

## HARTFORD PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Wednesday, August 2, 2023

5:30 PM – City Hall Council Chambers

Present: Todd Rusniak, John Klabachek, Ken Mikulec, Joe Kohler, Kate Carroll, Dan Hummel

Excused: Scott Helms

1. President Rusniak called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM; "This is an open meeting under 19.81 to 19.98 of the Wisconsin State Statutes".
2. Approval of Minutes – **MOTION BY** Kohler seconded by Mikulec to approve the July minutes.  
**MOTION CARRIED.**
3. Informational Monthly Staff Reports – The Director commented that the June monthly report, like the May report, shows program/activity numbers up compared to last June, including Signicast attendance, and membership sales are down. VMAC attendance is down compared to last year. While the weather has been favorable, it has not been the heat and humidity that draws people to pools. In addition, the wild fire smoke also kept patrons away.
4. Communication and Correspondence – None
5. Appearances / Public Comments –

Ted Swanson 545 Big Bend – Mr. Swanson spoke against the site of the playground equipment at Homestead Park. He claimed that the location for the playground is the only place in the entire park where it would be surrounded by three homes. He believes the corner of Yellowstone Drive and Big Bend Way would be a better location. He commented that the park is being used the best way it can be, as a big open space for play. He doesn't see a need for playground equipment. He also has concerns of cars parked on the street with those outside the neighborhood coming to play on the equipment. He says other residents also disagree with the location of this equipment.

Dale Berry 442 Big Bend Way - Mr. Berry spoke against the site of the playground equipment at Homestead Park. He recently moved to this home and says that with the location of the playground, he will no longer be able to install a hot tub in his back yard. He believes the structure should be installed on the opposite corner of the park saying also there would be more parking as it would be on a corner.

Nicole Medenski 442 Big Bend Way - Ms. Medenski spoke against the site of the playground equipment at Homestead Park. She commented that she does not want to come home to screaming kids or have kids playing close to their property line. She is concerned she may not be able to get a hot tub now that there is a playground behind her house.

Jeff Turchi –443 Big Bend Way - Alderperson Kohler had Alderperson Turchi on speaker phone. Mr. Turchi is the Aldermanic Representative for 1<sup>st</sup> District which is the district of Homestead Park. Alderperson Turchi spoke with Parks and Recreation Director and City Administrator recently about the location of the playground. Turchi is happy the Commission is looking to see if any adjustments could be made. He is pleased, that after years of no development to this park, that the City is moving forward with the park plan with hopes of some alterations to the design now that houses are built around the park.

6. Old Business – None

7. New Business

## ADMINISTRATION

Fall Activity Guide – This will be distributed in the Express Newspaper and posted on line the weekend of August 11. City Registration will begin on Monday August 14 with non-resident registration and online beginning on August 16.

Homestead Park Playground Location – Executive Summary - Installation of the playground equipment at Homestead Park has begun. Alderperson Turchi received concerns from residents whose homes neighbor the park about the playground location. The playground is planned for the southeast portion of the park as per the park master plan created in 2010. The request from the homeowners is to move the playground to the center of the park.

The Director gave history of the development of the park as shared by President Rusniak, one of the longest standing members on the Parks and Recreation Commission. In 2011 into early 2012, a 5-Year Park and Open Space Plan was developed to determine the City's Park needs. In the plan, Homestead Park noted 'park grading and seeding in 2009. Landscaping along the western edge of the park in 2010/2011. A backstop installed in 2011'. The Borlen Farms Subdivision Association began meeting in 2009 and in 2011 formed a spin-off park committee that provided city staff with recommendations for a playground and shelter.

In August of 2021 Homestead Park was visited by the Commission on the annual Park Tour. Parks and Recreation Director Mike Hermann provided the Proposed Improvements and Budget for the park. This included playground equipment, a 20' x 20' open shelter, 6 picnic tables, signs, sidewalks and pathways and tree plantings within a total budget of \$100,000.

The Commission toured Homestead Park again on August 3, 2022. Staff believed that there was a possibility that the Commission would be joined by some home owners within the subdivision during the tour, but that never materialized. At that meeting, the Director Hermann indicated that the cost of an open shelter was now \$30,000 and adding electric could push that to \$50,000. Due to increased costs at Centennial Park, Homestead Park and other parks required some reduction in budget allocations for the short term. The Commission felt that a \$50,000 budget should be used for playground equipment being the most important initially.

At the Parks and Recreation Commission January 4, 2023 meeting, Director Randy Wojtasiak provided a site plan that showed the backstop and a playground area and an open shelter per the original design from 2012. The Director shared playground equipment concepts which he chose to fit within the allocated budget amount in which the Commission found favor with.

At the April 5, 2023 Commission meeting, the Director indicated that Alderperson Turchi (who is a resident of the subdivision) shared the playground design and surface materials with the subdivision committee and the committee suggested the Lee Recreation equipment with a poured-in-place surface. The Director indicated that the equipment was then ordered and was to be installed in late-spring .

In their Commission packet, the Commissioners received a subdivision layout, overhead photo of the park site, a drawn site plan for the park, and photos of the work already started on the playground installation. Of note, there is a berm and tree line that was created as a buffer between the homes and the park.

Staff recommends keeping the original planned location for the playground. The location was selected as to not interfere with baseball play and avoid danger of being struck by a ball during baseball play. Staff and the Commission also wanted to leave ample green space for drop-in play. To move the playground to the center of

the park would hinder any future development of the park. To move the playground to a location that borders the park would put the structure near a road or direct site of other homes. The Director would have safety concerns putting it on the corner of Yellowstone Drive and Big Bend Way. He stressed that with the equipment being geared to ages 2-5, older, unsupervised children is less likely. In addition, this is a neighborhood park meant for residents of the subdivision and it is not designed as a 'destination' park that people drive to.

Following a recap of the Executive Summary by the Director and during the discussion amongst the Commission members, the individuals who made appearances and public comments made a number of attempts to interrupt the Commission members' discussion. After repeated outburst by those individuals, President Rusniak asked Dale Berry and Nicole Medenski to leave the meeting. After their departure and after an outburst by Ted Swanson, President Rusniak reminded Mr. Swanson that the Commission was now in discussion mode and that public comments were no longer allowed.

Commissioner Mikulec drew on his experience on the County Board and the Land Use and Planning Committee he serves on. He explained that with public property there is a 'reasonable expectation of use clause' and with a designated park space it is reasonable to expect playgrounds, courts, bathrooms and shelters. He also commented on how studies have shown young families are not moving into Hartford and that is a concern. To help draw young families, the City needs amenities for young families. He does not believe playground equipment should be put in the middle of a park as it does inhibit future development.

Commission Carroll, after clarification on which homes might have been built by 2009 when the park was first graded to which homes were built more recently, as well as clarification on the distance the trees/berm the City planted, stated that it behooves buyers to do due diligence on researching what might be planned for development around your home and subdivision especially when there is a large open space near your property.

Aldersperson Kohler re-stated on how residents had pushed for the park to get developed and as such, the Commission responded by budgeting \$100,000 for playgrounds, swings, open shelter and picnic tables. In questioning the Director on the remaining amenities and their timeline, the Director stated that the shelter would not be built this year and that he was working on having the material donated. In 2026-2027 there would be more development including potential basketball court. The Director stated at that time, discussion can be had with the neighborhood on their desires to have a half court hoop not for large group play but for shooting and small drop-in play. Aldersperson Kohler cautioned on adding amenities that were not already in the park plan including the basketball court. He did mention that a sand volleyball court does seem to be in the park plan. Commissioner Carroll had concerns about adding basketball as it can bring a whole new set of users that can be a disturbance to the neighborhood.

Commissioner Klabecek commented that he went to visit the site prior to tonight's meeting. While there he saw numerous vehicles blowing through the stop sign on the corner of Yellowstone Drive and Big Bend Way which concerned him should the playground be moved to that location. He reiterated that with the backstop located where it is, having playground equipment in any other location would be a danger to the kids as the potential to get hit by a baseball would be great. Moving it to the middle of the park, he agrees, severely eliminates the open space for drop in play.

Commissioner Hummel believes that a playground geared toward ages 2-5 will be quiet for the neighborhood and a nice amenity.

**MOTION BY** Mikulec, seconded by Klabecek, to keep the original location of the playground at Homestead Park.

**MOTION CARRIED**

## RECREATION PROGRAMS / ACTIVITIES

Playground Camp Summary – The final session will start on August 7. Over 220 registrations this summer which averaged 44 kids per session. About 70% come daily. This attendance percentage is slightly higher than last year's attendance percentage.

Tots A Little Registration – Registration for the 3-4 year old pre-school program began in mid-July. The two 8:15 classes are full and the 10:15 classes have 6 openings between them. Kris Pietz, who taught two of the Tots A Little classes last year and some of our pre-school special classes, will be our instructor for all four classes.

### ADULT / YOUTH SPORT

Youthball Report – The last of the make-up games are held this week. Coaches are returning equipment. It was another good year although we struggled with umpires, especially in the second half of the season. Kuddos to Alayna Pusch, Youthball Coordinator, for umpiring games when we were short.

Youth Football – Flag Football league starts with two practices at the end of August and 6 Saturdays games starting after Labor Day. Teams are coached by the HUHS Varsity players. This program is open to boys and girls ages 6-7 and 8-11. Registrations are slow to come in, which is normal. Staff still hopes for a minimum of four teams per league and up to six. Sponsors are being sought for the team t-shirts.

Summer Kickball – A short 4-week season to finish out the summer has been popular with kids ages 6-11. This year we have 44 kids registered.

### AQUATICS

Veterans Memorial Aquatic Center –

Proposals for Minimum Numbers And Features to Remain Open – Executive Summary – In order to balance revenue with staff expenses, staff is proposing to change the attendance benchmarks to reduce staff on days when attendance is lower.

	Current Benchmarks	Proposed
Minimum to Open	5 Patrons	No Minimum
Minimum to stay open after 1 hour	20 Patrons	50 Patrons
Minimum to stay open after 2 hours	25 Patrons	75 Patrons
Minimum to close water walk	No Policy	200 Patrons
Minimum to close Lazy River/Purple Slide	50 Patrons	100 Patrons

The rationale to open without benchmarks is that staff is there, and we are paying them for their time even if we don't open immediately because of low numbers. The decision to close the water walk and the lazy river/purple slide features would be made at the half way through the open swim. Closing the water walk feature would send one lifeguard home and the lazy river/purple slide would send three guards home. Admission and concession staff would also be reduced on days with low attendance.

Commissioner Carroll, who has worked at the pool, felt our previous benchmarks were not high enough and was 100% behind the new benchmark attendance numbers.

Commissioner Mikulec commented that the numbers for June attendance was not significantly lower this year than last. The Aquatic Fitness Supervisor explained that in previous years, the pool had more of a consistent higher attendance and this year attendance fluctuates more. His recommendation to adjust the benchmarks is to counter the low days.

Commissioner Carrol wanted clarification that staff does try to re-open the pool should it need to shut down due to weather/storms. The Aquatic Fitness Supervisor said this year there were no opportunities to re-open but that is still the policy.

**MOTION BY** Carroll, seconded by Hummel, to accepted the proposed changes for benchmark attendance to remain open and to keep pool features open.

**MOTION CARRIED**

Signicast Family Aquatic Center – None

**PARKS OPERATIONS**

Parks Project Report –

Special Monthly Projects:

- Firework Show Prep and Clean Up
- Independence Park Bathroom Vandalism
- New Employee On Boarding – Luke Bares
- Remove Vegetation From Animals in Motion Mural at Willowbrook Park
- Homestead Park Playground Site Excavation
- Mulched Independence Park Planting Areas
- Tree Removals on Simon Drive / Nature Trail
- Brush Clean Up at Woodlawn
- Windstorm Clean Up at Cemeteries and Parks

The Director reviewed damage from the most recent storm on Friday –

- The south diamond outfield fences at Independence blew down
- The Maple Tree at Willowbrook near the tennis courts split. The Director will be asking our Volunteer City Forester if the tree can be saved.
- Tree fell on the West Diamond outfield fence at Independence
- Multiple trees fell at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, but no monument damage

Luke Barres, our new fulltime employee has been doing very well in his first month.

Volunteer Group was a great help on multiple projects including weeding the mural at Willowbrook, weeding and mulching by the Independence Park sign, and at Woodlawn the group helped with brush clean up and stained the bridge.

The Director also informed the Commission that the new bathrooms at Independence Park were vandalized again and will need to be painted. The police are working to identify the culprit.

Centennial Park Update – The walking paths have been graveled and concrete is being poured this week. Staff met with Lee Recreation regarding the playground installation. The hope is to get this installed in the next week but will be dependent on the availability of their install crews. Installation may not happen until after Labor Day. If so, it will not slow down work around the rest of the park.

The pavilion roof, facia, siding, soffits should all be done this week. Painting should be finished next week along with plumbing and utilities. The clock should be installed within the next few weeks.

We are at a bit of a standstill on the park sign until the bracing for the sign is installed. Staff will do a field check before finalizing the production of the sign to confirm that it will fit and mount properly.

President Rusniak commented that he has received inquiries as to the water fountains. Parks and Building Maintenance Supervisor said that with the construction of the park, much of the electrical was not available for the fountains but staff looks forward to putting them in next year.

### **OTHER REPORTS /COMMISSION REQUESTS**

Commissioner Mikulec commented that the basketball hoop at Willowbrook Park that has a tree limb hanging over it, noticed at the last meeting, has not been addressed. The Director will discuss with staff on getting that tree branch trimmed.

President Rusniak commented on the Skate Park Group and their postings on raising funds to upgrade the skate park. He questioned if staff has met with representatives of this group to discuss the City's plans. The Director said he has spoken with Sean Hampe, the community member working with these youth to raise the funds. Mr. Hampe was part of the original skate park fundraising committee and design plan. He has had regular contacts with staff and stops by regularly with fundraising deposits which staff places in a carry forward fund for the skate park improvements. Mr. Hampe is the go between with the kids on what they'd like to see at the skate park. Updates for the skate park are in the 5-year CIP. Naturally, the youth would like to see it done sooner and hopes, by raising funds, may help move up the timeline.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION BY** Mikulec, seconded by Klabecek to adjourn at 6:48 PM.

**MOTION CARRIED**

Submitted by,

Randy Wojtasiak and Sara Cummings

"Persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations for attendance at the meeting should contact the City Clerk at least one (1) business day prior to the meeting." Members of the Common Council may attend the above meeting. Pursuant to State ex rel. Badke v. Greendale Village Board, 173 Wis. 2d 553, 494 N.W. 2d 408 (1993) such attendance may be considered a meeting of the Common Council may attend the meeting without violating the open meeting law."