

**Dakota County Planning Commission
 Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes-Final
 Date: September 23, 2021
 Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Members Present		Staff Present		Others Present
Jerry Rich	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Robert Timmerman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Lori Hansen	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nate Reitz	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Jill Smith	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jim Guttman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Greg Oxley	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tony Nelson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Amy Hunting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Donald Post	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Barry Graham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dennis Peine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Ramraj Singh	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Meeting Called to Order
Time: 7:01 p.m.
By: Chair Oxley

Public Comment
 None.

Welcome New Planning Commissioner Dennis Peine

Comments/Notes: Commissioner Hunting introduced Commissioner Peine and shared a few personal facts about him with the Planning Commission.

Approval of Agenda

Motion by: Commissioner Singh
 Second by: Commissioner Smith
 Vote: Unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes (from July 22, 2021 meeting)

Motion by: Commissioner Reitz
 Second by: Commissioner Graham
 Commissioner Smith abstaining.
 Vote: Unanimously approved with corrections.

Welcome New Parks Director Niki Geisler

Comments/Notes:

Niki Geisler, the new Park's Department Director, was introduced to the committee and welcomed. Niki stated that she has previously worked at the YMCA for twenty-two years in various roles, such as Camp Counselor and Vice President of Camping.

Item #1: Parks Ordinance Update

Action / Information

Comments/Notes: Jeff Bransford, Sr. Project Specialist, presented this item and responded to questions. This topic was previously addressed with the Planning Commission in 2018. Tonight's discussion is the first public meeting and the start of the public comment phase. The proposed schedule is to have the ordinance updated by the beginning of next year. Jeff presented seven items that need to be addressed by the ordinance update, including; Hammocking, Foraging, Electric Vehicle Use, Drones/Unmanned Aircraft, Amplified Noise, Commercial Uses, and Metal Detecting.

Questions and comments by Commissioners along with responses from staff (italics):

A question was raised as to whether the Parks Ordinance be updated in its current form or re-written? *Staff responded that our intention is to re-write the Parks Ordinance.*

Are you going to be checking with school districts? *Staff responded that several school districts would be engaged, and staff would contact and coordinate with those who work in schools.*

With respect to park programming, a commissioner stressed that Community Education should not be forgotten in this conversation. Dakota County should be careful not to duplicate what the school districts are already doing. It may be helpful to coordinate with Community Education Directors so that the school districts and parks programming is co-marketed and coordinated efficiently.

Planning Commissioners discussed the need to have the ordinance be easy to use by the public yet also enforceable. It may be necessary to have different documents and media to accomplish these two tasks. *Staff acknowledged the need to make it easy to use by the public but also clear and practical for enforcement by Sheriff's deputies and the County Attorney's Office.*

In a discussion of stakeholders that may be engaged in the update, it was suggested that the Dakota County Gun Club might appreciate being involved in this process. *Staff added the Dakota County Gun Club to the working stakeholder engagement list.*

Ordinance Topic: Hammocking

The Planning Commission discussed the practice of hammocking in parks. Some of the concerns that were discussed included:

- Liability if the hammocks are placed too high
- Potential tree damage if hammock straps are too narrow
- The potential to use hammocks for overnight camping in non-designated camping areas
- Whether Dakota County should have designated hammocking areas or hammocking post structures

In their discussion, Planning Commission members generally wanted to accommodate hammocking and also expressed a desire to limit overly restrictive requirements that would deter people from enjoying Dakota County Parks. There was some debate about whether to put restrictions in place in advance or to hold off on restrictions until a problem developed. There was general agreement that enforcement actions if needed,

should be appropriate for the circumstances and not be overly harsh as to prevent people from returning to enjoy Dakota County Parks.

Ordinance Topic: Foraging

The Planning Commission debated the practice of foraging. There was an acknowledgment that foraging is important for many cultures, including Native American cultural practices, and can be accommodated in Dakota County Parks. There seemed to be general agreement that foraging is an acceptable practice, provided it does not damage native plants and animals. There were a few examples of excessive foraging discussed, such as commercial harvesting of watercress from trout streams.

Planning Commission members were somewhat divided on the extent to which foraging should be regulated. Some of the comments that were made included:

- Allow people to forage if they have taken a class or can demonstrate that they are able to forage responsibly
- Apply foraging regulations uniformly as opposed to allowing foraging by some groups and not other groups
- Consider limiting foraging quantity by allowing people to consume plants/berries on-site but not remove them from the park
- Do not overly regulate foraging unless a problem develops and then respond
- Place restrictions in place now because some damage caused by foraging may not be reversible

Ordinance Topic: Electric Vehicle Use

There was general discussion about the incompatibility of high-speed electric vehicles in natural park settings, but that they may be more appropriate on some greenways. Planning Commissioners discussed whether it was the electric motor that is the problem or just the speed that someone is traveling/pedaling.

Planning Commissioners discussed the need to make ADA accommodations and to address the speed that vehicles can travel. ADA electric vehicles may also need to be accommodated on soft-surface trails.

Comments were made that some electric bike/vehicle use is imperceptibly different from traditional bicycling.

A request was made to evaluate what other jurisdictions around the country are doing and to include law enforcement's perspective on this topic.

Ordinance Topic: Drones/Unmanned Aircraft

The Planning Commission discussed whether drones are appropriate in a natural resource-based park system. This was a topic of debate of balance. A variety of comments were made:

- Recreational drone flying is not necessarily compatible with the mission/vision for the parks system and may disturb wildlife
- Drones may disturb or endanger other visitors
- One benefit of drones is that they are used by photographers who take natural pictures in parks
- Drones are sometimes used during family reunions to photograph large groups
- Some drones are small and quiet and do not disturb others
- Drones can be used to spy on others, and this may be an invasion of an individual or group's privacy
- If there is not a problem today, do we need to create unnecessary regulations

- Need to make sure that people are able to have fun in Dakota County parks

Ordinance Topic: Commercial Uses

There was general discussion that commercial uses can enhance visitor experiences by providing food, recreational equipment and enhance large events. Several comments were made:

- Food vendors need to be responsible to prevent packaging waste and garbage in the park
- Some commercial uses such as photography may not need a permit if they are low-key activities that do not bother other people
- Permits should be easy to get
- Uses that bother other visitors should be limited, regulated

Ordinance Topic: Metal Detecting

Planning Commissioners thought this use might be appropriate on beaches, in the water, or on trails. Digging should be limited in the rest of the park. Archeological sites need to be protected, and no digging should be permitted in these areas.

Ordinance Topic: Amplified Noise

Planning Commissioners again discussed the need to allow people to enjoy themselves without disturbing others. Law enforcement agencies need to be able to have the ability to measure decibel levels to enforce excessive noise.

Ordinance Discussion: Other Topics

The County Parks Ordinance needs to have a way to manage homelessness, and County Social Services need to be involved.

Several comments were made not to overly regulate activities in Dakota County parks, and that parks need to be enjoyable places for people to visit. A number of Planning Commissioners recommended that we do not add too many regulations to the ordinance and adapt it to add more if needed.

A suggestion was made to make sure that we are engaging current park visitors about potential changes to the ordinance to get their feedback. Dakota County needs to have enough amenities and opportunities for people to come and use the parks.

The Parks Ordinance should be written in a way that it does not duplicate existing city ordinances or existing state law. It does not need to be redundant.

A commissioner asked if the Park Ordinance applies to privately owned land within the park? *Staff responded that the Park Ordinance doesn't apply to private property and only applies to publicly-owned property.*

Planning Manager Update and County Board Actions

- Authorized agreement with City of Apple Valley for multiple trail design and construction projects along the North Creek Greenway
- Authorized agreement with DNR and MN Zoo for Bison Herd at Spring Lake Park Reserve
- Authorized agreement with City of Burnsville for Lake Marion Greenway design study

- Authorized sustainable trail design study for Lebanon Hills Regional Park

Upcoming Public Meetings – Community Outreach

County 66/Hwy 52 Area Study Open House	Tuesday, September 28, 4:30 pm – 6:30 pm United Steel Workers Hall 18990 Goodwin Avenue, Hastings https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Transportation/PlannedConstruction/CR66/Pages/default.aspx
Thompson (CSAH 8) and Oakdale Ave (CSAH 73) Trail Improvements Open House	Tuesday, October 5, 5:00pm - 7:00pm Dakota Lodge, Thompson County Park, West St. Paul
South St. Paul Library Open House	Wednesday, November 10, 5:00pm-7:00pm Central Square Community Center, Centennial Room, South St. Paul https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/libraries/HoursLocations/SSP/

Topics for Next Meeting (Thursday, October 28, 2021)

- Miesville Ravine Natural Resource Management Plan and Master Plan update

Planning Commissioner Announcements/Updates

Several comments were made regarding the upcoming Miesville Ravine Master Plan. A Planning Commissioner suggested that Dakota County address the power line going through the Cannon River. Another comment was made to address the poor water quality entering the park from surrounding agricultural land. Planning Commissioners discussed the need to do this in a sensitive way that recognizes the long agricultural history of the surrounding area.

Adjourn: 8:56 p.m.

Motion by: Commissioner Graham

Second: Commissioner Smith

Vote: Unanimously approved.

Next Regular Meeting: Thursday, October 28, 2021. The next meeting is planned to be in person at Western Service Center.