

## PROCEEDINGS OF THE STEARNS COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

6:00 PM

The regular meeting of the Stearns County Park Commission was held at the Stearns County Park Office, 1802 County Road 137, Waite Park, MN 56387.

**Members Present:** Sean Gaetz, Kaye Wenker, Orville Willenbring, Anne Ackerman, Lucas Sjostrom, Joe Perske, and Richard Blenkush.

**Members Excused:** (None)

**Others Present:** Ben Anderson (Park Director), Sarah Weed (Operations Coordinator), and Julie Nistler (Office Specialist II).

**Approval of the Minutes:** *Ms. Ackerman made a motion to approve the minutes as written. Mr. Blenkush second. Motion passed.*

**Approval of the Agenda:** *Mr. Gaetz made a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Ackerman second. Motion passed.*

**Great River Park Complex – Action Item:** Mr. Anderson reported that the Great River Park Complex received designation for being regionally significant. This allows the complex to be eligible for legacy funds. *Ms. Ackerman made a motion of recommendation for the Park Director to submit a legacy grant application for the purchase of the property located north of Mississippi River County Park with a minimum 25% match from the County Board in order to qualify for the maximum points toward the grant. Mr. Blenkush second. Motion passed.*

**Graniteman Events Discussion:** Mr. Anderson shared a request from the Graniteman organizers. They have asked that Warner Lake County Park be closed for a few hours during the event. Since the event hasn't had any issues in the past, the event is on a Sunday morning with low traffic, and parks and trails are only closed for events that affect safety such as archery or hunting, it was agreed to keep the park open during the Graniteman Event.

**COVID – 19 and Park Operations:** Mr. Anderson gave an update of park operations. There haven't been any changes in the Executive Orders, so cleaning and maintenance routines have remained the same. All the parks and trails are very busy. Quarry Park has limited parking when it reaches 50% capacity. In order to avoid congestion at the park entrance, the gatekeeper takes a cellphone number and then sends a text when a parking space is available. Wait times on the hot days were over 3 hours.

**Quarry Park Visitor Use Data:** Mr. Anderson shared the reports from the gatekeeper's county visitor survey. In May, Stearns was at 46%. In June, Stearns was 23% with Hennepin a close second at 20%. July to date, Stearns is at 28% and Hennepin is at 19%. Comparisons to other years will tell if it's a new trend with non-Stearns park users. Review of the parking fees will take place next spring.

**Quarry Park Adjacent Property Development Discussion:** Mr. Anderson was contacted by the realtor for the Ardolf property that is adjacent to Quarry Park. They have someone interested in developing 70 acres and would like to get an access to the park from the property. The request will be deferred to the MN DNR since that property is adjacent to the SNA.

**Federal Recreation Trail Grant:** Ms. Weed reported that we were awarded the Federal Recreation Trail Grant for \$25,000 to be used for crack filling and seal coating on the Lake Wobegon Trail from Freeport to Melrose.

**Lake Wobegon Trail:**

**Resurfacing:** The project between Melrose and Sauk Centre was completed.

**Seal Coating/Crack Filling:** The project between Avon and Waite Park was completed.

**Chip Seal Projects:** Chip sealing was done on the entrance road into Warner Lake County Park and the Nature Center parking lot. The beach parking lot and boat landing will be done in the future. Striping will be done by the Highway Department. Chip sealing was also done at the south entrance to Quarry Park.

**Programs/Events:**

**Volunteers:** Ms. Weed reported more community service people were doing buckthorn removal at Quarry Park. She thanked Sean for his group that cleaned the trails at Warner Lake; and she thanked Lucas for his group that helped clear Chinese Elm at Warner Lake.

**Hopke Shelter Dedication:** A nice dedication ceremony was held on Friday, June 26 with approximately 25 people attending.

**Issues by Commissioners:**

Mr. Sjostrom encouraged staff to keep up the good work. He suggested offering to waive the shelter rental fees in exchange for doing volunteer work in the parks.

Mr. Blenkush was very impressed the with staff's work on building the Hopke shelter.

Mr. Gaetz sent kudos to the caretakers at Warner Lake; they're doing a great job out there.

Mr. Perske stated there had been a proposal to build a solar farm in part of the city park in Rockville; the proposal was denied. He also asked for feedback and suggestions for how the County could do better dealing with COVID-19.

***Mr. Blenkush made a motion to adjourn; Ms. Ackerman second. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 pm.***