

Parks & Recreation Commission Minutes

Wednesday, June 1, 2022

The Parks & Recreation Commission met on Wednesday, June 1st, 2022 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

Members Present: Dan Novitch, Brian Artac, Kyle Gulke, Jean Ravn, Joan Tabor, Chad Krueger, Mark Weix

Members Absent: None

Department Staff: Dan Wendorf

Others: Draco Fink – MP3, Dave Johnson

Minutes from previous meeting:

***Motion Ravn, seconded by Artac to approve the minutes from the May meeting.

Carried unanimously.

Claims: Novitch questioned Lincoln County Health Department charges. Wendorf said it was annual permits for the pool. Weix asked about RTL invoice for the pool, Wendorf explained it was wiring in the new chemical feeder system for the aquatic center.

***Motion Weix, seconded by Tabor to approve the May claims.

Carried unanimously.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

Summary of Outdoor Recreation Survey: Wendorf provided a summary outline as requested by the Commission and gave a verbal explanation from the department's view. He said he was pleased with the survey and it provided a lot of very helpful data. Including reassuring the Department and Commission that many of our recent developments and investments are still ranked at the top of people's current recreational uses and interests. Wendorf explained that this is a powerful tool to utilize when capital budgeting and it is important to invest in things that our citizens want and actually use consistently. By comparing our current Outdoor Recreation Survey to our past Outdoor Recreation plan it is powerful confirmation that these trends are longer lasting and not just a flash in the pan type fad.

Discussion on Bierman Family Aquatic Center staffing levels and future recruitment and retention: Wendorf asked chairperson Novitch if we could blend the next item on the agenda into this one to allow for free flowing conversation on related topics. The Commission agreed. Wendorf began the discussion by talking about up to date staffing levels. He said they have just enough lifeguards and other staff to open the pool during weekdays and select weekends when staffing allows. Wendorf stated that they have done literally all they can do to recruit employees from the area and beyond but there is simply not enough interest at this time. He said he is continuing to work with MAPS and they have a Lifeguard

Training Course set up for the weekend of June 10-12th and hopefully that will help. Wendorf informed the Commission that MAPS recently approved a rate increase for their lifeguards. MAPS guards will now get paid \$15/hr. for their first two years, then move up to \$16/hr. They will also pay their head guards \$17/hr. to start. Wendorf stated that even with our last increase for our guards, we are still \$2.00/hr. less than the newest MAPS increase. Wendorf stated that we literally share all of our guards between our two entities and requested that we at least match what MAPS is offering their guards. Equity for the same duties and responsibilities is important for continuity and for retention. Ravn asked if we had ever considered referral bonuses for guards who help recruit other guards. Wendorf said that is a great idea but they would have to make sure to have funding to allow that and would have to look into the legality of it as we are not a private entity. Johnson said it can be done under certain circumstances (a community to our south did it recently – but for a higher profile hire). Krueger asked if it might be a good time to not only match wage rates but potentially slightly exceed so that it is more enticing and so that we are not chasing others with rates. Wendorf continued the discussion by talking about compaction within seasonal and full time hourly employees. He said another concern we should all have is the issue of needing to adjust seasonal wages in order to recruit and retain good seasonal employees, but we cannot forget about our full time hourly employees. If we increase wages for our seasonal employees we should be increasing wages for our full time employees proportionally. Failing to do this in today's market could be catastrophic because of the number of job openings in our area that are paying more than what we currently are. We can only speak to our own department but we are extremely fortunate to have amazing full time hourly staff members and we want to do everything we possibly can to retain them for their entire career. Our full time hourly staff goes way above and beyond each and every day, taking on a lot of additional responsibilities. The ripple effect of adjusting seasonal wages too close to full time could have consequences with lasting effects. This is a very real issue and needs to be looked at much more holistically than just seasonal. Novitch suggested keeping this discussion going and coming up with a proposal as we get to our 2023 budget request. Johnson mentioned that there might be a savings in the pool wages budget due to our limited operational hours that we won't be able to run that we had intended on being open that we might be able to use at the end of the season.

Monthly report: Wendorf informed the Commission that almost all of their seasonal help has started and that High School spring sports have come to a close and youth recreational leagues are in full swing. He said the pool is open now for the season and so far has been good – with the exception of the staffing issues. Wendorf said that many of the recreation programs will be starting next week and continuing through the summer months and that everyone is looking forward to another great season in Parks & Recreation.

Next meeting will be on July 13th, 2022 at 4:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

***Motion Artac, seconded by Ravn to adjourn at 5:15pm.

Carried unanimously.

Dan Wendorf
Recording Secretary