



FOX CROSSING PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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PARK COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

November 8, 2023

Park Commissioners Present: Jim Beson, Jordyn Kurer, Chris McCoy, Steve Otto, Suneer Patel, Kathy Sylvester, Jean Wollerman

Staff Present: Director Amanda Geiser, Recreation Supervisor Leah Zak

Others in Attendance: Jeni Fernandez, Bob Jacobs

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The Commission meeting was held at the Municipal Complex, 2000 Municipal Dr., Neenah, and was called to order by Commissioner Beson at 6:00PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and roll call was taken.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES AND DISCUSSION OF EXPENDITURES

The Park Commission dispenses with the reading of, and adopts, the October 11, 2023, regular meeting minutes. Commissioner Patel motioned to accept the minutes, seconded by Commissioner Otto. Commissioner McCoy abstained, motion carries.

PUBLIC FORUM

- Jeni Fernandez spoke in regards to an October 6, 2023 memorial/donation letter sent from the Parks and Recreation Department. Ms. Fernandez read the letter which asks donors to clean up any additional items they have placed around memorial trees and benches. The letter also indicates that effective January 2024, additional items will no longer be allowed around donation sites. Ms. Fernandez indicated her young Godson passed away unexpectedly last year. He loved playing at Fritsch Park often and since his passing a memorial tree has been planted near the little slide he enjoyed playing on. She visits the park frequently and has placed trinkets and items in the tree area. She stated her nephew does not have a gravesite that she can visit so the tree and the area around it mean a lot to her. She feels having the extra items around the tree brighten up the area and make the area less sad to her. She mentioned she spoke to Director Geiser on the phone a while back after some items had been stolen/damaged from her Godson's tree, and then again after receiving the letter. Upon receipt of the letter which indicated items would no longer be allowed, she approached Director Geiser at Fritsch Park while she was setting up for the Trick-or-Treat Trail event. She was looking for information as to why the extra items were no longer being allowed. Ms. Fernandez was not happy with the response she received from Director Geiser that day and felt she was being insensitive. Ms. Fernandez indicated she does not understand how this new policy will make things better for the park and wondered how many other memorial sites have had issues. Ms. Fernandez noted she contacted the Police Department to ask what will happen if she does not comply with this new policy. In closing, she asked the Park Commission to reconsider this policy change and will keep an eye on future meeting agendas.

DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION

- Volunteer of the Year Recommendation:** Director Geiser discussed her recommendation for the 2023 Volunteer of the Year. This year she would like to recognize the group of individuals who work in our parks on Saturdays in the spring and fall. They spend the majority of their time at the Rydell Conservancy and O'Hauser Park, but have also worked in other locations through the years. The individuals to be recognized include: Randy Meyer, Carl Hett, Norb Radle, Brad Landrath, and Cooper Landrath. Director Geiser noted that two members of the group are not mentioned in this list. Both Jim Beson and Connie Meyer have previously received this award and even though they continue to spend a tremendous amount of volunteer time in our parks and at events, Director Geiser thought it was important to recognize the five individuals separately at this time. The presentation will

take place at the December 13, 2023 Park Commission meeting. The Commission agreed with the recommendation.

- B. Park Pavilion Summary and Survey Results:** Director Geiser shared the numbers for the 2023 park pavilion rental season. This year saw the highest total of pavilion rentals and overall survey responses were positive. It was noted while some of the concerns around cleaning are valid, in some cases renters have too high of expectations of our outdoor park pavilions.

REPORTS

- A. Park Report:** Accepted as written.
- B. Recreation Report:** Accepted as given.
- C. Director Report:** Accepted as given.
- D. Commission Reports:**
- **Commissioner Beson:** No report.
 - **Commissioner Kurer:** No report.
 - **Commissioner Otto:** No report.
 - **Commissioner McCoy:** No report.
 - **Commissioner Patel:** No report.
 - **Commissioner Sylvester:** No report.
 - **Commissioner Wollerman:** Not report.

OLD BUSINESS

- None

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Approval of Parks & Recreation Department Philosophy and Related Polices:** *Commissioner Sylvester made a motion to approve the updated Parks and Recreation Department Philosophy and Related Policies as submitted. Commissioner Kurer seconded.*

Director Geiser reviewed the changes that mostly centered on the temporary signage policy, the memorial/donation program, and the contracted recreation program fee split.

The Commissioners then discussed changes to the memorial/donation program and comments included:

- Commissioner Beson indicated this is an emotional subject for people but the point of having the donation program is that the tree itself is the memorial. It was never the intention that trees/benches would become display areas. In some cases such as the park benches, they are no longer usable. His feeling is people should be encouraged to make their own memorial, possibly by planting a tree on their own property. This would offer them the same opportunity they are looking for, but one in which the park does not allow. He indicated if we were to allow some items it would be difficult to manage what is and isn't allowed. He reiterated this was never intended to be a public memorial site.
- Commissioner Wollerman asked how many trees and benches are part of the donation program. Director Geiser did a quick review and noted it's over 100 total. Commissioner Wollerman wondered if it's possible that the 5 who have items placed around their donation be grandfathered in to allow one item for a specified amount of time longer and then going forward any future donations would be subject to the new policy. She mentioned the symbolism of the tree is that it's a tree of life and the tree is giving the deceased life. This is still a place where people can go, sit and meditate. She agreed it is painful as we have all lost people in our lives.
- Commissioner McCoy asked how many areas have been decorated beyond the plaque. Director Geiser indicated there are probably 5-6 total. He agrees with not allowing items around the bench but asked if there is room to adjust the wording on the tree policy, to only allow a small number of items. Director

Geiser indicated it would be difficult to draw the line between what's allowed and what's not, but would do whatever the Commission feels is best.

- Commissioner Kurer feels that consistency is the key and noted it has to be a blank policy of what is expected of all donors.
- Commissioner Sylvester noted she keeps a lot of items in her house and attaches them to certain people. This is an emotional situation, but in the case of the bench at O'Hauser, it's difficult to even sit on it. It can get overwhelming, and for people who aren't connected to the items, they can see something else. We want our parks to be uniform for everybody. She said we've all lost someone and there are things that remind us of someone. Commissioner Sylvester appreciates Ms. Fernandez coming in and putting herself out there for her Godson and she's sure this isn't easy, but she feels we need something uniform for everyone. With over 100 donated items it can get overwhelming to manage.

Director Geiser mentioned the memorial program really took off with the redevelopment of Fritse Park and that area is what the program is modeled after. She apologized for how Ms. Fernandez felt she was treated at the park but reminded everyone she was setting up for an event that was about to start. Director Geiser mentioned she offered to talk to her on the phone on a different day as this wasn't the time for the discussion. This is not easy for staff and sometimes working with the donors and families is emotional for them as well. The reason for the program in general can be sad, but staff tries to do the best they can to give loved ones something to honor their lost family members. In terms of the park, nothing is safe in a park setting. Unfortunately staff has seen people tend to damage just about anything and everything. She indicated she doesn't want people to put items out and have the items disappear, and also wants a uniform look to the park system. This wasn't an easy decision for staff to make but there are starting to be a lot of extra items and now it's starting to disappear. Director Geiser took responsibility for things going further than they should have because she didn't want to tell people to take their stuff away from the sites. As an offering to make things easier for Ms. Hernandez, Director Geiser offered to possibly place a small placard/sign by the small green slide in honor of her Godson.

The motion was put to a vote and approved 5-2; Commissioners Beson, Kurer, Otto, Sylvester and Patel voting yes. Commissioners Wollerman and McCoy voting no.

- B. Approval of Fritsch Park Land Use Agreement – YMCA of the Fox Cities:** Commissioner Patel made a motion to approve the 2024 Fritsch Park Land Use Agreement with the YMCA of the Fox Cities as submitted. Commissioner Sylvester seconded. All in favor, motion carries.
- C. Approval of Palisades Park Land Use Agreement – Appleton Little League:** Commissioner Otto made a motion to approve the 2024-2025 Land Use Agreement with Appleton Little League as submitted. Commissioner Kurer seconded. All in favor, motion carries.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Otto motioned, seconded by Commissioner Sylvester, to adjourn the Park Commission meeting at 7:00PM. Motion carries unanimously.

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for December 13, 2023, at the Municipal Complex, 2000 Municipal Drive, Neenah, at 6:00PM.

Sincerely,



Jim Beson

Chairperson - Village of Fox Crossing Park Commission