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09-26-2023

Board of Park Commissioners
Special Meeting
Minutes

Regular Meeting: Wednesday, August 16, 2023 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

Council Chambers
401 North Morton

CALL TO ORDER - ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Kathleen Mills at 4:30pm

Present: Kathleen Mills, Ellen Rodkey, Israel Herrera and James Whitlatch

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BOARD COMMENTS: The Board of Park Commissioners occasionally held special meetings when topics need to be addressed separately from other business in Park Board regular meetings. Today's meeting would be to review Resolution 23-02 - Policy #13220. A change of how structures and what types of structures were permitted in/on Park Properties.

A. BUSINESS

A1. Review/Approval of Resolution 23-02 - Policy #13220 "Use of Structures on Park Properties"

Paula McDevitt, Director the Parks and Recreation Department and staff recommend approval of Resolution 23-02 Titled "Use of Structures on Park Properties". The parks, properties and facilities, under the authority of the Board of Park Commissioners and the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, are intended for the recreational use of the whole Community. The department is responsible for maintaining parks and trails and program spaces throughout the whole park system. The Board of Park Commissioners have the authority to set policy to support the mission and work of the department.

Camping structures and makeshift enclosures have been set up in park locations prohibiting the use and enjoyment of these spaces by the whole community. Camping structures and makeshift enclosures have become a serious public health risk and safety issues due to vandalism, illegal activity, and the accumulation of abandoned property and garbage.

Resolution 23-02 outlines the reasons for the resolution, and the adoption of Policy #13220 entitled "Use of Structures on Park Properties". The policy addresses the concerns presented by enclosures while still permitting the appropriate use of shade structures. The policy however, is not intended to preclude the use of tents or similar enclosures that are authorized by the Department's Special Use permit process, or in association with Bloomington Parks and Recreation events programs and tournaments. Nor is the policy intended to prohibit unenclosed shade structures. Unenclosed shade structures provide relief to park users

from exposure to sun, rain and snow, and other elements but do not shield activities occurring beneath the shade structures from public view. The make shift structure that will no longer be permissible are shade structures that are located in areas so that an activity beneath the shade structure is fully or partially obstructed from view, or obstructions or other materials are placed around a shade structure as to fully or partially obstruct the activity beneath the shade structure.

Tim Street, Operations and Development Division Director, provided data compiled from August 2022 through July 2023, based off of incident reports.

- Security was in the parks every day, with exception of two holidays
- Contract for 2023 security in parks and on trails would cost \$297,840
- Marshall Security reported 1724 incidents at sites they patrol
- 2022 Bloomington Police Department reported 3688 call for services in parks and on trails

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kathleen Mills opened the floor to public comments. The Board received public comments both in favor and opposed to Resolution 23-02 – Policy #13220 “Use of Structures on Park Properties”.

Board Comments: *Jim Whitlatch commented:* I appreciate hearing all the input from everyone that has made input today. There's no question that we need social services and other issues dealt with, and available for everyone that's involved in these issues. Our issue as the Park Commissioners is to take care of the parks, and to make the parks accessible to all, and to have a safe environment for all that utilize the parks regardless of their housing status and other issues that may be involved. This is not an effort to ban people from the parks. This proposal, it's not kicking people out of the parks, it's assisting us in ensuring that we have a safe environment in the parks. I'm in support of the Ordinance and Resolution and would support it passing today.

Kathleen Mills commented: I would just add a little to what Jim has said. That unfortunately when these issues come up it becomes, and I totally understand this, it comes a little bit of a referendum on how we as a society are helping people who are unhoused. Those are all great questions to ask. We are tasked with overseeing what goes on in Parks. The Parks Department is always in liaison with social service agencies and has a partnership program with Centerstone to help. We cannot solve the problem of being unhoused in Bloomington. There definitely should be more resources, and definitely there should be more space. We are here to make sure that the parks properties are safe and accessible for everyone. As the people also oversee what the decisions the parks department makes, we can't really continue this cycle the needle removal, the trash removal, and the storing of belongings. It gets a little bit hard as a Parks Commissioner, to say we're just doing the same thing over and over again, and we don't seem to be finding our way out of it. I would also tend to be in support of this. I don't know if it's going to make a difference, but I know we're at a crisis point.

Ellen Rodkey commented: I would also just echo, this is really a complex issue. I would caution our community from having a stigma against the unhoused population. They're all members of our community, everyone is welcome in parks. They need to be accessible for everyone. I would just say again it's just it's a really complex issue. Our role is making sure that Park staff can do the job that they have to do to maintain our facilities. I think everyone in this room realizes that this is a community issue, and that we all play a part in it. I am going to vote in favor of passing this resolution. We still have a lot of work to do with our Community and Family Resources and with the Heading Home Group to figure out what's going to happen now that the Wheeler Women's Shelter is closing. We all have a part to play in helping solve those issues.

Israel Herrera commented:

We hear through public comment that there is the need for conversation in our city, and in our community. Since the last time we voted for a resolution there was involvement of everyone the community, the organizations, the administration because this conversation was needed. Since the last time there has been

this kind of a conversation there are things that need to be improved. One of the things that my colleagues have mentioned, is that our charge to see how parks has been working in recent years, the health problems, and safety. We care, and we take into account unhoused people. The results that we have seen from the reports show we have to be concerned with the parks, and the best way to take care of the parks. To behave in a way that all citizens should be in a in a parks. So as my colleagues have mentioned, I'm also in favor of this ordinance

Ellen Rodkey made a motion to approve Resolution 23-02 adopting Policy #13220 entitled "Use of Structures on Park Properties". *Jim Whitlatch* seconded the motion. Vote take: motion is unanimously carried 4-0

The Board thank everyone who came to comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 5:24pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kim Clapp,
Secretary Board of Park Commissioners