

BRAINERD PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
Special Park Board Meeting
June 16, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.
Brainerd Fire Department Training Room
23 Laurel Street, Brainerd, MN 56401

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the special meeting of the
Parks and Recreation Board was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Board President Schaefer.

Present were President Kara Schaefer, Dale Parks, Troy Rushmeyer, Kevin Yeager and Park Director Tony Sailer. Also noted present were Recreation Coordinator Katie Kaufman, Mayor Dave Badeaux, City Administrator Jennifer Bergman and Human Resources Director Kris Schubert. Tim Boeder was noted absent.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Addition of New Business Item "D" – WSB contract. Motion to approve agenda by Parks; seconded by Yeager; motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Outdoor Recreation Grant

Mr. Sailer reported that the department did not receive the Outdoor Recreation Grant. Out of \$8M in grant requests, \$3M was awarded. The department was encouraged to apply again in 2021.

B. Park Evaluations

Board members reviewed the final group of park evaluations that included Bane, Buffalo Hills-Lions, Jaycees, O'Brien and Trailside parks. Common themes among the park evaluations were tree removal and replacement, grass quality, building roofs, and picnic tables. Mr. Sailer reported that someone has been hired to grind stumps. Evaluations will be used as a tool for ongoing maintenance projects and budget planning into the future. It was discussed to seek maintenance-free materials when replacing roofs and picnic tables. The Board requested that a community survey be conducted to find out what residents would like to see for amenities and programs in the park system. Recreation Coordinator Katie Kaufman will put together a park-specific survey based on topics and questions provided by board members. Mr. Sailer reminded the Board that he requests capital improvement funds from the City Council each year at budget planning time, based on the 30-year city-wide capital improvement plan.

NEW BUSINESS

A. New Hires

Temporary maintenance hires are Greg Roberts, Jack Schafer, James Jenkins and Beau Kubesh. Mr. Parks made a motion to approve the new hires, Mr. Rushmeyer seconded and board approval was unanimous.

B. Department Restructuring

Ms. Schaefer opened by asking that everyone keep an open mind with this first discussion of possibly restructuring the Parks Department. She turned the floor over to Troy Rushmeyer who requested the discussion. Mr. Rushmeyer said he has been thinking about this for some time with the drop in youth participation numbers in recent years. He stated the park evaluations convinced him the department needs to look at a different way of doing things. He is not putting blame on staff; he just feels the system the department is working in doesn't fit anymore. He doesn't think we can properly maintain the parks and properly run youth programs. He looks at restructuring not as something negative, but as an opportunity moving forward to do the very best for the community. He turned the floor over to Kevin Yeager.

Mr. Yeager stated he joined the Park Board because he has historically been highly critical of the park system. He surveyed park staff from four other communities to find out how they run their parks departments, toured 12 parks in those communities and compiled results which were distributed with meeting materials. He said the glaring difference he saw was the appearance of the parks and the number of employees dedicated to beautification and maintenance. He

would like to embrace a new vision of what our parks can be by focusing on parks and maintenance and beautification for awhile and see if we can find a partner in the community that is willing to take the programs, though he would not be willing to do away with programs if it meant leaving kids without any programs. He closed by saying the first step is making a choice as a team to go in a different direction.

Discussion centered around how to achieve what other similarly sized communities have done. Goals, budget, and staffing were discussed.

Mayor Badeaux reported that the City is reviewing the city charter, which states the Park Board shall establish the recreation policy. He doesn't believe a recreation policy has been established in the past and thinks the Board should start now to create a recreation policy, perhaps see who the partners in the area might be and then define the policy before moving on to the next steps.

Ms. Schaefer reported that she and Mr. Yeager, Mr. Sailer and Ms. Kaufman met with Shane Riffle, Executive Director of the Brainerd Family YMCA who requested the meeting to discuss the possibility of a partnership for youth programming.

A lengthy discussion followed about establishing the future direction and structure of the department, keeping the department's policies and mission and vision statements in mind. Mr. Yeager proposed they put a Request for Proposal out to the public to see if there are potential partners interested in managing any of the youth or adult programs before the Park Board can establish the recreation policy. If there is no response, he would not want to see programs eliminated. Mr. Parks was concerned about how the public would perceive outsourcing programs and thought perhaps a public statement should be issued. Staff provided budget information for each program. Ms. Kaufman expressed concern about where she and Mr. Sailer fit into the equation, and if they would have a job in a year. Board members said this is a preliminary exploration into how the department can best serve the community and it is more about how the department is structured than individual jobs.

Mr. Yeager made a motion to create a Request for Proposal that lists programs run by the Parks Department, requesting involvement from community members and entities for future participation or management of those programs. Mr. Rushmeyer seconded the motion. Board members Yeager, Rushmeyer and Schaefer voted "aye", with Mr. Parks voting "nay". The chair declared the motion passed. Ms. Bergman advised the board to be very clear with the RFP language, and to run it by the City Attorney. She was not sure the board could hand-pick who it would be sent to. She reminded the Board that this is their staff. They do this every day; they know what the programs are and what it entails. She encouraged the Board to rely heavily on them.

C. Adult Softball

Board members received a packet of information about potentially starting adult softball. Under the current COVID-19 guidelines, youth sports are not allowed and adult sports are not recommended, with adult softball considered medium risk. Ms. Kaufman reported that USA Softball State Commissioner Dan Pfeffer said that several Minnesota Sports Federation communities have already begun playing. She provided a preparedness plan and asked the Park Board to consider starting the leagues, based on how they interpret the COVID-19 verbiage. Restrooms would be opened for four hours on league nights and posted with proper signage that they are cleaned once a day. All players would be required to sign a waiver and there would be no subbing allowed. Staff would need two weeks to mobilize, with a proposed start date of July 6. Mr. Parks made a motion to allow adult softball to begin with the conditions set forth. Mr. Rushmeyer seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

D. WSB Contract

Mr. Parks made a motion to approve the WSB contract to be signed. Mr. Rushmeyer seconded. Board approval was unanimous.

PUBLIC FORUM

There was no public forum.

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, June 17, 2020, at 4:00 p.m. at the Brainerd Fire Department training room.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn to the June 17 meeting was made at 6:53 p.m. by Mr. Parks and seconded by Mr. Rushmeyer. Motion passed 4-0 and the Chair declared the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Finch, Administrative Specialist