

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

February 1, 2023

The Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission met on Wednesday, February 1, 2023 at 4:15 p.m., at Merrill City Hall.

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

Members Excused Absent:

Department Staff Present: Dan Wendorf and Dawn Smith

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

***Carried unanimously.

***Motion by Weix, seconded by Tabor, to approve the claims from December 2022 and January 2023.

Wendorf stated that on the bills in December, John Deere and Riesterer & Schnell are the same invoices, they were accidently listed twice.

***Carried unanimously.

Public Comment: none

The next item on the agenda was to review/approve bids for new front mower. Wendorf stated that there was only bid from Riesterer & Schnell for \$62,209.98. Wendorf stated that included in the price was a front blade, snow blower, broom, tire chains, drop spreader, rear weights and hard cab. Wendorf also stated that the old equipment that they currently have will be going to Nick at the City Hall. Artac questioned how long the warranty was. Wendorf stated it was a three year warranty. Weix questioned how long the equipment would last. Wendorf stated hopefully 9+ years like the last one.

***Motion by Gulke, seconded by Artac to approve the bid from Riesterer & Schnell for \$62,209.98 for the new front mower.

***Carried unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was to discuss 2023-2024 budgetary challenges and potential solutions. Wendorf stated that because we haven't had much of an increase in our budget, and the cost of goods and services has increased significantly, we have to make some unfortunate decisions on some of our programs and aquatic center. Wendorf stated that he would like to cap summer playground at 60 kids, and by capping the program we could keep our employees at 5 people. That would be 3 less than last year. Ravn questioned how many kids we had in the program last year. Wendorf stated around 80. The summer playground program will also go to week to week registrations. We will not save any spots, because what happens is if we save your spot and you decide not to come for the full month of July we just lost \$200.00. You will be able to register ahead of time for every week that you want your child to attend. Wendorf stated that we just can't do the same things we did 20 years ago; the value of the dollar is not the same.

Public Comment: Hallie Savall stated that she moved back from Black River Falls 2 years ago and her kids attended the summer playground program. She stated that it is so nice because daycares are full and it's hard to find someone to watch your kids. She did state that it would be nice if the program went a little longer than 3 but she is grateful for the program and her kids really like it.

Wendorf stated that they will continue to look into ways to make the program more profitable but in all reality the only thing they can do is cap the program. Wendorf will keep the Park and Recreation Commission updated, and continue budgetary discussions to be proactive before working on the 2024 budget.

The next item on the agenda was to review and approve Bierman Family Aquatic Center operating hours for 2023 season. Wendorf stated that he does not want to bring this to the commission but again with budgets not increasing and everything else going up in price there is no other option. Wendorf proposes that the Bierman Aquatic Center should remain closed on Monday's. Monday's are the slowest day at the pool and it would give the workers a chance to do inventory, restock, clean and do any maintenance on the pool. Wendorf also stated the lifeguards could use Monday's for doing in-service training. Wendorf also stated that he figures there would be a savings of between \$15,000 to \$17,000 in staffing. Gulke questioned if the prices in the concessions go up. Wendorf stated that they do go up, determined by what we pay. Tabor stated that if the commission chooses to close the pool on Monday's it has to be communicated to the public ahead of time. Wendorf agreed and stated that is why he is bringing it to the commission now.

***Motion by Gulke, seconded by Krueger to close the Bierman Aquatic Center on Mondays in 2023 due to budgetary restraints.

***Motion carried 6 – 1 with Jean Ravn voting no.

The next item on the agenda was continued discussion on waste removal options for park shelters. Wendorf stated that the Parks Department can't continue to pay over \$10,000 every year to haul everyone's garbage. Wendorf stated that he has been talking with Dustin Bonack about the possibility of using the big garbage totes; building a small shelter to keep them in and whoever rents the park will get a key so they can put their garbage in there. Weix questioned if people who don't rent the park abuse the dumpsters and Wendorf stated that this is a really big problem. Wendorf also stated that baseball and softball may have to rent their own dumpsters for their tournaments and leagues from now on. No decision was made and this item will be put back on agenda.

The next item on the agenda was to review and approve route for River Bend to Prairie Trails Connector Trail. Wendorf included a map of the route. Ravn questioned if the route was gravel. Wendorf stated that the city would be paving some areas of the route. After some discussion Wendorf stated that there is a possibility of some changes so he requested that no motion be made at this time, but the commission by consensus like the proposed route.

The next item on the agenda was to review and potentially approve property acquisition form MADC along the River Bend Trail. Wendorf stated that MADC would like to give the Park and Recreation Department the property next to the River Bend Trail, approximately 8.56 acres. Wendorf stated that there are no strings attached and it would not increase any work for the department as it is just mostly trees. Wendorf stated there is a lot of wildlife that is in that area and the Thrivent Trail runs through it.

***Motion by Artac, seconded by Ravn to accept the property acquisition from MADC along the River Bend Trail.

***Carried unanimously.

The next item on the agenda is review of Personnel and Finance committee Grant acceptance discussion. Wendorf brought this item to the commission because he stated that he would hate to work on a grant for weeks or more just to bring it to Personnel and Finance and City Council and have them potentially deny it. Wendorf stated he will bring any grants that meet this amount to the commission before writing them. Weix stated that this is something that he and other department heads should probably talk with the interim City Administrators with. Wendorf stated he would.

The next item on the agenda was monthly reports. Wendorf asked if anyone had any questions. Ravn questioned if the Park and Recreation Department has seen increased traffic with the ice age trail. Wendorf stated it really doesn't affect the Park and Recreation Department but he has heard there has been a slight uptick in some of the area businesses. Weix questioned if any signage has been put up for the Pinery Water Trails. Wendorf stated that he is working with the organization on getting signage.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 4:15 p.m. at the Merrill City Hall.

Public Comment: Kyle Gulke stated that the library has an Ice Age Trail Backpack and also snow shoes that can be checked out.

***Motion by Ravn, seconded by Artac to adjourn at 5:50 p.m.

***Carried unanimously.

Dawn Smith
Recording Secretary