

2016 Joint PRC and Committee Meeting January 12, 2016 Follow-Up

1. Introductions – commissioners, committee and staff

Present: Parks and Recreation Commissioners Nicole DePalma, Joe Quinn, Jordan Polehna, Sheila Hedin, Michelle Dunkirk, and (Chair) Chair David Juntunen. Parks and Recreation Committee of Council Lori Braucks, Joe Balsanek, and Tony Nelson. City Administrator, Melanie Mesko Lee, Parks and Recreation Director, Chris Jenkins, Recreation Programming Specialist Paige Marschall

2. Purpose/Goal of Meeting—Introduction to topic at hand, the reason(s) we are all meeting together

- Parks and Recreation Director, Chris Jenkins gave a brief introduction in regards to the meeting purpose and goal. The purpose of the Joint PRC and Committee meeting was to all come together, communicate and identify needs in the Hastings community in regards to Parks and Recreation.

Background – the City’s Comprehensive Plan (2007 edition) has provided a roadmap for the Parks & Recreation Department’s efforts with regard to new and existing facilities, amenities, and to some degree programming. This was a public process as part of our overall Comprehensive Plan. We will be reviewing these documents in the next year or two and the timing is right to review what we’ve said we want to do, where we’ve been, and what our next steps are. Economic reality likely stalled some of the momentum generated from the Comp Plan, however, you will see that a number of accomplishments have been attained since the plans adoption. Below are a few statements to keep in mind as we review, evaluate and plan for the future:

- The current comprehensive plan is still relevant.
- Significant outreach and community involvement was vital in the creation of the plan.
- Hastings has not changed too much since the plan was developed.
- Director Jenkins shared the background of the City’s 2007 Comprehensive Plan. The discussion of where the Parks and Recreation Department has been and the needs in town and how they are shifting from the 2007 comprehensive plan was addressed.

At the core of the Comprehensive Plan are the Common Vision, Mission Statement, and Guiding Principles detailed below. These statements are vital to the success of the Comprehensive Plan, and provide necessary direction to the Parks & Recreation Department as we work to provide services for Hastings.

A Common Vision The public process and open conversation that the City has had with its residents in 2007 was instrumental in creating a common vision for the community. A key underpinning of this vision is fostering a high quality of life through the provision of parks, open spaces, recreational facilities, and trails within the context of responsible land stewardship, long-term sustainability, and economic viability.

- Director Jenkins referenced the comprehensive plan (2007 Edition) was developed out of public engagement including various groups, to develop a high quality of life. Public engagement served as a guiding factor to provide a balance of parks, natural areas, athletic facilities, and trails.
- City Administrator, Melanie Mesko Lee addressed the fact that a new comprehensive plan is required in 2018 and the public engagement process will begin laying the groundwork for the 2018 Comprehensive plan in the near future.

Mission Statement

The mission statement is an outgrowth of the common vision and reflects the City’s commitment to its desired lifestyle and providing a balanced overall system. The mission statement is to:

“Promote a high quality of life in Hastings by providing a balanced and sustainable system of parks, natural open spaces, athletic facilities, and trails consistent with the historic sense of place in the community.”

- Parks and Recreation Commissioner Michelle Dunkirk expressed her interest in natural open spaces and how they are defined. Director Jenkins addressed Michelle’s question stating the natural open spaces vary depending on the location in Hastings and the maintenance and care for the natural land is case by case.
- Commissioner Michelle Dunkirk shared her concern for the older trees in Hastings and what the plan is for the trees. Commissioner Dunkirk shared her knowledge and experience with trees in Hastings.
- Director Jenkins acknowledged Commissioner Dunkirk’s concern and assured the trees are taken into consideration when maintaining the land.

Guiding Principles A number of guiding principles support the vision and mission statements.

These include:

- Implement a balanced system plan offering multiple community values
- Allow for some flexibility in implementing the plan to adjust to realistic financial limitations and unforeseen events
- Maintain a high and consistent standard of quality throughout the system
- Plan and design parks for their entire lifecycle (i.e., 15 to 20 years)
- Adhere to a standardized planning and design process for individual parks to ensure consistency in public involvement and outcomes

What we’ve said we want to do: – there is a consistent theme woven into the fabric of the comprehensive plan and it states the purpose is to *“Preserve the sense of place and livability of the community while accommodating growth and evolving recreation and social trends”*.

- Director Jenkins gave an introduction into the 2007 Comprehensive plan and what we have said we want to do in the City of Hastings Parks and Recreation Department. Key themes for the plan were introduced and discussed.

Key themes from the plan include:

Reducing organized athletics in neighborhood parks.

Page 3.8: Although neighborhood parks can be used on occasion for younger children’s programs such as T-ball, doing so should be purposefully limited to avoid overuse issues, such as excessive parking in the neighborhoods, turf quality issues, and detracting from the neighborhood sense of place.

- Director Chris Jenkins addressed the theme of reducing organized athletics in the City of Hastings neighborhood parks. At this time, we do not have enough space for associations in our current park facilities. The idea of expanding and reconfiguring Veterans Park would need to be developed.

Expanding athletic facility capacity in an athletic complex.

Page 3.13: System is at capacity, with little opportunity to rest fields. Quality of fields becoming more of an issue as use levels grow. Currently relying extensively on neighborhood parks to meet demand. Optimal nearer-term solution would be to add four more athletic greens at the athletic complex, plus lighting an existing field. This would take the pressure off of existing facilities and start the shift away from heavy programming of neighborhood parks.

- Director Jenkins introduced the capacity of our current facilities and the quality of our fields as the associations use level grows. The reliance of our neighborhood parks is at capacity and a solution is necessary. An additional four fields in Veterans Park along with lights for an existing field would help the quality of our facilities and less organized athletics in neighborhood parks.
- Director Jenkins also mentioned when people come to Hastings to play a game, driving through a development and parking on the street may be their first introduction to the City of Hastings. The difficulty of crossing the street lined with vehicles is a safety concern for families.
- Parks and Recreation Commissioner Jordan Polehna expressed his admiration for a small town feel and enjoyment of playing athletics in a neighborhood park as a youth, but acknowledged the concern of safety in the parks during high usage timeframes.

Page 3.14: Notably, as the demand for facilities reaches its peak in the future, it will be increasingly important that the City be able to objectively understand true demand to avoid over or under development of facilities. Thereafter, the opportunity to make adjustments in the mix of facilities will be more difficult and costly.

- Director Jenkins introduced the redevelopment of neighborhood and community parks within the City of Hastings.

Holistically redevelop neighborhood/community parks.

Page 3.7: The design for each neighborhood park should be consistent with the desired service level and tailored to the neighborhood it serves, rather than the generalized needs of the community.

Page 3.8: The integration of new neighborhood parks with the larger open space (greenway) system with interlinking trails is also an important factor in pushing the service radius of a neighborhood park to 1/2-mile or more.

Page 3.10: The design for each community park should be individually considered consistent with its intended use within the park system.

Page 3.10: Given the extent of existing community park opportunities, there is little justification for adding new community park sites to the system. Instead, the focus should be on providing a quality experience within the existing parks. In addition to meeting defined needs, the design of these parks is also critical to creating a compelling sense of place that residents and visitors will return to time and again.

- Director Jenkins shared the process in redeveloping neighborhood parks, like Wallin Park. The process includes neighborhood meetings and discussing what components the residents in that neighborhood want to see. The residents are the ones using the park, and holding neighborhood meetings helps assist in redeveloping the park for optimal use based on the new trends of the neighborhood and its residents.
- Commissioner Sheila Hedin mentioned her interest in new elements of parks and what other cities are doing.
- City Administrator, Melanie Mesko Lee referenced providing what is on trend with parks and redeveloping parks to feature new elements and creativity.
- Commissioner Michelle Dunkirk expressed her concern with installed rubber ground. Dunkirk shared a story and her knowledge on the rubber ground and the emission of off-gases when the rubber gets too hot. Director Jenkins will further look into the product and consult with the National Certified Playground Association.
- Council member Joe Balsanek shared his interest in a BMX park. Council member Balsanek shared a story and admiration for the highly used BMX Park in Maple Grove.

Maintain existing and seek to add trails and trail connections.

Page 4.1: The overarching goals of the trail system are to:

- Develop an interlinking system of high value trails throughout the city that connect with regional and county trails.
- Provide reasonable trail access to the natural resource amenities within the community without unduly compromising their integrity and natural qualities.
- Provide an appropriate level of universal accessibility to trails throughout the system.
- Director Chris Jenkins shared the current maintenance on existing trails and trail connections done by the Parks Keepers. Director Jenkins shared highlights, referencing the trail off of County road 46 and 47, Bauer trail, CP Adams trail, reconstruction of the trail in Lions Park and other connections in Hastings.
- City Administrator Melanie Mesko Lee mentioned that 2016 will be the year they are closing the trail loop in Hastings, providing a holistic trail system.

Maintain, Enhance and Increase natural areas, greenways and buffer zones.

Page 5.1: The stewardship plan promotes an ecosystem-based approach to managing natural systems.

Page 5.1: Ecosystem-based management views people as part of the community, and as such maintaining a healthy ecosystem is the best way to meet human needs as well as those of other organisms. General goals of this philosophy are to:

- Enhance the health of the ecosystems in the city
- Preserve and enhance the biological diversity of native habitats
- Provide an appropriate balance between **natural** resource preservation, recreational use, and development

Page 5.3: Undertaking a natural resource stewardship program across the city will require a close partnership with landowners, and private developers to be successful. The City alone will not likely have the financial resources to both set aside land for open space or parks and provide stewardship for those lands. As defined in Section 3, setting aside land for preserved natural areas and providing perpetual stewardship of those lands will have to be accomplished as part of the development process if it is to occur. Achieving these goals will have to be balanced against flexibility given to the developer to maintain the economic viability of a development.

- Commissioner Michelle Dunkirk questioned the appropriate balance between what kinds of resource preservation. Director Jenkins addressed the resources as natural.
- Commissioner Michelle Dunkirk expressed her interest in having a wildlife habitat and corridor created, considering the aged trees. Dunkirk asked how the land will be preserved. Director Jenkins addressed preserving land case by case for each piece of land the City of Hastings owns. The preservation is site-specific to develop an overall balance in the community.
- Commissioner Dunkirk would like to know the plan for the parks and to make sure the trees will not be cut down.

- Council member Braucks expressed her appreciation for Commissioner Dunkirk's concern for the trees in Hastings and suggested the preservation of trees be taken into consideration for the 2018 Comprehensive Plan.
- A discussion on the guiding principles when developing or redesigning took place and made reference to ecological and developmental concerns. When planning a park or redeveloping a park takes place, the reality of what is currently there and thinking strategically and being responsive to concerns is a priority.
- City Administrator Mesko Lee mentioned the City of Hastings priority of being a good steward to the environment and the planning process holds stewardship of land a priority.

Where we've been:

- Director Chris Jenkins outlined where the City of Hastings Parks and Recreation department has been in their efforts to address the 2007 Comprehensive plan and the outlook for the future.

Reducing organized athletics in neighborhood parks:

We have not yet been successful in addressing this theme. As noted earlier, this theme is intertwined with adding capacity through an athletic complex.

Expanding athletic field capacity in an athletic complex:

- Efforts began on this theme, likely as a result of this Comprehensive Plan, however plans have not been fully developed, nor has any expansion been realized.

Holistically redevelop neighborhood/community parks:

- This theme has recently been completed very successfully with the Riverfront Renaissance and the redevelopment of Levee Park.
- Staff are committed to this theme for future park projects, however face some challenges that will need to be addressed. Challenges include the current composition of many of our neighborhood parks that include athletic facilities, the age of current play structures and the need to replace them.

Maintain existing and seek to add trails and trail connections:

- Noticeable progress has been completed on this theme, some completed by the City and some by our neighbors.
 - Link to and construction of Point Douglas Trail (construction 2016)
 - Link to and construction of "Northwest Regional Trail" (trail to Spring Lake Park)
 - Construction of a portion of the "Vermillion Corridor Trail" (Hwy 46/47 or Bauer Trail)
 - Trail connecting CP Adams Park to downtown Hastings
 - New trail segments within CP Adams and Connecting CP Adams to "Vermillion Corridor Trail" (construction 2016).
- Conversations are once again in progress with regard to the Hastings To Redwing Trail.
- Allocations have been made as part of the P&R Budget to conduct repairs/reconstruction annually.

Maintain, Enhance and Increase natural areas, greenways and buffer zones:

- Probably some of the least noticeable, yet meaningful progress has been made on this theme since the plans adoption.

- Old Mill Park underwent evaluation and has a Natural Resource Management Plan tailored to enhance the natural resources of the park. Enhancement activities have recently occurred in Old Mill Park and include buckthorn removal, prescribed burning and native plant/grass reintroduction.
- A partnership with the Friends of the Mississippi River helps Old Mill Park have activities like buckthorn removal, prescribed burning and plant and grass reintroduction.
 - Vermillion Linear Park was also evaluated and has its own Natural Resource Management Plan. Enhancements including buckthorn removal, prescribed burning, riverbank stabilization and native prairie installation have occurred recently.
- Commissioner Dunkirk would like to make sure the planning implements forward thinking of a wildlife habitat in Hastings.
 - Hastings River Flats Park, or at least the portion that was used for the HWY 61 Bridge construction is in the process of being restored to a native plant community.
- We have a contract with DOT to make this possible.
 - Removal of diseased pine trees was recently conducted near 36th Street West and Greten Lane.
- Commissioner Dunkirk asked the question how do we know they are pine trees and what was the disease. Director Jenkins stated the work with contractors and our City Forester, Paul Mahoney worked on this project to ensure the proper and appropriate removal.
 - A Monarch Butterfly Station was installed at the LeDuc property through an Eagle Scout project.
 - Local residents are interested and willing to install and maintain pollinator friendly plants within desirable public lands. Water quality monitoring at Lake Rebecca was conducted this summer by Hastings Environmental Protectors. Monitoring activities are being conducted to identify water quality issues (if any), and determine if any intervention is desirable.
- Commissioner Hedin would like to have a discussion on different trends and new evolutions of recreation.
- Commissioner Dunkirk is interested in a non-traditional arrangement of parks. For example, a Bee area.
- Council Member Nelson asked the question of Eagle Scout Projects and if we have a list of projects. The possibility of the Parks and Recreation Commission to develop a list of projects was brought to the table.

What our next steps are:

As mentioned at the beginning of this document, the City's Comprehensive Plan is due to be updated in the next couple of years, and now is a great time to discuss our next steps.

I believe the City has been tracking well with the purpose and intent of the Comprehensive Plan, and the recommendations included. The term "Balance" has been used extensively throughout the Comprehensive Plan, and we see it again at the very beginning of **Section 6: Implementation Plan & Administrative Provisions.**

Page 6.1: As defined in *Section 2 – Vision Statement and Policy Plan*, a key principle of the plan is taking a balanced approach to implementation to ensure that multiple community values are being realized and that the wide-ranging interests of residents are well served as time goes on. A balanced approach also provides the City more latitude in taking advantage of opportunities as they arise.

As we look to continue making balanced progress here in Hastings, I suggest that it is important that we continue to use our Comprehensive Plan as a roadmap to success and continue to focus efforts and resources on accomplishing items identified as priorities.

- Commissioner Dunkirk would like to respond to the aging population in Hastings and people over 50 with nature. Dunkirk mentioned that nature is not age specific. Dunkirk also mentioned the idea of a community garden.
- Director Jenkins addressed the idea of community garden and shared there is a garden at the LeDuc Mansion that could be expanded.
- Director Jenkins mentioned the variety of models for community gardens. The exploration of what we can do will be looking into for the near future.
- City Administrator addressed the thought that there are only so many resources to go toward each section (athletic facilities, green space, trails, and parks). The communication piece between committee of council and commissioners will continue.
- Council member Balsanek suggested the need for bike lanes needed in the 2018 comprehensive plan, along with an ice rink at Wilson park be brought back.

Page 6.4:

Priority	Category	Overall Priority Statement
1	Relationship with School District	<p>The interdependency of the park, open space, and trail system and recreational programming between Hastings and the School District is vital to effectively and efficiently meeting local needs. Ensuring that this is accomplished in a fair and equitable manner is critical to long-term success. As such, reevaluating the relationship and updating formal agreements is a top priority that can be acted upon in the nearer-term.</p> <p>Update - the Joint Powers Agreement will be reevaluated and clarified.</p>
2	Athletic Facilities	<p>Athletic facilities are listed near the top in terms of priority due to the importance of 1) setting aside reserve land for future use, 2) the need to address existing imbalances in supply and demand, and 3) enhancing the City’s capacity to track demand.</p> <p>How do we want to integrate going forward?</p> <p>Update – 1) 54+ acres of vacant, City owned land adjacent to Veterans Athletic Complex is zoned as Parks & Recreation. 2) City staff work extensively with local associations to provide and allocate facilities for use. At times, there are not enough athletic facilities available to satisfy the requests. It should also be noted there is not sufficient capacity to pull a facility out of service without significant effect on users. 3) We have not increased our ability to track demand, however City staff work closely with School District/Community Education and local associations to coordinate and allocate facility uses.</p>

3	Open Space and Greenways	<p>Setting aside lands for open space and greenways is a top priority because it is intrinsically linked to community development. Setting aside this land must occur as part of that process if it is to occur at all. Following through on the system plan will also require a close working relationship with adjoining townships in terms of managing development to achieve desired ends.</p> <p>Update – lands beyond what was identified within this Comprehensive Plan have not been sought for acquisition. When lands become available, reviews are completed based upon the Comprehensive Plan and determinations are made.</p>
	Trails	<p>The implementation of many of the highest-value trails is also intrinsically linked to community development, especially the destination trails that would traverse the greenway system in future areas of annexation. Given its routine rating as the highest value recreational activity by people across age groups, developing the trail system is justifiably a very high priority within the city. As with the greenways, most of the destination trails need to be established as part of the development process if they are to occur at all.</p> <p>Update – as noted earlier, multiple trail connections are being made and trail segments have been completed. Great interest surrounds the potential connection through the Hastings to Redwing Trail.</p>
4	Parks	<p>Continued development of the park system remains important to serving traditional recreational needs. This falls slightly behind the other priorities larger due to the greater immediacy of addressing athletic facility supply and demand issues and taking advantage of opportunities as development occurs. In addition, the upgrading of many of the neighborhood parks first requires shifting programmed athletic uses to the athletic complex or select other parks. The extent to which this occurs will have an effect on the design for a given park.</p> <p>Update: Levee Park – complete redevelopment occurred, including the installation of a musical playground, labyrinth/skating rink, pavilion, amphitheater, non-traditional interactive features were also incorporated.</p> <p>Depot Park – a new train themed park based on proximity to railroad.</p> <p>Sand Volleyball Courts – will be installed (through grant funding) within the hockey rink at Pioneer Park (summer 2016).</p> <p>Wallin Park – playground expansion and basketball court installation completed in 2015.</p> <p>Cannon Park – new play equipment installed in 2015.</p> <p>Dog Park – opened in late 2014 and operating well.</p>

		Park equipment replacements – The 2016 budget has funds available for play equipment replacements at Sunny Acres Park and Tierney Park. Equipment selection will include neighborhood meetings to determine desired components and amenities.
5	Natural Resource Stewardship	<p>With the ever increasing value that society places on preservation of remaining natural areas, establishing a stewardship program will become an increasingly significant priority. It is rated lower at this point since much of this relates to lands that have yet to be set aside as future open space and greenways, which will occur as development pushes out into surrounding township.</p> <p>Update – as noted earlier, both Old Mill Park and Vermillion Linear Park have active natural resource management plans and ongoing projects through Friends of The Mississippi River. Most of the enhancements have been completed using grant funds received by FMR. River Flats Park is also undergoing a restoration project through 2017.</p>

- The question of what philosophy are we going to pursue was mentioned.
- City Administrator Melanie Mesko Lee addressed as we go forward we need to take into account the trends, developing parallels. City Administrator mentioned the possibility to allocate funds in different areas to address needs.

As we keep our efforts directed on priorities that were identified, it is also important that we recognize that all things cannot be accomplished immediately. The following statement sums up how we should approach implementation.

Page 6.2: By focusing on raising the level of service through strategic and prioritized investments, the role that the system plays as a defining element in the City’s infrastructure can be strengthened.

Many great things have been accomplished since the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, and many more are on the horizon. With focus and determination we can continue to enhance our community’s quality of life and livability.

Projected Takeaways:

- Comments/Feedback on Comprehensive Plan document?
- Comments/Feedback on items addressed to date?
- Thoughts/direction on 3-5 specific, measurable priorities between 2016-2020?
- Next steps
- Michelle Dunkirk would like to pick up a 2007 Comprehensive Plan. Paige brought to City Hall for pick up on January 13th 2016.
- Guidance is needed on where our Parks and Recreation Department is going to focus their efforts.
- Thinking about public engagement and what we can do. Commissioner Polehna mentioned his interest in a Photo Contest for the public.
- Making connections and making the connections engaging.

