

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

May 4th, 2022

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

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

Members Excused: Joan Tabor

Department Staff Present: Dan Wendorf

Others in attendance: Elizabeth McCrank, Lori Anderson-Malm, Mayor Hass, MP3, Dustin Brown, Dave Johnson, Fred Heider (NCWRPC)

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

***Carried unanimously.

***Motion by Weix, seconded by Artac to approve the claims from April.

***Carried unanimously.

Public Comment: None.

The next item on the agenda was to review the results of the survey from our upcoming 5-year Outdoor Recreation Plan that North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) has been working on. Fred Heider from NCWRPC was in attendance to review the survey and summarize the results. He explained that in the packets for the commission was a summary and the supporting details from the survey. He explained that the survey was taken by 282 people and there was a good representation of citizens from inside the City and from the surrounding townships. He explained that surveys are acceptable in lieu of public hearings because the survey allows for so much more feedback over a longer period of time. The survey results showed that it was taken by 58% female and 42% male and that the majority of survey takers were between the ages of 25-40. That age category was over 50% of those participating. He also explained that there was a good representation of all age categories. Heider then discussed some key findings. He stated that one of the very first questions was most frequent outdoor recreational activities that respondents participated in. Results showed the top ten outdoor recreation activities to be (in order): 1. Walking/hiking 2. Events/festivals/fairs 3. Swimming 4. Fishing 5. Playground usage 6. Boating 7. Dog walking/dog park 8. Canoeing/kayaking 9. Bicycling 10. Gardening. Heider mentioned that boating and playground usage were higher than other communities but the results speak for themselves. He then explained that "enthusiast questions" followed use questions to quantify people's interests. Heider discussed the "rate this statement" category and said it turned out very well and allows the commission to really gauge public interest on the topics they elected to include on the survey. It also allows the commission to see how many people answered these questions and how many skipped. Krueger asked if it is normal for people to skip these questions and Heider said yes. Heider went on to describe the goals and objectives portion of the survey, saying that

he used the previous plan and survey results. He suggested keeping the second goal in the plan due to the very high survey demand for water based recreation. He stated that the survey results confirmed the goals and should remain according to the public. Heider explained that if the Commission sees anything that needs to be changed, please let either him or Wendorf know and we can get it adjusted into the plan. Heider told the Commission that the Outdoor Recreation plan helps with grant funding through Stewardship as well as LAWCON funding to help support park projects. He also stated that new LAWCON legislation is going to allow for funding qualification (50% match) for non-nature based items now, including playgrounds and facilities.

The next item on the agenda was to discuss the upcoming WisDOT Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant cycle. Heider also spoke on this topic and said that the new grant cycle begins in August of 2022 and will likely close towards the end of October. TAP grants are 78% federal funding with a 22% local match and can include any requests related to bike/pedestrian/trail expenditures. He said there is a minimum of \$300,000 request for this cycle. Weix asked if sidewalks would be included and Heider said not all sidewalks would be – only ones that were identified in our Bike/Ped Plan that we completed a few years ago. He did say the pedestrian bridge that we referenced in our survey over the railroad tracks connecting Banker's Square to the River Bend Trail would qualify.

The next item on the agenda was to discuss a potential concession building to be built with donated time and materials near the north baseball/softball fields of the MARC. Wendorf stated that he met with a representative of Merrill Baseball that has enough materials to donate and build a 12x14 building in between the three north fields. Wendorf stated it was a great idea and it was mentioned numerous times in the survey that people would like that there. He stated that baseball would need to find a mason to pour a concrete slab, as the person who is building it doesn't do concrete work. Wendorf also stated that they would try and work with local plumbers and electricians to stub in accommodations to allow for power and water/sewer at a later date when funding allows for a bathroom to be added to the facility and increase the size of it. Wendorf stated this is a great opportunity to accomplish a real need in that area and not have to spend taxpayer dollars on the project.

***Motion Weix, seconded by Ravn to approve the concessions building by the north fields at the MARC.

***Carried unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was to continue discussion on the lifeguarding situation at the Bierman Family Aquatic Center. Wendorf informed the Commission that the situation is unfortunately similar to last month's meeting. We have enough guards to open the aquatic center, but not enough to open with the same hours as we have enjoyed in the past. Wendorf explained that they have continuously advertised on the radio, newspapers, social media, word of mouth, job fairs, and even large posters at several key areas around town (even the High School). We have gained a couple guards over the past month but not enough to make a big impact. Wendorf stated that after discussing availability with existing guards, the Bierman Family Aquatic Center will only be able to be open Monday through Friday's. Guard availability is extremely limited on almost all weekends all summer long. If there is a weekend or weekend day that we have enough guards, we will add that to the schedule and inform the public. Wendorf also stated that he and Dawn recently sat down with representatives from MAPS to not only address the current situation, but to begin looking at ways to creatively solve this issue moving forward. He said there were some very good ideas that came out of the discussion including Lifeguarding as a credited physical ed class through the school and a consortium of communities with shared lifeguard

pool to name a few. Wendorf stated that it is very important to remain vigilant in our search for recruiting and retaining lifeguards for the foreseeable future and it will most likely involve keeping a very close eye on wages that surrounding communities pay to remain competitive. Wendorf also stated that he realizes that the public will most likely not be happy with the hours that we have to operate under at the aquatic center, but we literally have no other choice. We need lifeguards. He will continue to keep the Commission apprised of the situation.

The next item on the agenda was to elect a Parks & Recreation Commission representative to the City Plan Commission. Novitch explained that this is going to be a one year term starting this year and we will re-elect a representative each year. Novitch asked if anyone on the Commission had any interest in being a representative. With nobody stepping forward, Novitch informed the Commission that he talked with Gulke before the meeting and he agreed to serve for another year if nobody else had interest.

***Motion Weix, seconded by Ravn to nominate Kyle Gulke to the City Plan Commission for a one year term.

***Carried unanimously.

Next item was monthly reports. Wendorf fielded questions to begin. He then went on to say things were ramping up in the parks with the nice weather finally starting to arrive and that everyone was extremely busy with parks maintenance and programs. Ravn thanked Wendorf and the Parks & Recreation Staff for all of the things that they do. Wendorf said that we are all fortunate to have the best staff. The Parks & Recreation Staff (full time, part time, and seasonal) are the ones who make things happen each and every day.

***Motion Artac, seconded by Weix to approve the monthly report.

***Carried unanimously.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 1st, 2022 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

***Motion Ravn, seconded by Artac to adjourn at 5:40 p.m.

***Carried unanimously.

Dan Wendorf
Recording Secretary