

PARKS & RECREATION
ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

August 21, 2023 5:45 pm
City Arena

Members Present:

Steve Ball
Jodi Hartman
Whitney Sauer
Rich Yost
Therese Salazar

Members Absent:

Amy Leach
Tony Segura
Jason Howland, Ex-Officio

Staff in Attendance:

Cathy Malakowsky, Community Engagement and Enrichment Director
Bob Furland, Recreation Manager
Ryan Hajek, Assistant Director of Public Works
Mike Westney, Parks Superintendent
Josh Heilman, Arena/Aquatic Center Foreman
Dani Bakken, Recreation Coordinator
Afton Wacholz, Recreation Administrative Assistant

Others in Attendance:

Marco Hunt – Apex
Mark Rasmussen - Apex
Todd Ulve – Albert Lea Youth Hockey Board President
Ty Prater – Waldorf University Men’s Hockey Associate Head Coach

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Steve Ball at 5:45pm.

Adopt Agenda:

Jodi Hartman made the motion to approve the agenda for tonight’s meeting and Whitney Sauer seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Approval of the Minutes:

Therese Salazar made the motion to approve the minutes from the July 17, 2023 meeting and Rich Yost seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Public Items:

A letter from the Albert Lea Area Pickleball Club was mailed to the Recreation Office. The board received the letter with the agenda packet for this meeting (letter is attached to the minutes as well). Board discussed the letter and agreed that the contents of the letter have previously been discussed within the board already in the last couple of years. City staff added that the current courts have been resurfaced 2 years ago and that it would only last about 5 years. Ryan added that in order to build additional courts the area would need to be tiled, dug deep down and would cost roughly \$600,000 to building courts similar to what there is now.

Afton Wacholz informed the board that she sent the club president, Chris Utz, an email back on May 17, 2023 in regards to the new Parks and Recreation Projects: Process and application. She did not receive anything back in regards to this.

Safety was mentioned in the letter due to the condition of the courts, however no discussion on this has been brought to our City staff, specifically as the club has prepared for their annual pickleball tournament which was held August 18-20.

Steve Ball made a motion for Whitney Sauer to contact Chris Utz or a pickleball club member to follow up on the letter and discuss the project application requirement that was already sent to them. Jodi Hartman seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of the said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Action/Discussion Items:**Continued discussion on Apex proposal for Recreational Facilities and Solar Systems**

Cathy opened discussion with an email that was sent to City staff from Paul Durbahn on behalf of the Albert Lea School District. The email stated the gratitude for the relationship between our two entities and appreciation for the partnership in the proposed project. The School District is confident that the City staff and Park and Recreation Advisory Board will make the best decision for all user groups involved and they look forward to being a part of this going forward.

Steve Ball started off pointing out that there was a lot of information dumped on the board at once during the presentation last month. There are many wants and needs from all user groups and it is important that we don't make decisions to just catch up. Steve asked if the staff could point out their priority list and also stated that the items that would be paid off in 10 years or less are a no brainer. City staff explained that the arena projects have been a main priority from the start as the continued maintenance is getting out of hand. Cathy informed the board that decisions should be made soon as many of the incentives are time sensitive. Rich stated that he wants to see the "must haves" pass. Steve questioned the ability to have local contractors do the work and Mark from Apex confirmed that they do typically have local contractors do much of the work. Jodi wants to develop a plan for how the board can better partner with the City as decisions are made going forward, possibly in establishing phases of the project. Cathy added that it's important for staff and the board to know what is important to the community and our user groups.

Todd Ulve with the Albert Lea Hockey Association thanked the staff and board and shared that their associations top projects are #2, 4, 5 and 6 which will specifically help to hopefully have summer ice in the future. Their wishes would also be to pursue #8, 12, and 14. They are no in favor of #16 as they would like to see a dryland facility in the upstairs space. Todd stated the association is on board to continue to partner financially with the City of improvements. He also said that in order for the public to see a visible improvement, beyond the behind the scene ones, a front lobby atrium would be a great option to provide more gathering space and open up the concessions area.

After board discussion and hearing feedback from City staff and user groups, Jodi Hartman made the motion to recommend to the City Council to pursue City Arena projects #1-8 and #11-15 in order to sustain usability of the ice arena and take advantage of the current incentives as well as with the City

staff to prioritize the projects at hand. Rich Yost seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion on a roll call 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Further discussion was had in regards to the Aquatic Center projects with the majority of the discussion centering around gender neutral bathrooms and locker room spaces as the current facility layout is specific to male and female entrances from the front desk. City staff recommend the first four projects as the bare necessities in order to keep the aquatic center operational.

Whitney Sauer made the motion to recommend to the City Council to pursue Aquatic Center projects #1-4 in order to sustain usability and take advantage of the current incentives. Therese Salazar seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion on a roll call 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Whitney Sauer made the motion to have City staff work with Apex to further explore the options of pursuing a viable redesign of the current bathhouse facility to better accommodate gender neutral and family friendly bathrooms and changing areas. Therese Salazar seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion on a roll call 4-1, with Rich Yost opposing. Motion declared passed.

Projects at the Marion Ross Performing Arts Center were also discussed. Jodi Hartman made the motion to recommend to the City Council to pursue all projects #1-5 and to work with the City staff in implementing them according to the needs. Whitney Sauer seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion on a roll call 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Ordinance to prohibit cannabis smoking in parks – Board Recommendation to City Council

Cathy informed the board that this type of time would typically come through the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board first for recommendation to the council, however City staff wanted to work quickly due to the recent changes in regards to cannabis in the state. Cathy asked the board if they would like to make a recommendation to the City Council as the second reading of the ordinance change will take place at the next Council meeting on August 28.

Therese Salazar made the motion to recommend to the City Council to approve the ordinance change that would prohibit the smoking of cannabis in City parks. Jodi Hartman seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion on a roll call 5-0. Motion declared passed.

Additional discussion from Parks regarding fencing at Snyder Field

Mike Westney asked for the boards input on the color of roofing for the new dugouts at Snyder Field. Mike provided the color options, with the more common colors being white, green and blue. The Youth Baseball Association has recommended the color green to City staff. The board recommended to City staff to choose the green roofing for the new dugouts in order to keep things uniform with future projects at the facility.

Staff Reports:

Recreation: Report provided by Bob Furland and Dani Bakken;

- Play parks closed on July 27; overall, we had a good summer. We heard a lot of positive feedback about the collaboration with Community Education. Below are the attendance numbers for playparks. These numbers do not include the Community Education participants. Dani will be meeting with Scott Hanna for those numbers.
 - Academy- 403
 - Lakeview- 292
 - Hawthorne - 436
- Movie in the park was held on August 18. Surfs Up was shown and Leland Realty sponsored the event and provided popcorn.
- Fall registration for programming will open on September 1.

- Mites In-House Hockey
- Learn to Skate
- Special public skates
- We will be partnering with Community Education and the YMCA for MEA break and winter break.
- Dani attended the Zion Church fundraiser in Albert Lea and the Karen Festival in Austin, as well as the Back to School event with the Albert Lea School District to promote programs.
- Thursdays on Fountain will continue through the end of August.
- Staff is busy planning a new event, Oktoberween, with the CVB and the 112 on Broadway. The event will be held October 20th – October 21st, October 27th – 29th and October 31st. Watch for more information. <https://www.oktoberween.com/>

Parks: Report provided by Mike Westney;

- Maintaining uptown plants & flower beds
- Rick fertilized sports fields
- We are watering trees planted within the last three years
- We removed all 4ft fence, backstops & dugouts at Snyder
- Usual building & equipment maintenance
- Start replacing the playground equipment at valley park
- Still very busy with facility rentals
- The basketball court at Sondergaard is done except for some turf work around the court
- EAB treatments have been completed
- Doing tree take downs & trimming

City Arena: Report provided by Bob Furland/Josh Heilman;

- The Freeborn County Kennel Club had its annual dog show August 12th and 13th. The show had 550 dog showings each day.
- The arena staff has the building cleaned up and ready to start the compressors to build ice on Nystrom. Waldorf practices start August 28th.
- Waldorf is having two teams skate at the arena this year.
- Albert Lea Figure Skating is having signups and meetings for skaters Monday August 14th and August 23rd.
- Youth Hockey registration has opened online.

Aquatic Center: Report provided by Bob Furland/Dani Bakken;

- The Pool closed on August 13.
 - Total visits: 17,861
 - Memberships: 180 memberships sold for the season
 - Swim lessons: 332 participants

Senior Center: Report provided by Bob Furland/Cathy Malakowsky;

- Overnight casino trip was held August 15-16 to Jackpot Junction

- August 18th Defensive Driving for Seniors
- August 28th End of Summer BBQ at the Senior Center

Marion Ross Theater: Report provided by Bob Furland;

- Roy Orbison tribute band Aug 19th
- August 20th – 24th Much Ado About Nothing Shakespeare in the Village (held at Freeborn County Historical Museum)
- Sept 13th Ben Bailey – The Cash Cab Guy Live in Concert Comedy Tour

Other: Report provided by Cathy Malakowsky;

Motion to support/not support ordinance change to prohibit cannabis smoking in parks?

The Albert Lea City Council introduced a law change Monday, Aug. 14, that would expand “no smoking” in public places to include cannabis products. See the language below.

The [current ordinance](#) prohibits smoking or chewing tobacco in City parks, City Hall and the City Arena, along with restaurants, stores, schools, hospitals, nursing homes and common areas of apartment buildings.

The proposed law change would add “any cannabis flower, or cannabis product that can be inhaled through the means of smoking or an electronic device.”

Ordinance changes require two readings:

- Approving the first reading introduces the change.
- Approving the second reading adopts the change.

Usually, this ordinance change would have gone to the Parks Rec Board for a recommendation before the council vote. However, staff wanted to move quickly to close the loophole in the Minnesota law that legalized [adult-use of certain cannabis products](#) on Aug. 1. The State of Minnesota is establishing a licensing system for selling cannabis products, which will likely start in 2025. In the meantime, cities across the state, including Albert Lea, are studying related issues, such as whether to restrict the number and location of dispensaries.

Would the Parks and Rec Board like to adopt a motion making a recommendation to the City Council on this ordinance change?

September meeting: Recommendation on park regulations?

The discussion on whether to prohibit smoking cannabis products in city parks led to a review of the following park regulations posted at: <https://cityofalbertlea.org/park-regulations/>. It turns out that not all of the rules are in City Code.

Park Regulations

For everyone’s safety and enjoyment, please follow these Park Regulations:

- Park hours are from 5 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (hours need not be in City Code, but the Board may wish to recommend hours for a policy on when parks are open to the public, including restrooms)

- Alcohol is not allowed in any park. (not in City Code except that licensed providers required if serving alcohol at an event)
- All parks and facilities are tobacco-free. (in City Code)
- There are no lifeguards at the City Beach, swim at your own risk. (need not be in City Code)
- Threatening and/or abusive language or conduct is not allowed in any park or public property. (covered by other laws)
- All vegetation including trees, shrubs, flower beds, turf, and other natural growth cannot be cut or damaged. (some covered in ordinances and some not)
- Defacing or destruction of park buildings, structures, or other property is prohibited. (covered by other laws)
- All pets must be on a leash in control by a person. Any feces must be removed by the person in control of the pet. (in City Code)
- Fires are allowed only at designated picnic grills, fireplaces, and fire rings. All fires must be completely extinguished upon departure. (in City Code)
- Litter must be placed in designated containers and dumping of refuse is prohibited. (code states “no disposal on city streets and sidewalks”)
- Horses and motor vehicles are prohibited from park property except on designated trails. (code states “No animal shall be allowed in city parks and picnic areas unless restrained and attended by the owner or a person of suitable age and discretion.”)
- Personal property cannot be stored in any park or on public land. (not in City Code)

Please think about what regulations should be in place for City parks. If prohibiting alcohol, then should THC beverages also be prohibited? Staff will likely have recommendations at the September meeting for the Parks and Rec Board to discuss, modify as the Board sees fit, and vote on a recommendation to the City Council.

UP Rail to Trail

- Update on Trail Action Plan for UP rail corridor:
 - City-County group met July 12:
 - Phil Wacholz, Nicki Eckstrom, Brad Edwin, Steve Jahnke, Cathy Malakowsky, Larry Baker, Brian Anderson and HDR consultants. City-County group decided:
 - The priority segments to develop – with timing determined by grant programs – are Front Street to Shoff Park, across Highway 13, Highway 13 to I-90.
 - To hire HDR to work on getting the Freeborn-Waseca Regional Master Plan designated a regional trail to qualify for funding next year from the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission.
 - To issue an RFP – written by Phil – for engineering the project, including upfront design and environmental assessment.
 - The best hope for funding the trail would be 75% grant and 25% matching from City and County.

**** Top 5 Project Updates:**

Restrooms by Splash Pad –

- No update

Develop the Union Pacific rail to trail –

- See update in Cathy’s department update section.

Develop an off-season field house –

- No update

Upgrade Snyder Fields –

- See Parks department updates regarding the fencing and dugouts.

Update aging facilities, including the City Arena and Aquatic Center –

- Continued discussion from Apex presentation at the July board meeting.

Board Member Items:

- Rich Yost –
 - Working with Mike Westney and the contractors on the Snyder Field improvement projects on behalf of Albert Lea Youth Baseball. Youth baseball and softball will be purchasing the aluminum benches, fencing lumber and trim for the dugouts with their \$50,000 donation to the City.

Adjournment: Therese Salazar made a motion to adjourn the Park Board meeting, and Whitney Sauer seconded the motion. The board voted in favor of said motion 5-0. Motion declared passed. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Afton Wacholz
Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Secretary

Approved:

Steve Ball
Park & Recreation Advisory Board Chairman