

Official minutes
Parks & recreation advisory commission

Members present: Amy Brandli, Bruce Cantor, Jay Jaffee, Adrienne Krill and Sonya Rippe

Members absent: David Yakes

Staff present: Jason West, Parks and Recreation Director, Pat Coleman, Community Engagement Coordinator, Sean Walther, Planning Manager and Deputy Community Development Director and Larry Umphrey, Parks Superintendent

Guests: None.

1. Call to order

Commissioner Rippe called the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission meeting to order at 6 p.m.

2. Introductions / roll call

Present were Commissioners Krill, Brandli, Jaffee, Cantor and Rippe. Staff members Jason West, (Parks and Recreation Director), Larry Umphrey (Parks Superintendent), Pat Coleman (Community Engagement Coordinator) and Sean Walther (Planning Manager and Deputy Community Development Director) were also present.

3. Approval of minutes – December 3, 2025

Commissioner Rippe asked if anyone had additions or corrections to the minutes or if someone would make a motion.

It was moved by Commissioner Jaffee, seconded by Commissioner Cantor, to approve the minutes from December 3, 2025. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Presentations

a. Preliminary and final plat for 5430 Minnetonka Boulevard

Sean Walther, planning manager and deputy community development director, presented the application for a preliminary plat and variances at the northwest corner of Minnetonka Boulevard and Highway 100. He explained this was the site of a former Rogers/Holiday gas station that MnDOT acquired and demolished during Highway 100 improvements. The property has now been sold to developer Sela Investments, who built the Parkway Residences, Parkway 25 and Parkway Commons.

Mr. Walther explained the developer is not subdividing the property but needs to plat the lot that MnDOT provided since it lacks a proper lot and block description. The development will include 33 units, and the city will collect park dedication fees of \$1,500 per unit. Trail dedication fees of \$225 per unit would also apply, though staff recommends reducing this amount because the developer will build a trail connection

from the Vernon Avenue cul-de-sac south to Minnetonka Boulevard. Any remaining funds after trail construction would be paid to the city.

Mr. Walther noted the comprehensive plan shows no new parks designated for this location, so staff recommends accepting a fee in lieu of land dedication. He added that Planning Commission was holding a public hearing on the plat and variance requests that same evening. The variances relate to underground parking that will extend into the front yard setback but will not be visible once constructed.

When asked about cleanup from the former gas station, Mr. Walther explained MnDOT did not clean up the property except for areas they disturbed, so they turned it over with contamination still present. The developer will bear cleanup costs. He noted this is unique because the developer has not requested city financial assistance, unlike most redevelopment sites.

Commissioner Rippe clarified the commission was only considering the park dedication and trail fees, with Planning Commission handling the other items.

It was moved by Commissioner Cantor, seconded by Commissioner Brandli, to approve the recommendation for park dedication fees in lieu of land. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Vision 4.0 and boards and commission by-law update

Pat Coleman, community engagement coordinator, provided an update on the Vision 4.0 process. He reminded commissioners he had visited previously during the engagement phase and returned to share results. On December 8, 2025, city staff and consultants presented the engagement recap to city council.

Mr. Coleman explained Vision 4.0 is the city's visioning process conducted every 10 years through deep community engagement to establish strategic priorities for the next decade. The process began in fall/winter 2024, before he was hired, with Sean Walther and Cheyenne Brodeen leading initial efforts.

The engagement included several components. An ambassador cohort met three times in March 2025 with 35 average participants including city staff, council members, leadership, an internal planning team of 10-12 staff, and board and commission chairs and vice chairs. This group helped plan the engagement process and developed questions that guided data collection throughout. A live artist from Studio Thalo attended meetings and created a 5-foot by 6-foot painting displayed on the third floor of city hall, capturing themes from the conversations.

The community survey received 633 responses, far exceeding the approximately 200 responses from Vision 3.0. Mr. Coleman had anticipated around 400 responses but credited social media outreach and event engagement for the strong turnout.

Community conversations allowed residents to hold meetings in their own spaces like dinner parties or bonfires, creating safer and more comfortable environments for feedback. These conversations engaged 96 participant's total.

Mobile pop-up engagements occurred at about 20 events with tabling's. Four events featured artist engagement activities including metal art burning where participants

could make notes about engagement questions and street corner letterpress creating postcards with responses. Residents could take home their creations.

Open houses included a virtual session in August, an event at Aquila Park during Welcoming Week and presence at St. Louis Park High School's back-to-school night.

Total tracked engagement reached 2,336 interactions: 1,600 from mobile pop-ups, 633 survey responses and 96 from community conversations. Mr. Coleman noted this exceeded Vision 3.0 numbers and represented diverse participation across ages from 12 to over 65 years old and various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The consultant group analyzed all collected data including survey responses, community conversation feedback and sticky notes from pop-ups to develop five key themes with recommendations for city council:

Safety - creating a community where all people are and feel safe, encompassing physical safety, police and fire services and mental health components. Feedback focused on maintaining St. Louis Park's existing safe feeling rather than addressing specific safety concerns.

Infrastructure - building and maintaining a connected, reliable and people-first public realm.

Sustainability - leading as responsible stewards of natural and financial environments.

Community and belonging - fostering a vibrant, connected and inclusive community where everyone belongs.

Housing and affordability - ensuring diverse and attainable range of housing options for all.

Phase two now involves a consultant group working closely with city leadership to create strategic priorities based on these findings. The kickoff meeting occurred at yesterday's city council study session, with completion targeted for end of March.

When asked how the findings would be used, Mr. Coleman explained the consultant group will use them when engaging city council to develop strategic priorities. Mr. Walther added themes from the findings will inform strategic priorities, which then feed into the strategic plan with goals, objectives and metrics. This will also influence the comprehensive plan update over the next two and a half years and affect programs and initiatives. He noted visioning has been a valuable touchstone for over 30 years.

Mr. West explained how this connects to the commission level through work plans based on key strategic priorities from council.

Regarding "Leading with Love," Mr. Coleman explained this came from a community advisory group member's comment, emphasizing that all feedback came from a place of love for St. Louis Park rather than negativity.

Mr. Coleman then addressed boards and commissions bylaw updates. Throughout 2025, several amendments to city code affected boards and commissions, including implementation of stipends. As staff reviewed these changes, they identified other areas needing updates, particularly bylaws. Each commission has bylaws, many

outdated, creating repetitive information across city code, bylaws and rules and procedures documents.

For advisory boards, Mr. Coleman plans to consolidate bylaws into one rules and procedures document to eliminate redundancy and create consistency. When asked about commissioner participation in this process, he indicated he would determine this as the process develops but noted changes would not affect day-to-day operations. He will provide updates through Mr. West.

Regarding stipend payments, Mr. Coleman confirmed those who opted in should have received payments a few weeks ago. Commissioners can still opt in but will not receive back pay for the first six months. New participants would start receiving payments from the December period onward.

Mr. West thanked Mr. Coleman for serving as emcee at the National Day of Racial Healing event on Monday, praising his presentation alongside other REI staff.

c. Parks Capital Improvement project review

Larry Umphrey, Parks Superintendent, presented an overview of capital improvement, maintenance and grant projects for 2026.

For maintenance, Walker Park soccer field will be shut down and fenced beginning in spring. The field will undergo leveling, deep core aeration, watering, fertilizing, seeding and weed control. It will remain closed throughout summer and reopen in spring 2027. Mr. Umphrey encouraged commissioners to tell anyone using the fenced area to stay out, noting they had issues at Louisiana Oaks Park with people going through fences. Louisiana Oaks Park looked much better before snowfall compared to previous years. The field for 2027 maintenance has not been determined but will involve discussions with football, soccer and baseball organizations. Louisiana Oaks Park fencing will come down in late April.

Birchwood Park basketball court will be resurfaced. Mr. Umphrey is currently getting quotes, preferring spring resurfacing. Last year they booked in March but work wasn't completed until July. He was happy with last year's contractor who was cheaper with good quality work. He typically seeks three quotes for better understanding of options, aiming for May completion.

Aquila Park fields three and four will receive dugouts similar to fields one and two, supported by a Hennepin County shade grant. Multiple quotes and designs are being reviewed. The preferred design exceeds grant funding, requiring negotiations with vendors. One scenario would have zero impact on field play while another would affect play. Mr. Umphrey will coordinate with Jim Lombardi, who runs adult softball, to minimize interruption. Installation could occur anytime from spring to fall depending on the option selected and softball schedule.

Aquila Park playground, installed in 2011 and showing wear after 15 years of heavy use, will be replaced with a new structure including shade elements, from a Hennepin County grant. This will be the third playground installed in summer 2026, scheduled for September to avoid affecting summer park use. When asked about shade structures, Mr. Umphrey explained options include integrated shades through vertical posts, sail-type shades and cantilever shades like at Ainsworth Park. Full playground shade

coverage would cost \$100,000 with footings, so partial coverage is more likely given grant funding limits. The playground location is in the southwest corner of Aquila Park, not part of the school.

Parkview and Cedarhurst Parks will also receive new playgrounds in 2026. Proposals for all three playgrounds begin reviewing tomorrow with public engagement to follow. Installation will be staggered with one each in July, August and September. Staff handles much of the removal, wood chips and related work. The staggered schedule allows maintenance of fields, irrigation and other duties while providing buffer time for weather delays. Typically tear out takes one week and installation takes one week or more depending on weather and shipping issues.

Parking lot repairs are planned for Nelson Park and the south lot at Louisiana Oaks Park, involving patching and repair. If funds remain, possibly with streets department assistance, additional lots may receive striping. Nelson Park's northeast corner experiences water submersion and ice problems. A culvert in the grass area may be improved for better drainage to extend asphalt life. The area takes significant wear from trucks servicing two hockey rinks, especially during freeze-thaw cycles. Nelson Park is located west of Peter Hobart School with two permanent hockey rinks.

Athletic lighting at Dakota Park baseball field will convert from halogen to LED. An assessment in March will determine if existing poles can support LED lights. Keeping poles would save significant money while pole replacement would exceed budget. The department recently replaced broken halogen lights at Nelson Park hockey rinks with LEDs, resulting in excellent lighting, an Xcel Energy rebate and 8 – 9-year payback on electrical savings.

When asked about workload, Mr. Umphrey indicated three playgrounds is typical based on his two summers of experience and review of the 7 – 8-year CIP. Some years have more but less expensive projects. The Dakota Park lighting project has \$345,000 in CIP funding. Hockey rink lighting cost about \$15,000 without poles while baseball field lighting without poles would cost \$70,000-\$90,000, leaving funds for other projects. With pole replacement, costs would exceed \$345,000. Project counts may be slightly below average while dollar amounts are slightly above average.

Mr. Umphrey announced the department received a \$300,000 Hennepin County grant for an inclusive playground at Oak Hill Park, which is scheduled for replacement in 2027. The city received the entire \$300,000 allocation, which is unusual. Mr. West praised the grant writing by Mr. Umphrey, Nikki Friederich and Heidi Batistich. Total project cost is estimated to be around \$500,000 depending on specifications. Savings from other projects like light posts could potentially be reallocated. The grant resulted from staff creativity in seeking additional funding, with planning beginning in 2025 including tours of different facilities by Mr. Umphrey and Ms. Batistich to research options.

5. Business

a. Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA) update

Mr. West announced he is no longer the West Metro representative for MRPA, with Nikki Friederich being elected to that position, ensuring St. Louis Park maintains representation.

Mikayla Beuch, recreation supervisor, received the MRPA presidential award. Mr. Umphrey and the entire team attended to support her. She received recognition primarily for organizing the Lifeguard Olympics, during her leadership year when she secured sponsorships and doubled participating teams. The event was held in St. Louis Park and was highly successful. The presidential award is given at the MRPA president's discretion to select individuals.

Additionally, Commissioner Rippe is the new MRPA president for this year. She has developed an exceptional agenda for the state association that will help it excel.

b. Discuss April meeting date

Mr. West initially thought the April meeting might need rescheduling due to a conference but determined it unnecessary. With April 1 being Wednesday, the third Wednesday falls on April 15. His conference trip will be the following week. No commissioners had conflicts with April 15, so the meeting will remain as scheduled unless something else arises.

c. Distribute naming policy

Mr. West reminded commissioners about the naming policy discussed mid-last year, last updated in 2007 or possibly 1999. Original policies date back to 1972. He included the policy in packets and asked commissioners to review it this month for detailed discussion in February.

Commissioner Rippe recalled this arose from discussion about a playground representative wanting a dedication plaque on the inclusive play structure at Oak Hill Park. The commission offered parameters that were declined, prompting the need to review policies.

6. Staff communication

a. Mark Oestreich update

No update was needed as Mr. Oestreich was on the agenda for Carrie's celebration.

b. Stipend payments

This topic was covered by Pat Coleman earlier in the meeting.

Mr. West highlighted the National Day of Racial Healing event held Monday at the Rec Center. Over 100 people attended including Ron Latz, Larry Kraft, council members and the mayor who gave the closing keynote. The event provided community members an opportunity to come together and take a breath during challenging times. ZaRha provided sound bowls for meditation to help people center themselves. Pat Coleman and Jocelyn Hernandez Guitron gave a presentation about National Day of Racial Healing. The event concluded with SOAR students leading table conversations on difficult topics. SOAR students receive training weeks in advance to prepare for leading these discussions. Attendees particularly appreciated the student-led format.

Regarding Minnehaha Creek cleanup, per commission direction they selected April 25 from 9 a.m. to noon at two locations: MSC and Knollwood. Two staff-led groups will work at each section. The 9 a.m. start time allows staff to prepare equipment for both

locations. Registration will be free but requested to estimate attendance at each site. Students may show up without registering. Mr. West emphasized this represents the commission's request for two sites in spring. Commissioner Rippe requested Stacy Voelker send calendar invitations. There was uncertainty whether the date was decided at the last meeting or afterward based on Mike Bahe, Natural Resources Manager's availability.

7. Community Education / School District communication

Patrice Howard was unable to attend due to a family emergency and had no updates to pass along.

8. Member communication

Commissioner Jaffee expressed satisfaction that the Oak Hill Park situation worked out well despite being messy or dicey. He noted it brought out important discussions about processes for future naming and was glad for the positive outcome.

Mr. West expressed excitement about working with the commission on naming policies to provide staff direction.

Other commissioners had no additional communications.

9. Adjournment

It was moved by Commissioner Brandli, seconded by Commissioner Jaffee, to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

These minutes were created with the assistance of a generative AI transcript service, then edited and finalized by a staff person.