



PARK SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN REFINEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

August 12, 2021

7:00 PM

Fridley City Hall, 7071 University Avenue N.E.

MINUTES

Members Present: Mike Heintz, Peter Borman, Dan Gourde, Don Whalen, Kim Farraro, Ken Schulz, Malcolm Mitchell, Liz Novotny, Jordan Hurst, Jim Stangler, Maija Sedzielarz

Members Absent: E.B. Graham, Traci Wuchter, Jeremy Powers

Others Present: Mike Maher, Community Services Director, Candace Amberg, WSB Landscape Architect, and Jeff Jensen, Operations Manager for Streets, Parks and Facilities

Mike Maher, Community Services Director, called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Maher welcomed those who were present.

2. Icebreaker Activity

Mr. Maher led the group in an introduction and icebreaker. He concluded the exercise by summarizing that this meeting will be to set the table for the group's future work. The group will discuss how to set expectations of how the group wants the decision-making process to be. He informed the members that these meetings are open to the public.

3. Review and Discuss Refinement Task Force Charter and City Council Resolution No. 2021-51, Directing Continued Efforts Pertaining to the Park System Improvement Plan

Mr. Maher reviewed feedback from the 2021 Town Hall Meeting where preliminary concepts were shared with the public. Responses from residents were considered and caused the City Council to adopt Resolution No. 2021-51, which was the Council's direction for staff to refine the Park System Improvement Plan (Plan). Resolution No. 2021-55 formally appointed members to two separate task forces. The Finance Advisory Committee will examine funding options for the Plan, and the Refinement Committee will examine concept plans to pare down the cost of the Plan to approximately \$30 million.

Mr. Maher reviewed the committee charter, which outlines the framework of the group's work, the format of the committee's meetings and the role of the committee in the overall Plan. He reiterated that this is an advisory committee tasked with making a recommendation, that will ultimately be decided upon by the City Council.

4. Park System Improvement Plan Background

Mr. Maher provided a brief history of the Fridley park system, reviewed current park conditions and introduced park improvement plan benefits. Mr. Maher recapped 2019 community workshops that identified the community's priorities of safe and connected parks for all, nature access, and quality facilities.

Committee members noted additional considerations should be including age groups included in plans, better wayfinding and signage, and flexibility in accommodating sporting trends.

Candace Amberg, WSB Landscape Architect, reviewed her firm's process in analyzing what the current park usages were and incorporated those sports into the Plan. Peter Borman commented that Community Park was built for softball and now is sitting vacant. Mr. Borman recommend consulting with sports associations to find out why they play where they do. Mr. Maher said the next meeting would be to review community parks. Ms. Amberg reported that she will consult with local sports associations to integrate their feedback, community survey results, and feedback from this meeting's discussions to refine concept plans.

Mr. Maher reconfirmed the group will get into discussions on specific parks and uses for each at later meetings.

Jim Stangler noted it would be nice to know what each park is currently being used for. Ms. Amberg replied that analysis will be integrated into future presentations to the group as concept plans change.

Mr. Maher asked the group to spend time reviewing each park concept. The group will discuss the three community parks: Commons, Community and Moore Lake, and approximately six of the neighborhood/special use parks to recommend changes. In subsequent meetings the group will decide what six parks they will work on. This process will help refine the priorities, which will impact the price.

Mike Heintz noted the Park and Recreation Commission's strong recommendation that there be no consideration of selling any park land within the City. Mr. Maher noted the consideration of selling park land is not being considered in the Plan.

Malcolm Mitchell asked if there were any criteria for review that the group should look at? Ms. Amberg replied that yes, the priority to understand system as a whole to identify particular populations and how the parks serve them, examine the barriers to park usage, age of the park, safety concerns, condition and accessibility of each park. Ms. Amberg discussed barriers to recreation in high-density, low-income and minority neighborhoods is a major component of analyzing the Plan. Those are the parks she really would encourage the group to focus on to make sure the most meaningful impact to the community is felt. The change needs to be noticeable so taxpayers understand what their tax dollars pay for. Ms. Amberg stressed the need to make a good and big impact for residents so they realize the good work being done and are supportive of additional improvements.

Kim Farraro asked how long it would take to pay for the Plan. Mr. Maher said it depends on the recommendation of the Finance Committee who is working on exploring different financing strategies. Mr. Mitchell thought working on financing strategies first does not make sense until the Plan is fully

established with a clear price tag. Mr. Maher informed the committee that most likely the primary source of funding will be bonding, but other avenues are being explored. This group is tasked with paring down to the current proposal from \$50 million to \$30 million at direction of the City Council.

Mr. Heintz added the City has a good track record with how it financed the Springbrook Nature Center building through bonding. Mr. Maher added that if the group would like to learn more about the financing options, he would request the City's Finance Director come to speak with the committee.

Ms. Amberg noted this is an exercise to prioritize top parks to work on. There will be projects that will move down the priority list and that will decrease the cost. She asked the committee to look at broad picture to make sure the whole community is served.

Mr. Mitchell asked if the \$50 million price was based on high-estimate price for each concept plan in the binder. Ms. Amberg affirmed. Ms. Farraro asked if there a price list for each item at each park? Ms. Amberg affirmed and noted that as the group works through feedback, they can decide what items to remove, which will decrease the overall cost.

Ms. Amberg reviewed the park service area analysis in the committee's binders.

Mr. Mitchell asked what features are most desired by diverse groups. Ms. Amberg recommended the committee consider age. Typically, City parks accommodate younger children, and teens are often not considered when new equipment is installed. Also, how can we get parents involved to enjoy the park alongside their children or grandchildren.

Mr. Heintz added shelter buildings are appealing for diverse groups who use those facilities for family/community gatherings. It is a good way to serve those who may not have their own yard space. Mr. Maher noted these discussions will be a big part of this group's work.

Jeff Jensen, Operations Manager for Streets, Parks and Facilities stressed the important work of this group to analyze and determine where are high-need areas are. There will be some conflict. The group must weigh all aspects and prioritize the work to be done, and not every group will be satisfied. The committee's task is to discuss and debate so the City may attempt to best serve all groups. He added that the City needs to create a Plan that will provoke a response from residents to the Plan, and this committee is tasked with finding a way to wisely pare down the initial proposal.

Mr. Borman asked if the committee should take into consideration the added burden to the City of staff hours and maintenance. Mr. Jensen answered, not at this phase. The operational cost has already been considered. Those costs will be absorbed by the City and is a past practice of the Council.

Mr. Maher informed the committee that first thing they will be asked to consider are the three community parks. He asked the group to visit each one and envision the space with the proposed changes to visualize the concepts. This will allow each member to best be prepared to analyze each proposal, and to recommend changes.

5. Task Force Meeting Agreements

Mr. Maher led the group through a discussion to understand and agree on how the group will interact with each other.

Mr. Borman asked how long the meetings go on, and what was the ultimate goal. Mr. Maher replied that he has scheduled meetings until the end of 2021. He is open to what the group thinks for how long they would want to meet. Don Whalen added that the first two meetings will tell the group a lot once they begin getting into details. Ms. Amberg added the next meeting will be to discuss high-level items first, and subsequent meetings will do a deeper examination into particular parks. Mr. Maher reminded the group that their suggestions will go to Ms. Amberg who will then bring back a revised Plan for the group to review.

Mr. Mithcell suggested the meetings be set for 90 minutes with the flexibility to go longer, but not more than two hours. The group collectively agreed.

Mr. Mitchell noted its ok to have a disagreement. Maija Sedzielarz added the committee members should assume positive intent and be willing to listen to other people's perspective.

Mr. Maher confirmed that all members will have an equal voice in the process and committee meetings. The committee's meetings will be public meetings and members of the public are encouraged to attend.

Mr. Maher reminded the group that this is a refinement process where the three community parks will be examined first, followed up by six neighborhood parks. The committee will work toward an end recommendation that the City Council will consider.

Mr. Jensen added that this could be a ten-year plan. Part of the process with any park plan is community input to begin designing a concept. This group will work to take those park concepts, consider feedback from the community and planning experts to come to a more defined and clearer concept. Then ultimately, present the refined Plan to the community for their buy-in.

Ms. Amberg offered to provide guidance through her expertise, but will not make any decisions for the group.

Mr. Stangler asked why the City is not asking for the full \$50 million concept. Ms. Amberg answered that based on community feedback in the resident survey, there was a set dollar amount residents were willing to pay for a Plan. Mr. Maher confirmed that the City Council decided on the \$30 million price based on the resident survey.

Ms. Farraro asked if the group was aware of increasing taxes from the school districts and the County. Mr. Maher explained that the City typically uses eight other cities as comparisons for percentage of property taxes. Fridley is usually in the middle of that list. He noted that adding a \$30 million bond would increase property taxes but not significantly compared to other cities. Ms. Farraro added that a tax increase would compete with another increase from the school district, and may not be supported. Mr. Maher acknowledged it will be hard to separate the finance conversation from the work of this committee, but that is the work of the finance committee.

6. Review and Confirm Future Meeting Schedule

Mr. Maher presented proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2021: September 9, October 14, November 10, and December 9. For each meeting an agenda along with the previous meeting's minutes will be sent.

Jordan Hurst asked for confirmation of what the committee should do for the next meeting. Mr. Heintz answered to take the binder to the community parks and visualize the Plan and come to the meeting to discuss.

Mr. Maher thanked the committee for attending this evening's meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Moore, Administrative Services Coordinator/Deputy City Clerk