MINUTES
CITY OF ELKO NEW MARKET
PARKS COMMISSION MEETING
AUGUST 14, 2024
6:00 PM

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Sutton called the meeting of the Elko New Market Parks Commission to order at 6:01 p.m.

Commission members present:	Sutton, Vernon, Jones, Hokeness and West
Members absent and excused:	None
Staff Present:	Planner Jake Skluzacek

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Sutton led the Parks Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Sutton asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Planner, Jake Skluzacek, informed him that there were no changes to the agenda.

A motion was made by Vernon and seconded by Jones to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion carried: (5-0).

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mark Bergstrom, 255 James Parkway, was present to speak to the Commission. Bergstrom stated that he was here to talk about renting the ball fields at Wagner Park. Bergstrom pointed out that the City Facilities Rental Form has a checkbox to rent the shelter and a checkbox to rent the fields. Skluzacek clarified that they are independent of the other, when you rent the shelter, you only get the shelter and vice-versa.

Bergstrom's request was to be able to reserve the ball fields on behalf of NMBA for select Saturday dates in June and July. Currently the policy restricts ball field reservations for games on the weekends to accommodate shelter rental parking. Skluzacek informed Bergstrom that the request was discussed at the June 12 meeting and the Commission did not recommend amending the policy to allow for ball field reservations for games on the weekends. The reasoning had to do with the parking, there have been previous conflicts between shelter rental users and ball field users when both are going on at the same time.

Bergstrom mentioned an instance that happened this summer in which a ball game was played on the weekend due to weather and a shelter rental was happening at the same time. Bergstrom stated that there were no issues with the two uses going on simultaneously. Skluzacek stated that just because that was the case that specific time, it is unpredictable how much parking will be required for each shelter rental. Some will have enough parking to create issues, just as has had happened in the past.

Discussion took place on parking at Wagner Park. Bergstrom informed the Commission that he would be willing to instruct his teams to park on Park Street rather than use the Wagner Park parking lot so there would be more parking available to shelter rental users. Skluzacek stated that if NMBA were willing to reserve the shelter for those specific Saturdays, that parking would not be an issue as NMBA would be the only user. Bergstrom will reserve the specific shelter dates for NMBA Saturday games in June and July next Summer.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Sutton asked if there were any changes to the minutes. No changes were discussed.

A motion was made by Hokeness and seconded by Jones to approve the minutes of the June 12, 2024; meeting as presented.

Motion carried: (5-0).

6. GENERAL BUSINESS

A. Little Free Library Discussion

Planner Skluzacek discussed a request received from a resident at the June 12 Commission meeting. The request was to place a Little Free Library within Boulder Heights Park. The resident, Bob Larsen and his wife would volunteer to be stewards of the Little Free Library, checking the contents and performing maintenance on the structure when needed.

Skluzacek explained that Staff worked with the City Attorney's Office to determine the best course of action. The City Attorney had recommended placement of the structure on the Larsen's own property as it would only require a City right-of-way permit. The Larsen's originally planned to install the Little Free Library on their own property, but once the new playground was constructed at Boulder Heights Park, they believed that it would receive more traffic and be more visible if placed at the park.

The City Attorney recommended an encroachment agreement as a possible solution to placing private property on City-owned property. This is a common agreement for most fences located within a City drainage and utility easement. For anything other than a fence to be located on within a City easement, City Council approval is required. The agreement gives the City the right to remove any encroaching structure if it is needed. An example of this would be to gain access to repair a drainage tile. Although these cases are extremely rare, the City maintains a proactive approach in dealing with these possible situations. Even though the agreement is almost exclusively used for allowing residents to place sheds, retaining walls and accessory

structures within City drainage and utility easements within one's own property, the agreement could be used to allow for a Little Free Library to be installed on City property. If the structure becomes a hazard or is not well maintained, the City would be able to remove it.

Bob Larsen was present to speak with the Commission on the topic. Larsen stated that he simply rather donate the Little Free Library to the City rather than maintain ownership and beholden to an agreement. Larsen stated that he was still willing to be the steward for the Little Free Library and maintain it as needed; however, the City would assume ownership.

Commissioner Hokeness agreed with Larsen and wished to have an informal agreement that would make the Larsen's the designated stewards of the Little Free Library. The Commission was in agreement that accepting the structure as a donation would be the best solution.

A motion was made by Hokeness and seconded by Vernon to accept the Little Free Library as a donation to the City to be placed within Boulder Heights Park with the Larsen's assuming the role of stewards.

Motion carried: (5-0).

B. Alternative Funding Research Discussion

At the June 12 Parks Commission meeting, City Administrator, Thomas Terry, was present to present to the Commission on alternative funding sources for future park facilities. Terry began by refreshing the Commission's knowledge of the three traditional sources of funding for the City's park system.

Terry explained the gap in funding for the City's 2040 Park and Trail Plan even after considering the three main traditional sources of funding the City has utilized in the past. Terry stated this creates a need to explore alternative funding methods to make up the difference in what is needed for the full 2040 City park buildout. Terry planned to introduce some of these alternative funding methods to the Commission to work towards a possible recommendation to the City Council on an alternative funding source for the City's park and trail system. Of the alternative funding sources presented, three were chosen by the Commission for further discussion at the August 14 Commission meeting.

The first alternative funding method chosen for further discussion by the Commission was a utility round up program. Participants in a utility round up program authorize the City to "round up" their monthly utility bills to the nearest dollar or possibly adding a fixed donation amount. These programs have proven to be a stable source of revenue in cities that have instituted their own programs. The program would require initial start-up costs and ongoing marketing and Staff costs to administer the program.

Some Minnesota cities that have implemented their own utility round up programs include:

- Champlin
- New Brighton
- Anoka

- Proctor
- Rochester

The City contacted the cities of Proctor (33%), Champlain (11%), New Brighton (5.9%), Anoka (50%) and Rochester (no response) to find out what they're average participation rate was in their round up programs. Staff averaged these rates and rounded up to an average rate of participation of 25% for utility round up programs researched by Staff. If 25% of City residents (1500 residential accounts) participated in the program, it would equate to 375 accounts. If 375 accounts rounded up their bill by $0.50 each month, it would be estimated to generate approximately $2,250 per year in revenue. Staff time to administer the program, including benefits, is $44.24 per hour. The program would generate enough revenue to sustain approximately 50 hours of Staff time annually for reference.

Park Donations were another alternative funding method identified by the Commission. The key to growing this revenue source is a proactive City outreach program that links community members' donations to specific park needs. As with increasing grant revenue, more dollars in the operating budget can be freed up for other park purposes. Both small and large projects could be included with a donation driven approach. Individuals and businesses would also be able to choose their project from a catalog that the City could create. This approach requires Staff time and ongoing administrative and marketing costs. Also, having a limited donation base means less revenues overall for other City events and causes.

The last option identified by the Commission was a Community Foundation approach. Many states establish a Community Foundation that includes funding park projects as part of its bylaws. Annual contributions to specific projects would be made by the foundation, saving operating fund dollars for the City. This approach aggregates smaller donations to fund larger projects, it can also be used to fund non-park related projects. No tax dollars are used, and donations could be tax deductible. Even though the foundation would bear the City's name, it would be run by volunteers who are not necessarily part of the City government. Additionally, funds are not required to go to City projects specifically.

Community Foundations are usually set up to benefit a more regional area. Some examples of more local Community Foundations include Harmony, Bloomington, Rochester, and Winona. Every city's foundation requires seed money for creation. For example, the Harmony Area Community Foundation received its money from the former Trust for a Better Harmony, which was instrumental in building the Harmony-Preston bike trail and other large community projects. Likewise, a Community Foundation is accompanied by a mission statement and goals. Harmony's Community Foundation's mission statement is to serve the Harmony area by supporting projects which improve the quality of life and build a stronger community. Harmony's Community Foundation's goals are to support Parks and Trails, Fillmore Central Schools, Public Library, Arts and History, Health and the Environment, and Community Support and Growth

The Commission discussed the possible options for alternative funding methods to decide on which options may be recommended over others. Commissioner Hokeness was interested to see how much participation a potential utility round up program would be able to generate although he though it would be unlikely to raise much revenue. Discussion took place by the

Commission that the program may help raise awareness of the need for funding. Commissioner West asked if some of the information presented as part of the alternative funding research discussion could be included on a future City newsletter to also help raise awareness of the funding need. The Commission was in general agreement that the City Council should first consider a utility round up program before focusing on any other alternative funding method.

C. Draft Volunteer Organization Partnership Agreement Discussion

Planner Skluzacek stated that the City has been approached by several different individuals and organizations over the years who have asked to volunteer to plant some type of garden. These types of gardens or plantings are usually referred to as pollinator gardens and are filled with native plants that provide wildlife with additional habitat and food sources.

Most recently, Staff has been approached by the Pete's Hill Homeowners Association to plant a pollinator garden along the northern trail entrance of the Pete's Hill development. Initial discussions with the Parks Commission at the June 12 meeting gave Staff direction on what should be included in any potential agreement. City Staff worked with the City Attorney, Andrea Poehler, to create a draft Volunteer Organization Partnership Agreement that would allow for a Task Force to aid the City in the control and removal of invasive species, the planting and maintaining of native species, and the installation and maintenance of habitat for native wildlife within a specified area of City owned property.

Specifically, the agreement will address what area may be utilized as part of any planting. There is also a section related to equipment and damage as well as indemnification. The termination section of the draft agreement reserves the right for the City to terminate the agreement at any time if the Task Force fails to fulfill any of the agreement's terms and conditions.

The Parks Commission was being asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council on the draft Volunteer Organization Partnership Agreement for the Pete's Hill Homeowners Association. No discussion took place. The Parks Commission was in favor of recommending approval of the draft agreement for the Pete's Hill Homeowners Association.

D. Boulder Heights Park Shelter RFP Review

Planner Skluzacek presented to the Commission on the background of the RFP, request for proposals, for the proposed picnic shelter at Boulder Heights Park. The request was based on the desired shelter features previously identified by the Boulder Heights residents and the Parks Commission in 2023 during the planning process for the new park. Five vendors were sent an RFP for a 20' by 20' square metal shelter that would be able to accommodate four picnic tables. There was also a desire by residents for the shelter to have access to electricity.

The RFP directed vendors to include pricing for the individual structure, installation both with and without a poured shelter pad, delivery and any other relevant costs. The site preparation and grading are to be completed by Public Works prior to installation of the shelter and or pad. The vendors were also asked to include whether their option would be compatible with

electric outlets. The requested completion date for the project was no later than October 31, 2024, but due to delays in procurement, installation is likely for spring 2025.

Vendors were required to provide the City with a response no later than August 7 to be considered for the August 14 Parks Commission meeting. As of August 13, only two submissions had been received by Staff. The breakdown between the two submissions from St. Croix Recreation and Minnesota Wisconsin Playground Recreation are listed below:

Vendor	Estimate with slab	Estimate w/o slab	Installation Estimate	Outlet Capability
St. Croix Rec	$33,890.25	$26,890.25	$14,000.00	Yes
MWP Recreation	$30,160.00	NA	$9,720.00	NA

The option presented by Minnesota Wisconsin Playground Recreation featured an open-gabled roof and no compatibility with electrical outlets. The option presented by St. Croix Recreation had a fully enclosed roof and compatibility with electrical outlets. The St. Croix Recreation submission was deemed the most complete but was the more expensive option by $3,730.25.

Staff recommended accepting the submission from St. Croix Recreation due to meeting the desired features requested by the RFP. Skluzacek informed the Commission that both submissions were within the City's budget for the project.

Discussion took place between the Commissioners. The Commission was in general agreement that installation with a poured slab should be included as having one contractor coordinate the entire project would be the simplest solution. Several Commissioners had concerns with the open-gable design presented by Minnesota Wisconsin Playground Recreation and appreciated the incorporation of electrical outlets on the St. Croix Recreation submission.

A motion was made by Hokeness and seconded by Jones to recommend acceptance of the submission from St. Croix Recreation in the amount of $33,80.25.

Motion carried: (5-0).

E. City Facility Reservations Policy Discussion

Skluzacek concluded by stating that the Parks Commission was being asked to provide a recommendation to the City Council regarding the City's current City Facility Reservation Policy. Skluzacek added that the City Council has asked that any recommendation provided be accompanied by the reasoning for the recommendation.

Commissioner Hokeness had questions relating to the City's policy on alcohol and policing as part of the City Facility Reservation Policy. Skluzacek reminded Hokeness that the City Council approved changes to the policy earlier this year changing the language relating to allowing for wine and 3.2 beer to wine and malt liquor. Anything else requires a separate permit to be considered.

Discussion took place on the City's current policy. Currently the City does not reserve the Wagner Park ballfields to individuals for private events. The Wagner Park Shelter is available for private event rentals. There has been an individual who contacted the City wishing to reserve the Wagner Park Shelter as well as the ballfields for a private wedding ceremony and reception. Current policy does not allow reservations for the individual private use of the ballfields for any reason.

Mark Bergstrom was present in the audience on behalf of the New Market Baseball Association, NMBA. Bergstrom asked if his baseball teams could use the ballfields on the weekends since the fields are considered on a first-come first-served basis. Skluzacek informed Bergstrom that the fields are open to the public when not specifically reserved by a group or organization such as NMBA. The City will not reserve NMBA the fields on the weekends due to the conflicts over parking with Wagner Park Shelter rentals, but they are still free to use the fields if they are not being used by another party at the time as they are public property. The same would apply to Wagner Park Shelter Rental users who wished to use the park during their rental, even a wedding. However, the City will not reserve the ballfields for such a purpose. If conflicts were to arise related to parking, the Commission would take a look at other options, including signage for reserved Wagner Park Shelter Rental parking during rental times.

If NMBA wished to rent the Wagner Park Shelter on the dates proposed for weekend games, the City would be willing and able to reserve the fields for NMBA as there would be no conflict over parking with other Wagner Park Shelter rental users.

Commissioners West and Jones recommended that the current policy should remain in place and that no private reservations of the Wagner Park ballfields be allowed. Commissioner Jones clarified that the City does not allow for the ballfields to be reserved at the same time as Wagner Park Shelter rentals due to past conflicts related to limited parking at Wagner Park. Commissioners Vernon and Sutton agreed with Commissioner West and Jones's recommendation and reasoning. The City's current policy is the result of many years of discussion and compromise to ensure that Wagner Park remains accessible for Wagner Park Shelter Rental users, organizations such as NMBA who reserve use of the ballfields, and members of the public who wish to utilize the playground, skatepark, basketball court, and ballfields when they are not reserved for use.

Commissioner West asked if the policy should state that the Wagner Park ballfields are only able to be reserved for specific field related activities. Skluzacek responded that the policy contains a tiered system for users who wish to reserve the fields. The intent of the tiered system is to allow specific users to reserve the ballfields. These users are defined as groups or organizations who are likely to use the ballfields for an intended or public purpose. Other groups or individuals may still use the ballfields, but the City will not reserve the ballfields to those who are not identified as users within the tiered system.

7. UPDATES & REPORTS

A. July Parks Commission Update

Planner Skluzacek had his report attached to the packet. There was no discussion on the Parks Commission Update which was included in the packet.

B. July Parks Financial Report

Planner Skluzacek had his report attached to the packet. There was no discussion on the Parks Financial Report which was included in the packet.

8. PARKS COMMISSIONER'S QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

There were no additional questions or comments.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Parks Commission is set for Wednesday, September 11, 2024, at 6:00 PM at City Hall in the Council Chambers.

10. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Sutton and seconded by Jones to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m.
Motion carried: (5-0).

Respectively submitted by:

Jake Skluzacek
Planner 1