

RAMSEY COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

June 10, 2020 – 6:00 PM
VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING

In Attendance: Leah Shepard (AL), Michael Berger (AL), Jessica Pitzel (1), Jordan Nelson (2), Brian Tempas (3), Metric Giles (4), Bryan Shirley (5), Melissa Wenzel (6)

Not in Attendance: Candy Petersen (7)

Staff: Mark McCabe, Angie Marlette

The meeting began at 6:07 pm.

Approval of Agenda and May 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes: Leah Shepard asked if all were in favor of approving the minutes, all approved. Updates to the agenda with the addition of resident response letter and personal check-ins were also approved.

Member Check-in: In light of the civil unrest, the death of George Floyd and COVID-19 each attendee discussed perspectives, challenges, revelations, and community actions taken over the last month. The members were united in their outrage and need to purge racism from Minnesota as well as hope for the future and Parks goal for equity in Ramsey County Parks specifically.

Directors Update: Mark McCabe

- On a county level, there are ripple effects across the county that limits access to food aid and other needed county resources that were already exasperated by COVID-19.
 - Creation of Walk-up Service Centers and drop boxes to support financial aid services, social services, property tax, and career/job assistance.
 - Staff that are able will continue to work from home.
 - Mandate to reduce staff spending by 15% mainly through staff attrition and redeployment.
- Parks specifically
 - Areas are open to the public on a limited basis with restrictions
 - Parks shelters/pavilions are reservable for groups under 25 people
 - Opening restrooms
 - Beaches working to open unguarded, but with designated swim areas and enhanced signage
 - Parks such as McCarrons served as host sites for the public to begin marches in peaceful protest
- Parks and Recreation Racial Equity Leadership Team Report: Ken Pelto in collaboration with the greater county Racial Equity Leadership Team continues work:
 - Working on data collection that points out racial disparity in regard to impacts of COVID-19 in Ramsey County
 - Effective and focused communication in racial and ethnic communities that may be otherwise missed

- Program design and implementation that ensures effective service to communities that may see significant disparities
- Associated advisory board comprised of residents and experts
- CARES act spending and budget proposal involvement to ensure equity

In response to Metric's question: while this committee was already in place before COVID-19 some of the work has been more specifically tasked to address those inequities that may be COVID exacerbated.

Leadership in this committee are comprised of people of color and diverse backgrounds.

Response to Letter: Battle Creek Regional Park

The Commission would like to give concrete responses to the two suggestions in the letter showing what trail work is being done currently, prevention future issues as well as Mountain Bike trail expansion being halted until socio-ecological issues are dealt with.

Melissa Wenzel understands that there are many competing needs for the resources and that certain demographics do utilize mountain biking and skiing more than others. What tangible efforts have been made to meet the needs of the immediate community and how much of the area can be mixed use?

Metric pointed out that it would be wise to work with the author since they have a high-level expertise in the area and person to leverage. The Commission agrees to invite the author into a conversation, perhaps at the Parks Tour.

What's the balance between meeting people where they are at and encouraging use of current existing amenities? Two letters can be written in response; one letter from Parks planning focusing on technical updates and history of community engagement in the Master Planning process and another Parks Commission letter addressing equity and socio-economic issues. The Commission can also include those items that the Commission is advocating for such as getting the GARE toolkit operationalized.

Reappointment of Commission Members:

Members that the County Board reappointed to the standard 3-year terms were: Leah Shepard, Jessica Pitzel, Metric Giles and Candy Petersen. Jessica reported that Commissioner Frethem personally called to impress the importance of serving on the Parks Commission.

August Parks Tour Planning:

Plan to meet at Battle Creek Regional Park to tour the new nature play area and potentially Pig's Eye Lake. Participants will meet on-site with no tour bus provided this year due to COVID-19.

Capital Projects Update:

- Keller Regional Park, Golfview area: Expanded parking lot project completed. User Feedback indicated that more stalls were badly needed.
- Battle Creek Nature Playground: Created a destination playground in one of Ramsey County's busiest parks.
- TCO Turf Facility: Construction underway.
- Vadnais Snail Lake Flooding: Virtual Community Conversation held June 9th, continuing the previous community engagements on this topic and Beach area restored and ready for reopening.
- Battle Creek WaterWorks: Will remain closed for the season due to COVID-19 causing missed key prep dates to open:
 - Staff unable to be certified in a timely manner
 - Season is already half gone

- Mechanical systems take a significant amount of work after winter dormancy
- Mechanical staff currently handling Park maintenance and repairs

Report from The Chair & Other Commission Members:

Metric: Is there a leadership path to mentor people of color into management roles?

Currently in Parks, there is limited mentor opportunities that highlight management roles, and this does need to be further developed with the PRELT (Parks & Recreation Racial Equity Leadership Team).

Update: Work Force Solutions has done several Ramsey County wide departmental internships for people of color exploring careers. Parks has participated each year and interns shadow several managerial positions. As the Ramsey County Racial Equity Team solidifies its vision and goals, we would think to see greater cross departmental intern experiences with the goal of greater diversification of the managerial workforce.

Leah: Advocating for Parks: talk with your County Commissioners, create talking points (focused questions) and check back on outcomes

- *Securing Funding for Parks to measure racial demographics of users*
- *Operationalizing the GARE Toolkit for Parks and the Commission*
- *Funding for Community Engagement to reduce barriers*

Leah will communicate with Mark to create those pointed questions and other topics.

Melissa asked for updates on the census. Leah pulled some stats and Mark will see if there is more information about census takers.

Adjournment: Leah asked the group if they approved adjourning the meeting, All Approved, Meeting Adjourned at 8:03 pm.

Next Meeting: August 12, 2020, Annual Parks Commission Tour
Battle Creek Regional Park