

PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

FEBRUARY 2ND, 2022

The Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission met on Wednesday, February 2nd, 2022 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

Members present: Kyle Gulke, Joan Tabor, Brian Artac, Dan Novitch, John Van Lieshout

Members excused absent: Jean Ravn

Department staff present: Dan Wendorf

Others present: Alderman Weix, Ruby Jaecks, Mike Caylor, Mayor Woellner, MP3

**Motion Artac, seconded by Van Lieshout to approve the minutes from the December meeting.

**Carried unanimously.

**Motion Van Lieshout, seconded by Artac to approve the December claims

Novitch asked Wendorf about the charges from Baumgart Waste Removal. Wendorf stated that they charge one lump sum at the end of the season for all dumpsters used in all locations.

**Carried unanimously.

**Motion Van Lieshout, seconded by Gulke to approve the January Claims

**Carried unanimously.

Public Comment: None

The next item on the agenda was to discuss the upcoming 5-year Outdoor Recreation Plan. Wendorf began the discussion by explaining that the new Outdoor Recreation Plan is required by the State in order to qualify for grant funding at both the State and Federal levels. He also said it is a great exercise in reflecting back on what was/wasn't accomplished and to re-engage the public to see where there priorities are and re-evaluate the direction they should be headed. Wendorf introduced Fred Heider from North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC), who is going to be spearheading the plan once again. Heider began the discussion by thanking the Commission and started the discussion by saying the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) identifies gaps and needs throughout the State and by Region. He reviewed the gaps/needs in our region and wanted to point out that these should be included in the plan. Heider said the plan is a great tool to engage the public and the Commission and will allow us to focus on local needs, wants, and trends. He proposes to do this by organizing an online survey again this cycle. On our last plan, the online survey was highly effective. He proposes publishing the survey online and leaving it up and active for one month. Heider reviewed each of the questions with the Commission and asked that they provide him with feedback as to whether they would like all of the questions as they are, changed, or removed. The Commission will take some

time and review the questions and provide feedback to Wendorf by the next meeting so the survey can be finalized and published right after the March meeting. Gulke suggested adding the “what improvements” questions to all of the other “enthusiasts” questions to get a more detailed answer from the public for those specific questions. Heider finished up the discussion by thanking the Commission and discussing the steps and timeline that will need to be taken to finish the OR Plan by the end of the year.

Novitch asked the Commission if they were alright with switching item 5 & 6 on the agenda to allow for Heider to not have to wait for one item on the agenda and to potentially answer any questions pertaining to Bike & Pedestrian Plan (which he helped author). The Commission was friendly to that suggestion. Wendorf began the discussion by informing the Commission that he was contacted by Gulke requesting this item be included on the agenda. Wendorf stated that Gulke would like to review and potentially begin taking action on some low hanging fruit within the plan. Gulke mentioned that it was his intention to hopefully start putting some checkmarks on some easy, but impactful initiatives within the plan. He specifically mentioned wayfinding signs to help guide people to public attractions (especially from the River Bend Trail), bicycle parking, crosswalk improvements at high use crossings, and additional guide signs for bicycle facilities to make things more user friendly. Wendorf stated that he would need to work with Gulke and the RDDF to gather more details to determine where to put wayfinding signs and what to point out and that he can work with the Street Department to see how to enhance the crosswalks that would be identified as high impact. Heider suggested using larger font on the signs and not using the bike icon on the road signs so it is more useful to vehicles and bikes.

The next item on the agenda was to begin discussion on the 10 year Capital Plan. Wendorf began the discussion by reviewing the 2022 Capital Request list that the Commission approved last year for budgetary consideration. He reviewed what was approved for funding and what was not. He informed the Commission that the 70 acre property by the City Forest that was approved for funding no longer has to be funded through City Funds. Wendorf informed the Commission that he just received word that we received the full \$140,000 that he requested through the State Tourism Grant. Wendorf said that items that were not funded from the 2022 request need to be slotted back into the 10-year plan and that obviously the less projects that are funded each year cause future year requests to increase. Just because a project/improvement is turned down doesn't mean that it goes away, it only adds to the existing requests in future years. Gulke asked about the City Forest Road Repair. He said it was getting pretty rough end of summer last year. Wendorf stated that the crew spent some time up there in the fall with some heavier equipment and crowned it and fixed it as best they could. He said it is good for now but at some point will need to be improved significantly, especially with the increased usage. Wendorf finished the conversation by asking the Commission to take some time to review the updated draft of the 10-year Capital Plan and bring any suggestions to a future meeting when it will be discussed and hopefully approved again this year.

The next item on the agenda was Monthly Report. Wendorf summarized his report by highlighting the success of ice season thus far in the Smith Center, informing the Commission of the figure skating show on 2/12 & 2/13, as well as the Badger State Games Fat Tire Bike Races at the City Forest on 2/19. He also informed the Commission on the current shortage of lifeguards that both the Department and MAPS are experiencing. He said we are working with MAPS to help each other gain the necessary amount of lifeguards to run our respective facilities and we have set up a lifeguard training course at PRMS Pool on March 21-23. Wendorf encouraged anyone in attendance to help spread the word about the need for lifeguards and said that if we don't have enough, we cannot open the Bierman Family Aquatic Center.

The next Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting will be on March 2nd, at 4:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers at the Merrill City Hall.

The next item on the agenda was Public Comment:

Alderman Weix suggested adding two questions to the Outdoor Recreation Survey. Ask people if they would support adding a shelter at the City Forest, and ask if people would support adding a sidewalk &/or bike path on Riverside Avenue.

Christine Vorpapel (call in) said it was hard to hear some of the motions that were made and who voted aye so that she knows. She also said that she couldn't find the board packet information and if we are going to discuss budgetary items they need to be readily available and easy to find. She then thanked the Commission for everything that they do for the Community.

**Motion Van Lieshout, seconded by Artac to adjourn at 5:25 p.m.

**Carried unanimously.

Dan Wendorf
Recording Secretary