

**EAST GRAND RAPIDS
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
EGR COMMUNITY CENTER
COMMISSION CHAMBERS
6:00 PM
MONDAY, MAY 10, 2021**

The regular meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was held in the City Commission Chambers in the East Grand Rapids Community Center.

Carol Campbell called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Present in Person: Nick Abraham, John Arendshorst, Carol Campbell, Kate DeVries, Liz Mitchell
and Adam Rogalski

Present Virtually: Larry Fisher and Aaron Smith

Absent: Abby Sorota

Also Present: Shannyn Fasbender, Diane Ritzke, City Manager, Shea Charles and Lynda Taylor

Public Comment:

None

Report of Commissioners:

Nick Abraham – None

Carol Campbell – Reported that someone asked her to pass on two things.

1. The Reeds Lake Trail along the boardwalk side needs repair.
2. The trail by Silver Creek between Plymouth and Santa Cruz needs woodchips over tree roots.

Adam Rogalski – Would like more clarity on who maintains the different sections of the Reeds Lake Trail as he knows some of the trail is maintained by Grand Rapids Township and some is maintained by the City of EGR. City Manager Charles reported he will have an outline and a map at the next meeting of who maintains what portion of the trail.

John Arendshorst – Reported the City Commission has started looking at the Capital Improvement Plan for the upcoming fiscal year which ties in with some park projects.

Liz Mitchell – None

Kate DeVries – Reported on Mother's Day she and her family visited Cascade Township Park where they have a new playground with a poured surface flooring. She was excited to see discussion on the agenda for park improvements and is looking forward to the possibilities of enjoying similar amenities here in East Grand Rapids.

Larry Fisher – Reported the mural painted on the wall across from the Public Safety building will be redone this summer by the East Grand Rapids High School Art Club. This is a Foundation project.

Aaron Smith – None

Minutes for the April 12, 2021 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting were presented for approval. A motion was made to approve the minutes for the April 12, 2021 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.

MOTION: Nick Abraham

SUPPORT: Adam Rogalski

YES: Abraham, Arendshorst, Campbell, DeVries, Fisher, Mitchell, Rogalski, Smith, (8)

NO: (0)

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Parks Improvement Debt Millage Proposal:

City Manager Charles requested discussion regarding potential parks improvement debt millage to implement the 2020 Parks & Recreation Master Plan Improvements. He went over the background information and the list of projects included in the agenda packet for this meeting. He reported the City is looking at the possibility of placing this proposal on the November 2021 ballot. If the debt millage passes it would allow the City to accelerate those improvements. Some of the reasons for doing this now are the low interest rates and the Wealthy Pool debt will be paid off this year. Also included in the packet is a working draft of the 2021 Parks Improvement Millage Joint Resolution which is an agreement with the City Commission and EGR School Board. What he is looking for tonight is feedback and any additional input on this proposal.

Discussion followed:

Liz Mitchell – Is the list of projects to be done in priority order? Will taxpayers know what the millage is for? City Manager Charles responded that the list presented is not in any order. He also commented the ballot language will be a request for the City to issue up to 7 million dollars in municipal bonds for various parks improvements. There will most likely be a group of individuals within the community who will form a Vote Yes campaign and a lot of the information of what the City will do with the money will come from this committee. The City cannot take an active role in an election other than providing information on what will be done.

Carol Campbell – Why are the schools being taken out of the funding for the playgrounds? City Manager Charles responded the last time the playgrounds were replaced was about 20-25 years ago and funding for the schools have changed over the years. With the way funding for the schools is today they are not in the position to consider funding the costs of replacing the playgrounds. Carol also commented the list of projects to be included in the items to be completed was originally a “Wish List” in the Master Plan but wanted confirmation that these are all now on the list to be completed. City Manager Charles responded all the items that were on the list from the current master plan were included on the list. He also commented that the 7 million that is being asked is the upper limit, the intent is to borrow only what is needed to complete the projects, so if the projects come in at 5.3 million that is all that will be borrowed.

Aaron Smith – Inquired if some of the funding for playgrounds located at the schools is funded in part from the per pupil allowance funding that comes through as a result of Proposal A? City Manager Charles responded he could not respond specifically on how the schools handle their financing, Aaron also commented the idea of funding as many of these projects as possible seems like the appropriate thing to do as these things have been identified as important to the citizens and tying it back to property values is the right thing to do. The more money put into the infrastructure the return will be seen in property value.

Larry Fisher – Asked the City Manager to speak on the dog park at Manhattan Park and the restrooms at Manhattan Park and what that would include. City Manager Charles responded there has not been a location identified yet for the dog park and that will have to be figured out. The bathroom capacity will need to be expanded at Manhattan Park with anticipated increase in usage of the Park.

Adam Rogalski – Asked the City Manager to talk about the possibility of applying for grants for some of the projects. City Manager Charles responded the amount listed for the projects does not include any grant monies, but the City does intend to apply for grants which if received would reduce the amount of monies borrowed.

Adam also inquired if City Manager Charles was aware of the amount of the millage the City of Grand Rapids residents passed for the Parks and Recreation Department in 2020. City Manager Charles did not know what the answer to that was but would get back to him on that.

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Nick Abraham – Inquired if there is any history of funding Parks and Recreation through a millage? The City Manager responded the Wealthy Pool was funded about 20 years ago.

Nick also said that when the Master Plan was developed, he felt the items on the list were brought up as more of a Wish List, no one at the time thought there would be an immediate debt millage to finance all the items on the list. In terms of scope of the project he would like to see an emphasis on the existing infrastructure we have that needs repairs or maintenance such as the fields at Manhattan, the playgrounds at Manhattan and at all the schools as well as resurfacing sports courts. He mentioned there was community concerns about the dog park and splash pad. He would like to see a reduction of the scope to existing facilities and not creating new facilities at this point.

Aaron Smith – Asked for clarification that even though the debt millage is approved it does not mean that each item on the list will be an approved project. City Manager Charles responded that is correct, if a project such as the dog park is considered but the City does not proceed with the project at the current time they would not borrow on that project.

Carol Campbell – Commented she agreed with Nick Abraham on all his comments. Has concerns with putting the splash pad and dog park on the list as she has heard there are people who do not want these items.

Kate DeVries – Inquired about what will Community engagement look like if this millage is passed? City Manager Charles responded there would be Community input sessions and things of that nature. Speaking specifically about the playgrounds and the way the Joint Resolution is constructed, the schools would have review and final approval and the PTA groups would also be involved. As the City did with the Multi Use Trails at the end of March there will be Community forums before final designs and quotes on the project.

Kate also responded to Adam Rogalski's question on the City of Grand Rapids Millage in 2020. The millage was a 1.25mil permanent charter amendment as opposed to a 20 year.

John Arendshorst – Commented Community outreach and involvement will be very important as to deciding which projects belong on this list. He is hoping from engagement from all areas of the city.

Larry Fisher – Inquired if the list could be broken down to different options on the ballot? City Manager Charles replied it could be broken down to different options.

Adam Rogalski – Requested City Manager Charles speak on the timing of putting this on the 2021 Ballot. Could it be delayed until 2022 to see what Federal and State aid might be available then? City Manager Charles responded yes it could be delayed if that is what the City Commission decides.

Nick Abraham – Inquired if the language is approved how long would the issuance of debt be available, for example if one project could not get off the ground for 10 years would the issuance of debt still be available. The City Manager responded it should be issued in a window of 3-5 years. Nick inquired what discussions led to accelerating the projects as he was not aware of any discussions on this. The City Manager responded it was his understanding there were some informal conversations among commissioners and others in the community that had a real interest in pursuing these projects. When he came on as City Manager, he was asked to put something together and put it forward for consideration.

John Arendshorst – Commented with the tension between the current low interest rates and the current high construction costs, it could be prudent to get this going sooner rather than later to take advantage of lower interest rates on the front end and with construction not starting for another year or more, it seems to make sense to get the money approved now while it is cheap to give that flexibility and then see what construction costs are a year to 3 years from now and maybe we would not be facing the same material and labor costs as we are now.

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Kate DeVries commented another reason not to delay this project is the elementary school playgrounds no longer have the replacement parts available and some parts are crafted by hand. It is quite often that some structures are cordoned off for portions of the year due to the wait for parts. For safety reasons these playgrounds should be replaced sooner than later.

Liz Mitchell agreed with Kate DeVries, the playgrounds need to be replaced now. She is worried of the millage passing if all the projects go on the list especially those less popular or controversial like the dog park or splash pad.

Nick Abraham commented some projects are deemed 100% necessary by the vast majority of the community while other items on the list will cause controversy. Should it all be tied together?

Liz Mitchell commented she wants to make sure the voters are informed on what is on the ballot. Voters should understand all items on the list may or may not be done and only the completed projects will be funded.

John Arendshorst – Commented doing effective community engagement sessions is key and hopes the total community is heard and not just a certain neighborhood.

Adam Rogalski – inquired if a community engagement session could be done on the front end?

John Arendshorst – Commented the Parks Master Plan was community engagement on the front end. Once the funding is approved, he thought that would be when the next community engagement sessions would be held to determine how to prioritize the list and what should be done with the funding.

Kate DeVries commented it is wise not to privilege only those households that have children, but to consider so many of these projects benefit other users in our community such as those who might enjoy trails or birdwatching or the quietness of the woods. This would benefit all ages of the Community not just kids.

Nick Abraham inquired if there was an analysis done on whether monies would be available at this time from the general operating budget or from increased tax revenues tied to the improvement in the housing market. City Manager Charles responded at this time there is not funding available in the general fund for these projects. As far as the increase in taxable value this does not necessary equate to increased tax revenue as there could be some rollbacks in the overall millage rate.

The City Manager thanked the Commissioners for their feedback on this issue. He will bring this back to the City Commission and report back to the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Interim Director Shannyn Fasbender reviewed pictures and maps of the Reeds Lake Trail Wayfinding Project.

Report of Interim Director

Interim Director Shannyn Fasbender reported on the following:

- **Memorial Benches:** Reported all memorial benches have now been sold.
- **High School Graduation** will be on May 20, 2021.
- **Hanging Baskets:** The hanging baskets will be up on May 18, 2021.
- **Reeds Lake Run:** The Reeds Lake Run is scheduled to take place on June 26, 2021.

Larry Fisher reported the Reeds Lake Trailblazer will be held on July 4, 2021.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:54pm.