other communities have them and we do not. He asked if it has reached the point where the 2000 MHAA members should start e-mailing the Council.

Commissioner Morris said that the Special Park Fund has always had limited funds and with the City almost fully developed and the number of new dedication fees in the future will continue to decline.

Commission Craighead referred to the Parks Five Year plan for proposed capital improvements and suggested they contact staff for a copy and that the Commission would revisit this plan next month when the discussion continues and MHAA requests have been prioritized and reviewed.

Commissioner Klaus in response to Mr. Sienko's statement of MHAA members contacting the Council, that at this point this action would not be productive and even if there were 2000 standing in this room saying we want these things would not get us any closer in determining what are our capabilities today. Once the commission has explored the possibilities we can develop a plan. He went on to thank MHAA for gathering this information and emphasized that the Commission would be looking further into the issues raised and this discussion will continue.

Vice Chair Portz pointed out that out of the 100 or so communities within the Metro area that Mendota Heights has consistently been one or two places from the bottom of the list of least taxed communities and this is something the City Council tries to maintain. The low taxes have been a benefit to residents.

Mr. Kullander gave an overview of the types of improvements funded from the 1989 Parks Referendum and what decisions were made and why concerning development of ball fields.

Mr. Sienko stated that his son has never had an opportunity to play on the full size baseball field at Sibley because they will not allow anyone to use it.

Mr. Kullander briefly described the field use priorities contained in the Joint Use Policy between the City and School District and informed him that they should be able to use this field anytime the School does not have it scheduled and that he could provide a copy of the agreement if needed. *(GK – Note: Use of this field has been questioned before. Priority use: Sch Dist extra curriculum and athletic teams 7 am to 6 pm, M-F plus 4 hrs on Saturday. Next priority is organized MH youth programs)*

Mr. Sienko stated that the School District says no to almost all requests from MHAA for field use.

Vice Chair Portz thanked the MHAA members for their effort and said the Commission would research these issues and put a plan together and get back to them and possibly set up a future meeting. Excellent communications.

REQUEST FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Vice Chair Portz invited Ellie Strafelda (age 10) to approach the podium and address the Commission regarding her concerns (complaints) regarding her experience this summer while on a MHAA Girls ball team

Ms Strafelda reading from a prepare document stated she represented her friends and opponents and stated that the MHAA is not being fair. She reports that the boys program, the same age as her, have umpires while the girls do not. The boys also have better more complete uniforms. She made her complaint to her coach who said the girls would have umpires for the final tournament-they did not. The boys also have scheduled practice sessions and the girls only

meet the coach once and never have practices. She talked to the former Commissioner and he said when he was in charge the boys and girls got equal treatment.

Vice Chair Portz thanked her for a very well prepared presentation. He went on that he agreed that it should be fair across the board for both girls and boys. He directed a question to the MHAA members present if this falls within in their area and not the City's.

Scott Applebaum (MHAA) came to the podium and said he talked to Ellie, her friends and mother in the Lobby before tonight's meeting and agreed that her description does make it appear that the programs are unequal. He went on to say that Ellie has been invited to address the MHAA Board next Monday and that their monthly meeting and that the changes she requested would be discussed with the Baseball Commissioner. He also said MHAA was trying to acquire additional pitching machines so more teams would have these available to use. He apologized for any miscommunications and said that any differences in the programs was not intentional and promised that things would change, that they are aware of the problem, and will work to find solutions.

Commissioner Morris said that it was great that they brought this forward and complimented Ellie, her friends, and mother and remarked that she should be proud of her daughter.

REQUEST FOR PRACTICE "BANG-BOARD" AT A TENNIS COURT

Vice Chair Portz invited Grady Smith to the podium and complimented him on the letter he had written to the commission requesting installation of tennis practice "bang-boards" at one or more of the City's tennis courts (Marie or Valley).

Mr. Grady Smith reported that he participates in the Mendota Heights summer tennis program and that sometimes he does not have a partner and a practice "bang-board" would allow him to improve his tennis skills.

Commissioner Morris discussed some of the concerns Mr. Kullander included in the staff memo, especially maintenance issues and it was suggested that a notice be placed at several courts asking other tennis players to contact City Hall with their concerns or support. Mr. Morris went on to say that he supported seeking input from other tennis players of various ages.

Commissioner Craighead commented on how successful past efforts to get input from residents or neighbors has worked, especially the skate park issue that started at Friendly Hills Park but due to concerns was ultimately located at Roger's Lake where very little opposition was heard. He also pointed out the positive outcome at Ivy Hills Park when the Commission was considering if usage warranted investing additional money into repairs or consider closing the courts. Overwhelming support from residents was to repair and keep the courts open.

RECREATION PROGRAMMERS REPORT *(Attached)*

Recreation Programmer Gangelhoff reported that the Safety Camp was overflowing with 54 MH kids and that two MH Police and two MH Fire personal volunteered to help during the three day event. The last youth trip is tomorrow, a party was held on July 28th to celebrate the end of the summer tennis program. Teresa wanted to thank Bob Lawler and John Conway who volunteered all summer to help Tim Garvey with the tennis lessons. She went on the say that everyone had a good time and the fishing derby and 354 fish were turned in to be weighed and measured. She

also wanted to thank Ira Kipp, a resident that is a supporter of the derby, provided a generator when it discovered that the power was off at the pavilion in Roger's Lake Park.

CHANGE DATE/TIME OF SEPTEMBER COMMISSION MEETING

Vice Chair Portz asked the Commission if Thursday, September 14th, at 6:30 pm would be acceptable. Hearing confirmation from all members present, staff was directed to place this item on the next City Council agenda.

COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY

Vice Chair Portz acknowledged a memo from Operations & Projects Coordinator Guy Kullander requesting direction from the Commission on what type of policy and how much City staff involvement they desired.

Commissioner Morris said that he heard from several serious gardeners that a community garden policy could create a serious hassle for city staff and suggested that perhaps a policy is not needed since existing sites are available from the Dodge Nature Center and perhaps some may also be open on the Visitation property south of Mendota Heights Road.

Vice Chair Portz suggested that perhaps the City should only deal with this on a case by case basis and that developing a "program" where some of the preparation would be done by City employees would be too much.

Commissioner Craighead did not want a policy that only allowed residents living adjacent to a park to apply for a permit because this would be unfair to other residents.

Commissioner Klaus explained that community gardens are an issue he very much supports but he suggests that perhaps citizens should form a private group and approach the City with a request to use a specific area of a park for gardens. The City would then review each application to see if it addressed an established list of City concerns or criteria.

Staff were directed to develop a draft policy on use of park land for community garden space that requires an organized group of residents to formulate a use plan that would be submitted to the City for review and that this plan must address specific areas.

SPECIAL PARK FUND BALANCE

Vice Chair Portz asked Mr. Kullander to summarize the memo included in the agenda

Mr. Kullander explained that the current balance in the Special Park Fund is \$273,144.05. Mr. Kullander went on to say that the amount going into the fund this year from dedication fees from the Opus development may not be significant, but that Opus has said that the entire project would be completed in 2007. By the end of 2007 the entire amount, \$230,400.00, will have been paid into the fund.

Commissioner Craighead asked when the current Parks Five Year Capital Improvement Plan expires.

Mr. Kullander said the current plan runs through 2009 but the Commission developed the five year plans as a tool to help guide planning efforts for various projects and the plan has, in past years, been re-visited and revised by the Commission on several occasions. The plan, when developed, contained projects prioritized by the Commission that could be funded from the Special Park Fund and still allow to maintain or reserve a level of funds the Commission historically sought to protect (\$250,000 to \$300,000 range).

Vice Chair Portz asked for a review of the current projects in the Five Year Plan and to provide a cost breakdown of the projects MHAA has requested and submit this information for the Commission to discuss in September.

FINAL ACCOUNTING OF 2006 PARKS CELEBRATION FUND

Vice Chair Portz recapped various income and expenditures from the celebration and prepared his own summary prepared in a standard format for looking at a business operation that can help better manage and understand the financial status that reflected an ending balance for the celebration of \$7,242.00. He further went on to express his hope that the Council again budget \$10,000.00 in 2007 for an expanded Annual Celebrate Mendota Heights Parks event.

TENNIS COURT FIVE YEAR MAINTENANCE PLAN

Vice Chair Portz asked Mr. Kullander to summarize the five year maintenance plan for the City's five tennis courts that was included in the agenda packet which also has been included for consideration during preparation of the 2007 City Budget.

Mr. Kullander explained that the plan recommends \$18,000.00 for tennis court maintenance in 2007 but the exact amount Council budgets will not be known for several weeks.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Morris moved that the meeting be adjourned

Commissioner Klaus seconded the motion

AYES **5**
NAYS **0**

Meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

