

Winona County Parks & Environment Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday March 2, 2021 - 4:30 p.m.

Ring Central Meeting

Committee Members Present: John Howard Mark Engen
 Jack Stansfield Dale Hadler
 Kristin Dieterman Matt Neil
 Amanda Gentry James Spartz
 Steve Jacob

Staff Present: Lew Overhaug Kay Qualley
 Anne Morse Kelsie Travers

1.0 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:30pm by Chair Mark Engen.

2.0 Approval of Agenda

On motion by S. Jacob and seconded by D. Hadler, the Parks & Environment Advisory Committee voted to approve the agenda. Vote: Yes – All.

3.0 Approval of Minutes of January 5, 2021 Meeting

On motion by S. Jacob and seconded by D. Hadler, the Parks & Environment Advisory Committee voted to approve the minutes. Vote: Yes – All.

4.0 MDA Oriental Bittersweet Grant Update

Anne Morse went through the progress report for Noxious Weed Grant included in the agenda packet. The MDA requested a mid-year report for the 2-year grant to monitor progress on the state grant. Legislature is in process requesting ongoing support for eradication of noxious weeds. Anne Morse explained the extensive eradication efforts by several volunteers and staff on public and private land within Winona County. Amanda Gentry, of Winona County SWCD, added that the SWCD has a cooperative weed management area grant to assist higher density sites that are slightly dangerous for crews to get into, such as dead trees and steep or rocky terrain. The SWCD is down to their last funds of the grant, enough for potentially one more project, and have not come across any new grants to renew the funding.

5.0 Waste Reduction and final County-wide “Recycler” by GreenCorps member, Kelsie Travers

Anne Morse went over the Recycler, developed by Kelsie Travers with input from Anne Morse, Kim Nelson and Kay Qualley. The Recycler will be sent county-wide to assist the public with

information about recycling, household hazardous waste and food waste. Many helpful hints, informational websites and steps to follow to reduce waste are all included in the 4-page booklet.

Discussion ensued about Winona County being a mandatory recycling county and ways to share that information with the public. K. Qualley shared that the GreenCorps Member would be creating a series of social media posts on various platforms in support of those goals.

6.0 Apple Blossom Park goals for Spring

Kay Qualley is in process of ordering bare root and potted trees to replace the few that were lost from last year's DNR grant. In addition to tree planting, staff has a goal to enlist help with removal of the last of the invasive tall Miscanthus grass and areas of concentrated poison ivy from Apple Blossom. A volunteer committee was decided upon to assist staff with tree planting around Arbor Day at Apple Blossom Park: John Howard, Matt Neil and Amanda Gentry. Arbor Day is the last Friday in April for Minnesota but exact date of work party to be determined after Kay Qualley determines the tree delivery date. Staff will try to coordinate efforts by the subcommittee to recruit additional help for the work party.

7.0 Farmers Park goals for Spring

Kay Qualley met with County Maintenance Supervisor Aaron LaFee who could not attend this meeting. Their discussion centered around repair of existing pavilions; post replacement and tuckpointing. Ms. Qualley expanded by stating that the current limited parks budget permits minimal maintenance is not adequate for repairing and maintain the assets at the park and removing trees for safety reasons. In addition, in four years' time, Garlic Mustard has taken over many of the native wildflower areas; although Maintenance staff has the chemical for eradicating noxious weeds in the park, time to do it is an issue.

Other topic for Farmers Park was regarding past practices for renting pavilions for events and weddings. Currently, deposits are refunded to those who return the key, but staff recommends that this be changed for 2022, due to the amount of staff time to ready pavilions and sites (mowing) for rental and then subsequent clean up. It is suggested that the pavilion rental fee be changed to \$50, non-refundable. Should the key for a pavilion not be returned, an additional \$25 key charge would be charged. Currently, many citizens already donate the fee, and this is still a very modest charge. Weddings in the parks are recommended to shift from a \$100 deposit to a \$100 fee, if approved.

On motion by K. Dieterman and seconded by A. Gentry, the Parks and Environment Advisory Committee voted to change the fees for Farmers Park pavilion rental to \$50, non-refundable, and an additional \$25 charge should the key not be returned. Vote: Yes – All, except J. Howard who abstained.

Kay Qualley shared some additional work needed at Farmers Park: removal of posts near Gingko trees to aid in maintenance.

On motion by A. Gentry and seconded by K. Dieterman, the Parks and Environment Advisory Committee voted to remove the posts near the Gingko trees. Vote: Yes – All.

8.0 Stone Point Park

At the request of the Advisory Committee from the last meeting, Stone Point Park master plan, (approved ~8 years ago) was presented, with a breakout of key points. The staff presentation included the current state of Stone Point, reviewed excerpts from the park master plan, maps of park entry points, current uses of restricted areas, Sheriff's Office Posse training area, potential renewable energy sites and more. In addition, several slides pointed out potential short trail loops from the plan that led to desirable overlook views.

L. Overhaug discussed the Greater Minnesota Parks and Trails Commission as an organization whose goals include parks system planning and providing recommendations to the legislature for grants funded by the parks and trails fund. Grants are for counties and cities outside of the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance. Winona County is a member of the organization. Funding for Stone Point development through these types of grants would need to meet the threshold for regional significance and demonstrate the possibility of being a nexus for regional trails connectivity to be considered. A more detailed plan would have to be funded first, likely.

M. Engen shared that the Douglas County plan was well laid out and they could potentially take some ideas away from their plan and determine how it was funded.

K. Qualley shared that the 2021 parks budget is modest but the upcoming 2022 budget is something to consider for input by the Parks committee if a simple lawn panel with excess picnic tables from Farmers Park was desired as a starting point. Otherwise, for more serious progress on development, many larger grants require a significant funding match be identified, prior to application.

M. Neil asked what the committee can do to make progress on the Stone Point Park plan. The Parks committee asked if the County Board is the one who decides on funding for parks and how are the larger projects funded? Commissioner Jacob suggested that there are various ways to raise money to provide a grant match, such as from community members, clubs or someone passionate about developing the park system. J. Howard requested a Stone Point Park visit once the weather cooperates.

On motion by J. Howard and seconded by D. Hadler, the Parks and Environment Advisory Committee voted to hold a meeting at Stone Point Park to explore the options of park uses. Vote: Yes – All.

9.0 Visit Winona Update – Lew Overhaug

L. Overhaug shared that he is a board member of Visit Winona. It is the visitor bureau for the city of Winona plus approximately 20 miles outside of Winona. They market and promote the Winona area. The funding comes from hotel tax as well as other lodging, such as Airbnb's. Additional funding comes from partnerships, people or businesses who pay for advertising to be included in the visitor guides and materials.

For the past year, Visit Winona has been focused on weathering the Covid-19 pandemic, such as reducing staff and budgets. The visitor center has been closed during the pandemic. This year, they are looking to hopefully re-open the visitor center and get prepared for travelers, who hopefully would include Winona County parks in their travels.

10.0 Member Updates

None

11.0 Adjourn; next meeting date: May 4, 2021

On motion by K. Dieterman and seconded by S. Jacob, the committee voted to adjourn at 5:48pm.

Vote: Yes – All.

Respectfully Submitted,
Anne Schwertel
Administrative Specialist

Signed by: 
Committee Chair/Vice Chair

5/4/21
Date