

MINUTES OF A THE PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE PARK DISTRICT OF HIGHLAND PARK HELD ON OCTOBER 28, 2021, 4:00 PM. PURSUANT TO SECTION 7(e) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT, THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS HAS MADE A FINDING THAT IT IS NOT PRACTICAL OR PRUDENT TO HOLD IN PERSON MEETINGS BECAUSE OF THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY. NEITHER THE ELECTED OFFICIALS NOR THE PUBLIC WILL BE ALLOWED TO ATTEND REGULAR OR COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN PERSON BUT WILL PARTICIPATE VIRTUALLY. LINKS TO THE VIRTUAL MEETING CAN BE FOUND ON THE PARK DISTRICT WEBSITE [HTTPS://WWW.PDHP.ORG/PARK-BOARD/MEETINGS/](https://www.pdhp.org/park-board/meetings/)

Present: Commissioner Freeman, Commissioner Bernstein, Commissioner Kaplan, Vice President Grossberg, President Ruttenberg

Also, Present: Executive Director Romes; Director Gogola; Director Voss; Director Smith; Assistant Director Murrin; Manager Schwartz, Manager Johnson; Architect Evans; Coordinator Hejnowski

Guest Speaker: None

Approval of the Parks and Natural Areas Committee Meeting Minutes from the September 30, 2021

The minutes from the September 30, 2021 Parks and Natural Areas Committee Meeting Minutes were approved.

Sunset Woods Park

A. Playground Renovation Project Update

Manager Schwartz provided project highlights and shared images of the updated progress noting that crews are waiting on delivery of a custom drainage connection to finish up the drainage system, additionally, crews are continuing to work on grade skating and framework for the curbs and reconstruction of the stone seating walls. Lastly, she is pleased to report that play equipment has arrived and will be installed next spring. As a result, the concrete masonry work and tot lot equipment will be installed and completed this year. As of next spring, landscaping, pour-in-place, and fencing will be installed and completed.

B. Sunset Woods Site Master Plan Update

Manager Schwartz reported that the Sunset Woods Site Master Plan details staff recommendations based on feedback and engagement from the community, so staff are here this evening seeking consensus from the Committee to place the Site Master Plan on the consent agenda for the November 16 Regular Board Meeting.

The Sunset Woods Master Plan recognizes Sunset Woods as Highland Park’s destination community park nestled in the center of town. The plan strives to consider the timeless park holistically and in the context of the community and surrounding areas. In partnership with the community, the Park District and a design consultant team developed a Master Plan to honor Sunset Woods Park and guide improvements over the next 10 years. As a reminder, this is a conceptual plan which will be used as a resource to guide future development and identify funding.

In the fall of 2020, the Park District began engaging the public to understand current use and desired improvements for the park and playground. Feedback was collected through online and in-person events, virtual community meetings, listening sessions, and discussions with local organizations. The information gathered was used with additional feedback from Park District staff and the Park Board of Commissioners to prepare preliminary plans for the park and playground renovations. As a result, the concept Master Plan will preserve and honor the natural character of the park, improve connectivity and parking through enhanced entries and realigning parking spaces to permit improved traffic flow, enhance and repurpose existing amenities which includes the tennis and basketball courts, the skate park, field house renovations, and lastly, adding new desired recreation such as the adult fitness area, an amphitheater with natural tiered seating, and a water play area. Some future considerations include dog amenities such as an off-leash dog park, ongoing evaluation of the clay courts, considering Sunset Woods as a possible site for pickleball courts, and evaluating the interest from the community regarding a pump track.

Implementation will be guided by a prioritization plan developed by community and stakeholder feedback. The project team considered impact, community interest, and effort to determine high, moderate, and low priority projects. Once approved, the Sunset Woods Park Master Plan will serve as a tool to guide future development at the park and help to identify funding sources. As a reminder, this is a living document that staff will continue to evaluate.

Vice President Grossberg would like to know why staff are considering replacing the clay courts with hard surfaces due to the maintenance challenges.

Executive Director Romes reported that staff are exploring solutions, such as adjusting the Park District's policy to permit the use of a chemical to remove and prevent moss and algae from growing on the courts or replacing the clay with a hard surface.

President Ruttenberg would like to know if lighting throughout the park is adequate so that guests can use the paths in the evening.

Manager Schwartz reported that lighting has been identified as a need, so staff are determining where new lights will be placed for increased pedestrian visibility.

President Ruttenberg would like to know if the paths will be regraded, and additional benches will be placed throughout the park to accommodate the senior population.

Manager Schwartz reported that additional seating has been identified as a need since this is an intergenerational park.

President Ruttenberg would like to know if staff has been in communication with the hospital regarding connectivity.

Manager Schwartz reported that staff has been in communication with the hospital since they are frequent users, so connectivity off Park Avenue Road has been identified as a priority.

President Ruttenberg would like to know the plans for additional parking.

Manager Schwartz reported that staff are planning to realign the parking spaces, which will improve circulation and permit two-way traffic, without expanding the parking lot. Additionally, the parking lot off Sunset Road is receiving enhancements for busing.

President Ruttenberg would like to know if the ballfield near Park Avenue Road could be converted into an additional parking lot.

Manager Schwartz reported that the community is strongly opposed to additional hardscape, however, staff will continue to evaluate interests in the community to better address the parking challenges.

President Ruttenberg is pleased with the progress staff are making.

Executive Director Romes reported that the Park Site Plan Initiative has highlighted maintenance and operation improvements at Sunset Woods Park including improved signage, replacement of waste receptacles, drinking fountains, and other amenities throughout the park.

Additionally, Executive Director Romes would like a consensus from the Parks and Natural Areas Committee to add the Sunset Woods Site Master Plan to the consent agenda at the November 16 Regular Board Meeting.

Commissioner Bernstein would like to know the purpose of the plan since it is unfunded.

Executive Director Romes reported it's important to have a concept plan that has been vetted and approved by an architect and the Park Board of Commissioners so that when funds are available these concepts can be used to guide future planning efforts. Likewise, if the concept plan has been approved by the Park Board of Commissioners, staff can submit it for grant applications.

Commissioner Bernstein requested that this presentation be shared with the Park Board and the Community at the November 16 Regular Board Meeting.

Moroney Park Site Plan Update

Manager Schwartz reported that the Park Site Plan initiative identified Moroney Park as a neighborhood park in need of a playground renovation. Staff will schedule community meetings to better identify the needs and desires of the community, before investing in renovations.

President Ruttenberg would like to know if the tot lot currently at Moroney Park will be relocated into the larger parcel, which is an open space.

Executive Director Romes reported that the survey will be conducted by staff, so there is no additional expense to gather community input.

Commissioner Freeman requested that staff examine and consider the school boundary lines before surveying the community.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:46 p.m.