

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS
OF THE PARK, TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF
NORTH BRANCH IN THE COUNTY OF CHISAGO
AND IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA**

REGULAR SESSION

February 3, 2014

CALL TO ORDER:

The North Branch Park, Trails and Open Space Commission met in regular session and was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Charles Heinzl.

OATH OF OFFICE:

Sondrol administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Pantelis

ROLL CALL:

Commissioners present were Mic Dahlberg, Charles Heinzl, John Pantelis, and Bob Bernier. Commissioners absent None. Also present was GIS Specialist Nathan Sondrol.

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR:

Motion by Dahlberg, seconded by Pantelis to nominate Charles Heinzl for Chair. All voted AYE. Motion carried

Motion by Heinzl, seconded by Bernier to nominate John Pantelis for Vice Chair. All voted AYE. Motion carried

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion by Pantelis, seconded by Dahlberg to approve the November 4, 2013 Regular Session Minutes with the change. All voted AYE. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Linda Prince, 7524 393rd Street, noted that she was a former North Branch Park Commissioner and she did not see any reason to move Central Park. She felt that it is a beautiful park that has been located there for over 100 years and everyone knows where it is. She also felt that it would be very costly to move the park.

Heinzl provided a brief history of the park that there was an agreement reached with the railroad in the early 1900's that the City could use land as a park as long as it remained a park, and in 1996 the City purchased the land from the railroad.

Doylene Voligny, 8171 St Croix Trail, a 40 year resident, noted that there is nothing that recommends North Branch until you get to Central Park. She noted that she has travelled around the state and that a lot of other communities are not as fortunate to have an amenity like Central Park. She noted the amount of time

her kids and grandkids as well as other community members have spent in the park over the years and felt it made no sense to get rid of the park.

Denise Richter, 38878 8th Ave, noted she lives directly across the street from Central Park. She inquired who would reimburse her for the loss in value in her home if this moves forward and the adjoining property changes from green space to commercial development or grain bins. She felt that the City should not move forward without knowing what development would be taking place at the Central Park site.

Joe Sausen, 6728 Maple Street, noted he moved to North Branch 37 years ago and noted his neighbor's father and uncle used to volunteer to mow Central Park with horses. He noted that an agreement had been reached with the railroad back in 1907 that let the City use the site as a park as long as it remained a park. He also noted that he was a former North Branch Park Commissioner about 30 years ago and at that time the commission set guidelines what the park system should be. He noted that Central Park was the central jewel or the focus of the park system. He added that Central Park is the one thing that travelers comment on when travelling thru North Branch on Hwy 95. He noted the City sold off existing city owned property to concentrate on the development of Central Park. He stated he supports Peterson Mill 100% for all of that they do for the community, but does not support the relocation of Central Park.

Bob Egan, 38958 2nd Avenue, noted that he lives approximately 2 blocks from the proposed land swap site and that his neighbors and himself do not want the park in their neighborhood. He noted concerns of additional crime in their neighborhood, traffic issues with parade backups and staging during Midsummer and parking and traffic impacts of a funeral taking place at the adjacent funeral home.

Randy Koivisto, North Branch American Legion Post 85 Commander, noted that their Midsummer Days utilize Central Park as well as the several Chamber events. He felt that the relocation was not a reasonable one. He noted he has great respect for the Peterson family but this would be the wrong spot for the park. He felt additional commercial development at the Central Park site would bring additional traffic and safety concerns.

Kathy Lindo, Executive Director of the North Branch Chamber of Commerce, noted that she fully supports economic development and bringing in businesses, but without knowing the plan for the development of Central Park could provide support for or against it, but did have some concerns with moving the park site. Her concerns included the lack of parking at the proposed site, how this would affect the efforts and energy of promoting and developing the downtown and Central Business District, and how this would affect the development and the promotion of old Hwy 61 and its close proximity to the park.

Rosie Klopp, 6580 Maple Street, she noted that she served on the North Branch Park Commission from 1988-1997 and that when the gazebo was placed in Central Park the thought was that this would serve as the gateway and draw attention to Central Park while providing a community gathering spot. The park provided a natural tie in to the Sunrise Prairie Trail with a controlled crossing at Co Rd 30 and Hwy 95. She noted that the lives within a block of the proposed new site of the park and that there is not a safe crossing location to get to the site. She emphasized the commissions vision was to have the park be a centrally located gathering spot for the community.

Orville Otterness, 38544 Grand Avenue, a 37 year resident, noted that when travelling through other communities he likes to look for monuments or other similar features. He felt that moving Central Park to the proposed location would be a bad mistake.

Phyllis Alvin, noted that Jerry Peterson is a great man, but felt that this beautiful park should not be moved. She noted that John Alvin appealed numerous times to the railroad to use it as a park and it was finally agreed upon in 1907 that the City could use it as a park. She noted in 1996 it was purchased by the City for \$56,000 dollars, she had been told. She noted 5 generations of Alvin's have provided service to this community. She also noted that the park is centrally located, is 107 years old, and is used by the entire community and should not be moved.

Charlie Klopp, 6580 Maple Street, noted four concerns: 1)The park equipment cannot be moved, but instead would need to be replaced in order to meet ADA requirements; 2)Parking, there is no public parking at the proposed site, and there are additional traffic and parking concerns with the funeral home adjacent to the proposed site; 3) Traditions – i.e. Concerts in the Park, everyone has their favorite spot in the park; 4) He also noted there is not a time and temp gauge across the street so you know when to start the concerts.

Dan Dewan, 38708 Grand Avenue, felt if the park board determines that it is a good idea to move Central Park, he has no problem with it as long as it is an item for an item swap. He felt the new park should be established at the new location prior to removing the old. He inquired if the city would be compensated for the trees at the site as they have value and should be included.

Kirsten Kennedy, 7149 378th Street, a 7 year resident, asked the commission to consider all the repercussions that moving Central Park would have. She noted that she strongly supports economic development with a variable tax base and expanding the city's water and light services. She also expressed strong support for Peterson Mill and all that they do and provide for the community. She felt the commissioners and council need to look at what best serves all 10,000 citizens, not just one business owner. She asked the commission to listen to residents and

felt that looking what's happened historically and looking at the future of the community the right move is leave Central Park where it is.

Commissioner Dahlberg noted he received a phone call from resident Rod Lofquist, 6578 Elm Street, and noted his concerns included parking, hours of operation, drugs/crime in the current park and will this carry over to a residential area, should the carnival be relocated if the park were to move to the new site.

ADDITIONS TO AGENDA:

Dahlberg noted he would like to discuss the Community Center Fund Balance.

STAFF REPORTS:

7.1 Park Dedication Fund

Sondrol reported the current fund balances. He noted that the City Council approved a budget transfer of \$274,000 from the Community Center Fund to at their December 2013 meeting.

Dahlberg inquired about the November 2013 Community Center Fund balance being above \$400,000 and in the current February report it was only \$160,000. He noted that he has asked in the past if this is real money and had received varying answers. He asked if the funds are not real, what is the need for the transfer of funds.

Sondrol noted he could discuss this with the Finance Director and bring back the info.

Dahlberg noted the key point that he wanted to make is that even though the commission is only advisory, this goes back to the communicative process with the Council as the PTOS Commission was not aware of this. He noted that he contacted several residents in the past and a lot of people had identified a community center as priority to the residents.

7.2 Project Updates

Sondrol provided the latest project updates for the Commission.

Heinzel noted that Ski-Doo and Yamaha will have new snowmobiles available to test on a 5 mile track at the vintage snowmobile expo at JJ's Bowl & Lounge during WinterFest.

Kathy Lindo from the Chamber noted there would be opportunity for interaction with the ice sculpting this year at Central Park.

NEW BUSINESS:

8.1 Peterson Proposal – Central Park Land Swap

Heinzel suggested making a motion to the Council to invite the public to a meeting to discuss the possibility of moving Central Park.

Dahlberg was under the understanding that a public hearing would be required if a Comprehensive Plan amendment was needed.

Sondrol noted that a comp plan amendment would require a public hearing.

Pantelis felt that it is paramount that input is received from the public.

Council Liaison Jensen noted that as the residents noted the proposal presented by Peterson Mill is very raw and has a lot of questions to be answered yet.

Dahlberg inquired if there was anyone at the meeting representing Peterson Mill.

Dennis Aulich noted he was representing Peterson Mill. He acknowledged that he did not know what details may all be involved for the possibility of a land swap. He noted that they are respecting the process and they just want to be part of the process and where it ends up they are ok. He noted that the Mill just wants to make sure everyone has all of the information and details so good decisions can be made.

Heinzel inquired about the proposed use of the Central Park site.

Aulich stated as any business, they are just looking ahead to position to secure themselves in the future. He added that it makes a lot sense to add this piece of property based on the current surrounding land owned by them. He noted this is just a discussion and if citizens are not interested, then Peterson Mill can move on. He acknowledged that the Mill has had questions if this can or cannot work or not, as well, but they just wanted to start the discussion and to move ahead from there.

Jensen noted at this point the Council does not even know if the land swap is even legally possible and that they forwarded this to the Park Commission to get their input.

Motion by Dahlberg, seconded by Pantelis, to recommend to the City Council to invite the citizens to an open house meeting to discuss the possibility of moving Central Park. All vote AYE. Motion carried.

Heinzel noted that he is opposed to moving Central Park and there is nothing that can be said or done to change his mind.

Dahlberg indicated he was also opposed to moving Central Park and he felt the concerns presented by the Chamber including parking, the proximity to the trail, and the development and promotion of old Hwy 61. He noted there are also intrinsic values as well, with the park being there for 107 years.

Pantelis felt that by looking at the existing off-site parking and traffic flows, he could not find a way to make it worth moving Central Park to the proposed site.

Bernier inquired if this would be able to be discussed again if there were changes to the proposal. He felt that the proposed site would make a beautiful park, but functionally he did not feel it would work at this point.

Motion by Dahlberg, seconded by Bernier, to recommend to the City Council to leave Central Park at its current location. All vote AYE. Motion carried.

Dahlberg noted that he was excited when he heard the Peterson family purchased the old school site, as he was envisioning the possibility of an outdoor skating rink at that site.

Heinzel thanked the citizens for attending the meeting and providing their input.

8.1 Eagle Scout Project

Sondrol informed the commission that staff had been contacted by local scout Jacob O'Mera who was looking for ideas for his Eagle Scout community project.

Pantelis mentioned benches in Riverwalk Park or benches at the Disc Golf Course in Harder Park.

Dahlberg mentioned bat houses as a possibility.

OLD BUSINESS:

8.1 Comprehensive Parks, Trails and Open Space Plan Review

Sondrol provided the commission with the list of park land that the commission had identified as sites for further review for the possibility of selling to improve existing park facilities.

Pantelis felt that the Chilson property should possibly be taken off the list.

Sondrol noted the Chilson property was purchased in conjunction with Central Park. He noted that there may be a deed restriction on that parcel for the trail.

Jensen noted the Council would like a recommendation from the commission on how the commission would like to proceed with the identified parcels.

Bernier felt that the Chilson parcel is the most valuable and would like to keep it on the list.

Linda Prince noted that the Branch Acres park was planted as a native prairie that requires little to no maintenance. She also noted that there is a gas main on the property that would limit the development of it.

Motion by Bernier, Bernier, seconded by Dahlberg, to forward the findings to the City Council to find out what the City can do with the properties to determine what the City should do with them.

Bernier noted the intent of motion is to see what is possible to do with the properties and to then bring it back to Park Commission to determine what should be done including things such as obtaining input from citizens. All voted AYE. Motion carried.

Motion by Bernier, seconded by Dahlberg, to adjourn. All voted AYE. Motion carried.

ADJOURNED at 8:23p.m. by Charles Heinzl.

APPROVED _____ ATTEST _____

Respectfully submitted,
Nathan Sondrol, GIS Specialist
NMS