

## RAMSEY COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

January 13, 2021 – 6:00 PM  
VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING

**Commission Members:** Chairperson: Leah Shepard (AL), Michael Berger (AL), Jordan Nelson (2), Brian Tempas (3), Metric Giles (4), Bryan Shirley (5), Melissa Wenzel (6), Candy Petersen (7)

**Staff in attendance:** Mark McCabe, Scott Yonke, Brett Blumer, Angela Marlette

**Call Meeting to Order:** Chairperson Leah Shepard called the meeting to order at 6:04pm. *Candy Petersen motioned to approve the January 13, 2021 meeting agenda, Jordan Nelson seconded, motion carried. Jorden motioned for approval of the November 18, 2020 Meeting minutes, Mike Berger seconded, motion carried.*

Leah took Commission member roll call and welcomed all to the meeting. Meeting protocol was reviewed, and participants were asked to extend kindness, patience and understanding to each other. Leah also extended gratitude for community participation and recognized the depth of care participants have for the parks and natural resources in Ramsey County. The group was reminded that this meeting is not an official public engagement meeting for the master plan amendments and therefore, a public meeting notice soliciting feedback was not submitted. Community members are always welcome to attend Parks Commission meetings and share comments with the commission members. Mark McCabe welcomed all to the meeting and clarified the advisory role of the Parks Commission.

### **Battle Creek Regional Park Pig's Eye Master Plan Amendment**

Scott Yonke, Ramsey County Parks Planning and Development Director, presented an overview of the Amendment addressing natural resource habitat improvements, the creation of islands in Pig's Eye Lake, public safety, funding and public engagement conducted. The Battle Creek Master Plan Amendment is being completed and will encompass plans for all of Battle Creek Regional Park. This will be presented at a future date. Scott formally asked for the Parks Commission support for this Master Plan Amendment.

### **Public Comments submitted:**

Kiki Sonnen (?): Asked if previous written comments were reviewed by the Parks Commission. Angie Marlette confirmed that all comments were sent to the Parks Commission. Ms. Sonnen's major concerns are regarding the Heron Rookery sanctuary and effects of construction especially during breeding season. Expressed desire for more time to do population counts that are overdue. Ms. Sonnen also expressed concern that permits have already been received and these issues have been reflected in the permitting process.

Tom Dimond: Appreciates the opportunity to speak and acknowledges the complexity of the issue. Mr. Dimond states that the EAW and Metropolitan Council require engagement and participation for these projects, especially in regard to engaging people of color and that this was not done and is in direct violation of these requirements. Mr. Diamond stated that the public was excluded, public meetings did not happen and that the project leaders believed that minority groups will not be affected by this project as that this is the reason for not engaging them. Mr. Diamond stated that this highlights the great

inequities of participation in his diverse community. Finally, “Without taking the time to provide for meaningful engagement and participation of local residents that includes consideration of a no cost alternative, this violates core directives, MET Council counterpart planning directives and unfortunately it is par for the course of how more affluent and more diverse communities are treated.”

Terri Thao: Ms. Thao in general, supports the plan and is glad that there is other funding to support this instead of using County general funds as these are needed for a host of other issues at this time. Especially in regard to black and indigenous communities whose lives are being impacted a bit more. Ms. Thao acknowledged that there is a problem of engaging people with these very technical projects and requests that those completing the work are from the community and representative of the communities that reside in this area.

Karin Tomervik: Stated that feels people in the community were not contacted about the project and opposes the project as well as supporting Tom Diamonds comments.

Megan Dayton: Expressed support for the project and in reviewing it, is excited about the potential for it.

#### **Commission Member Discussion:**

- *Candy asked what public engagement was done for the Island Building project? The public engagement was done during the feasibility study which was coordinated by the Army Corps of Engineers but in partnership with Ramsey County. Local, State and Federal groups were engaged as well as several non-profit groups whose participants are community members. A 30-day public comment period was done, as required, residents were notified by newspaper, social media, email, online and direct mailings. Strict public engagement guidelines were followed when doing the environmental assessment.*
- *Melissa Wenzel recognized the need for better community engagement but has been able to document many engagement opportunities that have happened with various tribes and community groups. Melissa acknowledged the history of success for this type of remediation and pointed out the low cost to the county through the funding, because of this, Melissa supports this project.*
- *Metric Giles has concerns that while the quantity of Community Engagement was met if the quality of the community engagement was met as well. Metric would like to know if there is a record of those comments Scott mentioned, have they been addressed, and can tonight’s concerns be addressed? Is there a process for a restorative conflict resolution process at this point in the project to help people feel more engaged? All the engagement activities and correspondence from both the Feasibility Study 30-day public review and Master Plan Engagement activity are located within the Appendix of the Master Plan document which is currently available online. While the comment period has ended for the creation of the Pig’s Eye Master Plan Amendment, the process of community engagement for implementation of each phase or item in the amended plan has yet to happen. This Amendment also allows the planning of the public safety component (addressing pollution and recreation) at Pig’s Eye Lake to begin. This will also require a significant amount of public engagement. As each project in the amendment begins, so does the community engagement component for that project. They progress along side each other.*
- *Mike Berger reported the timeline of this project stretching from 2015 to 2020. While social justice issues and a call for more community involvement are vitally important, putting a halt on projects that have been in the works for years is not something that should be done. There needs to be a balance while also addressing shortcomings and fixing this for future projects which is something Mike has already seen progress toward. Mike, having reviewed this project and information shared by Melissa as well as her being a representative of the district, plans on supporting this Amendment*

*and seeks to ensure all that the Parks Commission does take these comments into account and is seeing public engagement inequities addressed in current and future projects.*

- *Jordan Nelson asked if there are significant downsides to building the island and what are the main reason why St. Paul would not attach themselves to the recommendation. There were other methods explored that can help with shoreline erosion, but it was not enough to mitigate the wind fetch coming from the lake. There is a cap to the number of islands that result in significant impact. The City of St. Paul was asked to support the Master Plan Amendment and the component that was objected to was the island building portion of the Amendment and nothing else. Therefore, the whole amendment was not supported.*
- *Metric would like to make sure that the residents not happy with the outcome continue to have the ability to give input and voice and create a project in which there is some ownership in. He also addressed concerns about accountability in ensuring that the workforce used is diverse as well. The solicitation for the building of the islands will be handled by the Army Corps of Engineers which do have hiring requirements for diversity. In as far as the Parks portions being handled, opportunities for local businesses are a focus.*
- *Brian Tempas emphasized the amount of time that has recently been spent on what public engagement means within the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Park, the cultural aspects as well getting people together on their terms. As an architect, island building is something that has been done a lot. Brian acknowledged the concern with the Heron Rookery and that history has shown the resiliency of nature and he is as comfortable with that he can be. Addressing Metrics comments on qualitative verses quantitative, there is an opportunity going forward to deepen that. Encouraged that there will be future opportunities to engage the community with this and pointed out that a Master Plan is a 30,000-foot view. Brian supports the Master Plan Amendment and feels that the process will ultimately be a more positive environment moving forward for the community.*
- *Leah Shepard asked Scott to speak to the protection of the Heron Rookery during construction. While there will be temporary impacts, there are no long-term negative impacts. There will be some noise with the bringing in of barges. There are restrictions to when this can be done which revolves around the nesting period as well as migration, these mitigation factors have been added into the construction plan. Also working to mitigate floating slit. In the end, the islands will provide greater habitat diversity and the plan does not preclude doing further public safety work in the area. This project will provide a very high quality, special unique area for the region.*

*Melissa moved to support the Pig's Eye Island Lake project as well as the Battle Creek Master Plan Amendment. Brian Seconded the motion. All Approved, **motion carried.***

### **Vadnais-Snail Lake Master Plan Amendment**

Brett Blumer, Parks & Recreation Architect, presented a detailed summary of the Master Plan Amendment to specifically address flood affected park infrastructure. Currently, the Metropolitan Council does not allow funding to go towards flooded trails and facilities until the Master Plan is updated. Brett addressed topography and water movement through the area, current and future impacts, agency partnerships, extensive community engagement processes/feedback and final infrastructure determinations. There was overwhelming community response to restore trail loops for commuting and recreation and to open facilities. Given the historical climate trends, design considerations must include flood resiliency.

- *Leah asked if any guests would like to speak, none responded.*
- *Metric asked, is this project intended to serve the general population of Ramsey County or the immediate adjacent community? What is the current attendance demographic for the site?*

*Beyond the project cost, are funds being allocated for opportunities of diverse attendance? The loudest voices were the neighbors, but it is designed to be used regionally the same as before the flooding. Yes, Parks is looking to equipment rentals across all of Parks to teach people different recreational aspects available in the parks. Metric asked for there to be protocol for presentations that answer/address racial equity and inclusion instead of it being asked for each time. While Metric likes the project, he states that it seems intended only for those that originally used the park. He would like to know who is paying for this? Brett reiterated that racial equity is a priority for parks, however this project differs in that it is restoring an amenity.*

- *Leah asked for an estimate of the boardwalk since this is being placed in an affluent, white neighborhood. The cost will be over 1 million. Mark McCabe highlighted that work continues across the whole county to engage in underrepresented communities as well through the already funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Park initiative. This is a repair project to restore something already in the system, the funding will compete with other regional parks, perhaps be Legacy funded, and not necessarily taking county funding.*
- *Mike identified his implicant bias as a resident of the area and daily use of the park and does see that engagement does seem to focus on only adjacent communities and needs to be taken broader.*
- *Brian stated that all parks need to serve all of Ramey county, and he has experienced great diversity in the parks. The bigger challenge is getting everybody into the parks to prevent and us versus them mentality. Leah added that this speaks to the need for more data on park users to help understand impacts of decisions.*

*Mike Berger moved to support the Vadnais Snail Lake Master Plan Amendment. Melissa Wenzel Secoded the motion. Metric Giles abstained; **motion carried.***

*A motion was made by Jordan Nelson and seconded by Mike Berger to move agenda items 5-7 to the February 10, 2021 meeting, all approved, **motion carried.***

**Items moved are:**

- Elect Parks Commission Chair and Vice Chair
- Annual Review and Approval of Parks Commission Bylaws
- Review 2021 Work Plan

**Director Updates**

Mark thanked all participants for the good civil discussion and the commission members for their time tonight. Assured the commission that Parks is working to weave and integrate equity into all Parks does.

*Jorden made a motion to adjourn the meeting, meeting adjourned at 8:07p*

**Supplement Meeting information – Attendees, Community and other Ramsey County\*:**

Ella Fair, Patty Mac, Terri Thao, Bobbie Scott, Joann Ellis\*, Kiki Sonnen, Tom Diamond, Nate Hood, Trista Matascastillo\*, David Paulu, Lori K, Susan Vento, Ken Iosso, Brian, Brad Griffith, Shenna Denny\*, Aaron McFarlane\*, Megan Dayton, Nate Campbell\*, Michele Molstead, Mary, Jen, Lisa Hanson-Lamey\*, Kristi Saksvig\*, Karin Tomervik, Rebecca N, and 2 undisclosed participants via phone.