

**EAST GRAND RAPIDS
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING
EGR COMMUNITY CENTER
COMMISSION CHAMBERS
6:00 PM
Monday, September 25, 2023**

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

Kate Skaggs called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Present in Person: Nick Abraham, Michelle Brown, Larry Fisher, Lauren Jacoby, Patrick Parkes, Bill Saxton and Kate Skaggs

Absent: John Arendshorst and Abby Sorota

Also Present: Parks and Recreation Director, Derek Melville and Sara Coffey

Guests: None

Public Comment:

None

Report of Commissioners:

Patrick Parkes – Nothing.

Larry Fisher – Thrilled to see progress with the playgrounds and trails.

Lauren Jacoby – “Dog Park looks fantastic!” Has been there a few times and it seems great. Has heard positive feedback about the park. Breton Downs playground has been a huge hit.

Michelle Brown – Nothing.

John Arendshorst - Nothing.

Bill Saxton – Nothing.

Kate Skaggs- There are quite a few boards loose on the back side of the Reeds Lake Trail. Wondered what communication has been had with Grand Rapids Township.

Melville: The Road Commission in cooperation with Grand Rapids Township will start removing the boardwalk from the Reeds Lake Trail this week. EGR City Public Works team will assist with hauling away of materials that are getting pulled out. The plan is to widen the paved shoulder. Removal of the boardwalk should make it easier for snow plowing.

Review of minutes:

Minutes of the August 28, 2023, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting were presented for approval.

MOTION to approve: Fisher

SUPPORT: Parkes

YES: Abraham, Brown, Fisher, Jacoby, Parkes, Skaggs and Saxton (7)

NO: (0)

MINUTES APPROVED

Special Event Calendar – FYI

Special Event Permits to Consider for Approval:

A: Blue Cross Blue Shield Resolution Run – Director Melville explained that this run is on New Year’s Eve and the event has been coming to EGR for several years. There are no substantial changes from years past.

Jacoby: Wondered if this request is for 2023 or 2024.

Melville: 2023

B. Reeds Lake Run - Director Melville presented this request. No proposed changes. Same out and back course as last year.

Skaggs: Wondered if the city is contracted with AMR for ambulance services, since she noted the run is using Life EMS.

Melville: No.

C. Rhoades McKee Reeds Lake Triathlon – Director Melville stated that 2024 will be the 40th year for this event. The Run and Tri can’t use the same courses because of the mileage and needing to stay within the city. The current course is the simplest for the bike, trying to remember how many laps have been completed can be difficult during a triathlon. The current course has bikers doing the same loop twice. In previous courses bikers had to do the loop four times.

In 2023 there were about 750 participants, which is our highest attendance since 2019. Prior to 2019 enrollment was around 1,000 people. Hopefully with the 40th anniversary we will see more people. There is interest in having a 40th celebration that won’t affect the racecourse.

Brown: Courses have gone into Grand Rapids Township in the past, what is their involvement with the triathlon?

Melville: Has been told that they take a hands-off approach. EGR is hosting the race and provides all the manpower, barricades and the volunteers to accommodate these closures.

MOTION to approve (all 3 events): Brown

SUPPORT: Fisher

YES: Abraham, Brown, Fisher, Jacoby, Parkes, Skaggs and Saxton (7)

NO: (0)

Blue Cross Blue Shield Resolution Run 2023 - APPROVED

Reeds Lake Run 2024 - APPROVED

Rhoades McKee Reeds Lake Triathlon 2024 - APPROVED

Parks and Recreation Policy Review:

The following policies have been updated and will be presented to the City Commission at a future meeting for approval. Input and suggestions are welcome.

Criminal Background Check and Driver Record Check: are done on any employee 14 years and older. Preferably the background check comes back clear, but if there is anything there are specific guidelines to determine if they can still work for us.

Saxton: Suggested having the pre-edited policy available in the future when reviewing the policies so the policies can be compared, and changes easily identified.

Melville: Will be happy to provide this with future reviews when the original document is available. In some cases, the policy was never formally approved, so in these cases there wouldn't be anything to compare it to.

Brown: Suggested consistent header and page numbers, including how many pages are in the document.

Parkes: If an applicant receives a green light that means no offenses have shown up that would indicate this person can't work with children. Are there additional screenings for people?

Melville: There are a couple of different checks that the city uses, one is I-chat. The green light indicates that nothing came back on the check but does not indicate if the individual is safe to work with children. Parks and Rec sport employees and volunteers have additional training and reference verifications.

Skaggs: Recently Michigan had a new expungement law take effect, where an unlimited number of misdemeanors and possibly two felonies (if eligible) are automatically expunged from people's background. They would no longer show up in I-chat. The city might want to have a conversation about what is specifically required of people to disclose their criminal history.

Fisher: Both he and his wife have been involved with the HOMES Act where someone under 18 years old has committed a felony and has the opportunity after a period of time to have their record expunged and he is 100% in favor of this, "people make mistakes".

Saxton: What happens when a person is told their crime has been expunged but the law says you don't have to answer.

Skaggs: Suggested the attorney for the city be consulted about this.

Melville: Unless the City or Waves requests changes, that is correct.

Skaggs: How does the contract affect the cost?

Melville: Mr. Hoffman is steady guidance for the city.

Cancellation Policy: This policy defines the notice needed to receive a full or partial refund when canceling out of a program. Participants receive a 100% refund if Parks and Recreation cancels a program. Cancellation of a program within two days of registering also receives a full refund. Canceling out of a program with a partial refund must happen 48 hours prior to the start of the program, less than 48 hours there is no refund. Late cancellations make it difficult, at times, to fill a program. If a participant is unable to participate due to medical reasons, there is a 100% refund.

Saxton: Wondered if the company providing the service (in the case of art) loses money or ends up in a bad spot when someone comes out of the program for a medical reason and receives a full refund. “Is our refund policy too generous?”

Melville: The Parks and Recreation Leisure Supervisors have a minimum number of participants for each program/class. These types of things don’t happen very much, and the city gets a portion of the proceeds of the class, so if needed we would cut that amount to ensure the contracting company is fully paid.

Skaggs: Suggested neutralizing the language of the household transfer policy to encompass who’s eligible. Does it include parent, stepparent and/or legal guardian?

Brown: Again, suggested consistent header and page numbers, including how many pages are in the document.

Program Fee Policy: The Parks and Recreation department wants everyone to participate in our programs. We encourage early registration by offering lower costs for certain programs, versus a penalty for late registration. This gives an incentive to people to sign up by the deadline and being put on a waitlist after that. The supervisors look at the wait lists and talk with instructors about the possibility of adding additional classes or camps.

Residents get lower pricing for programs compared to non-residents. There is a sliding scale for increasing the cost of the program from resident to non-resident. Part of this increase is the amount of effort required by city staff for these events or programs.

When determining the cost of classes and programs the intent is to cover the cost of running it. On top of that we have administrative costs, software costs and credit card fees. Approximately 98% of our registration is done by credit card, which charges us both for credit and refunds. We start with a 35% mark-up on our break-even amount, but this is really dependent on the program. Each program is looked at individually and programs/sports with a high equipment fee (football), we try to keep a lower mark-up. Staff also compare prices to other communities’ costs.

Fisher: Why do we go from \$25 to \$40 to \$75, why isn’t it \$50? Non-resident cost increase seems strange.

Melville: Not completely sure why these numbers were chosen.

Jacoby: Can Middle School kids that don’t attend EGR be part of our sports?

Melville: Not Interscholastic sports. Football and baseball are rec sports.

Jacoby: Why do some sports charge a fee to watch when others don't?

Melville: Will connect with Shannyn Fasbender to see why this is and I will get back to you.

Brown: it seems a little inconsistent with policies needing approval from the City Commission.

Melville: If you are referring to the statement "the City of East Grand Rapids reserves the right to change the program fee policy without notice", does not mean that we don't have to go through a process to change them but that there might not be a public notice that the program fee policy is going to change. All policy changes do go through the City Commission for discussion.

Brown: Should this be on every policy?

Melville: Yes.

Parks and Recreation Weather Policy: This policy did change. The Heat Index is now referenced. We are watching the weather all the time. When we see it's getting hot and/or humid, we will consult the chart and make concessions, as required. Some changes might be to move practice inside, more breaks and/or more water.

The Air Quality Index was also added to the policy, is recommended by the DEQ (now EAGLE). As with the heat index the program supervisors are watching and making changes as needed.

Fisher: People at the first football game saw both heat index and inclement weather policies all in one day.

Brown: Why is the EGRPS footer on this policy?

Melville: We have a Joint Venture; this logo will be on any policy that is part of this.

Special Event Policy: This policy states there can be 2 special events per month and outlines the 8 special event permits per year, which is just a guideline for hosting events here in East. No changes have been made to this policy.

One area of note is: No alcohol at special events. This is still the case with most circumstances, with the approval of the City Commission recently for a social district. Drinks will be able to be purchased from specific vendors and consumed within the social district. This includes John Collins Park.

Saxton: Special events can't serve alcohol?

Melville: Only special social district cups will be allowed in the social district.

Skaggs: With 8 events a year that require road closures, there is a big difference between a small Artisan Market and a big triathlon as far as road closures go. Wondered if the small Artisan Markets should require a special permit or not.

Melville: City Manager Charles has referred to this as well, he plans to have more conversation with the City Commission.

Brown: Would like the definition of a road closure, over a specific number of blocks, added to the document.

Skaggs: Are all road closures races?

Fisher: Artisan Market and Taste of East.

Melville: The Tree Lighting, parades and the 4th of July are grandfathered in and don't count toward the closings.

Parke: Where can people see what slots are used or are available?

Melville: The special events calendar is not forward-facing. People reach out to Parks and Recreation, and I will have a conversation with and guide them toward what opportunities are available to them.

Parks Improvement Project Updates:

Dog Park: The dog park was open September 9, 2023, and the ribbon cutting is scheduled for Thursday at 4:00pm. The dog park has been very busy. Since opening there are a couple of areas being monitored such as a wet spot and sticky/hard to use gates. Signs will be added soon. Gate latches might be switched out.

Man-5: Seeding was planned for next week and the well went out. Seeding was done and there is already grass growing after only 6 days! The field will be re-evaluated before the snow flies to see if it will be able to be used in the spring. The scoreboard and bleachers will be installed in the spring.

Breton Downs: Very close to being done. Waiting on some playground pieces. The access road will be removed and the restoration of the baseball field will be completed.

Wealthy: Waiting for pavilion, the same company is doing the playground equipment. The plan is for the playgrounds to be finished; the pavilion can be done later.

Lakeside: The whole school is using the lower elementary playground, now are working on the upper site. They will pave the new basketball and tennis courts. Painting of these will most likely be done in the spring. Also waiting on this pavilion.

Fred Bunn Trail: Progress is going really well. Invasive species such as Buckthorn have been removed. Two areas are flagged off for installation of culverts. Estimated completion is the end of October. Signs will be installed. The contractor wants to complete one loop and open it so people can use it and they can see how it holds up, while they are still on site working on another area.

Report of Director:

Director Melville reported: Parks and Recreation welcomed a new administrative clerk today, her name is CJ Dolehanty, staff are happy to have her join the team. She has administrative experience from Spectrum Health and Area Agency on Aging. This position is full time, previously two part time positions.

Viridis Design is working on a couple of conceptual designs for the October 16 City Commission meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 pm

Next Meeting October 23, 2023