

Parks Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, August 11, 2015
6:00 p.m., Council Chambers



City of South Haven

1. Call to Order by Reinert at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Present: Cobbs, Fitzgibbon, McAlear, Moore, Toneman, White, Reinert
Absent: None

3. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Fitzgibbon, second by White to approve the August 11, 2015 regular meeting agenda switching the position of Items 10 and 8 under new business.

All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes for the Record – June 9, 2015

Motion by Fitzgibbon, second by Toneman to accept the June 9, 2015 regular meeting minutes for the record.

All in favor. Motion carried.

5. Public Comments and Inquiries Concerning Items not on the Agenda

None at this time.

REPORTS

6. Accessible Kayak Launch at Black River Park

Halberstadt noted that the Kayak Launch is located in the far southwest corner of Black River Park. Paul VandenBosch has been working on this project with the Harbor Commission and Abonmarche. Halberstadt expects to see this ready for the next boating season. Referred the board to the link to the You Tube video in the packet if interested in how it works and what it will look like.

McAlear has viewed the video and was positively impressed with both how it will look and how it will work.

7. Fishing Platform at Black River Park

Halberstadt noted this will go on the farthest east side of the park, on the east side of the channel cut, where the city garage used to be. This project is in the preliminary phases of planning; waiting for a formal grant award.

Moore questioned the number of parking spaces indicated in the plan to which Halberstadt responded that staff is waiting for a more accurate rendering. Halberstadt believes there will be about ten spaces.

Moore asked if the Harbor Commission is going to finalize this and the Parks Commission is just looking to which Halberstadt explained that once the plans get a little further along staff hopes to bring it to the commission for input.

NEW BUSINESS

8. Commission will be requested to review and approve four Memorial Bench Donations.

Halberstadt noted these will be the typical benches you have seen in other areas of the city; three are requested to go on the Monroe Bluff and one in Riverfront Park.

Sue Ring, 164 Hazel Street. Explained that her mother's memorial mass and celebration of life will be held September 13 and family will be coming from all over. Ring wonders if there is any possibility the bench could be installed before September 13.

Reinert asked how long these typically take. Halberstadt said if Parks Commission approves the donation tonight it could go to City Council Monday. Fitzgibbon asked who does the brass plate; Halberstadt says he believes Ryan Bosscher orders them from Johnny's Lakeshore Jewelry. Fitzgibbon noted city staff does have those constraints and Ring agreed that she understands that.

Moore had questions about how many benches can be donated and where.

Fitzgibbon explained that the city has a gift policy, and it is the responsibility of the donor to maintain whatever they donate.

Halberstadt noted the sketches included in your current agenda packet on pages fifty-two (52) and fifty-three (53) indicating nine (9) available spaces on Monroe Boulevard and about nine (9) available spaces along Riverfront Park. "After those are filled up our recommendation would probably be that we don't continue putting benches on the bluff."

In response to questions about whether donors are maintaining their donations, Halberstadt pointed out that at the time the donation is done, we collect the funds to install, purchase and maintain the bench for about ten years. Halberstadt feels the more important concern would be what happens at the end of the life cycle of the bench. "Maintenance is one thing, but the bench could become too rotten to maintain. Do we go back to the original donor or open the space for a new donor?"

Moore asked what the expected life cycle of the benches is and Halberstadt believes it might be ten or fifteen years. Halberstadt believes some benches have already been removed and replaced.

Reinert asked if there are any other needs in the city that donors could consider for making memorial donations. Halberstadt noted that there is room for two benches at the kayak launch and more the fishing platform.

Fitzgibbon believes we should put that on the agenda and revisit it, regarding making some policy about this issue. Moore pointed out that the bluff could fill up by next summer.

Discussion ensued about the commission getting enough information ahead of time and having to make a decision based on that information. Fitzgibbon noted that the commission depends on Halberstadt, as staff liaison, to bring us that information. McAlear thought that the commission was asking for a master plan. He would like to see a plan as to how many and where so we could approve it and pass it on to City Council. Halberstadt said we can try to do a master plan for the whole city, but that would be challenging.

Reinert had questions about what was discussed at the last meeting about a master plan. Halberstadt explained that staff was trying to determine how to keep the benches spread out a little bit. Fitzgibbon expressed surprise that the city has so many existing benches. Halberstadt explained that a number of them got moved out of downtown, off of Phoenix Street, when we got new benches. Reinert asked if Halberstadt is looking for approval of all four of these benches today.

Halberstadt explained that people have come forward and asked to donate memorial benches and staff hates to turn them away because the city is trying to come up with a revised policy decision.

Toneman said he doesn't think we have a question about these four benches. Discussion ensued regarding not feeling that there should be two benches in memorial for the same person, by two different donors, and the decision was made at the last meeting not to accept a second bench for the same person. Perhaps, Halberstadt suggested, multiple groups who might work together to donate a bench. Toneman said that was the point, that we need some specifics in a couple of years to make a decision. Reinert pointed out again that there may be needs in other places while the bluff and riverfront seem to be the most popular sites right now. Halberstadt said he is not ignoring their concerns but needs some time to delve more deeply into this.

Fitzgibbon noted that since the Parks Commission drafted the current gift policy the town has grown, and donations have grown, and it is part of the Parks Commission's responsibility to update that policy. Fitzgibbon asked if discussion of the gift policy can be on the agenda for next month.

Reinert asked whether the commission can approve the four benches.

Motion by McAlear and second by Fitzgibbon to approve the four memorial benches requested on tonight's agenda.

Yeas: Cobbs, Fitzgibbon, McAlear, Toneman, White, Reinert
Nays: Moore.
Motion carried.

Moore suggests that staff not accept new requests until a policy is approved. Halberstadt explained that knowing the conversation from the last meeting, he really did not want to bring this before the commission tonight, but he didn't want to turn away the four (4) people who came forward with donation requests.

Reinert suggested that commissioners need to do a little homework, give Halberstadt some comments so we are ready to go forward at the next meeting. Toneman asked if the agenda item could include other locations that benches could be put. McAlear said perhaps from you we could get a recommendation of where good places would be.

Moore stated, "The issue is more than how many but also how long. The city is going to be maxed out in no time. Reinert commented that if there is a cycle, because we want our benches to look good and be functional, if a bench lifetime is fifteen years, perhaps staff can turn that location over to another donor. "There are going to be needs in the future. If we could identify the needs we could turn donors on to those locations." Reinert said perhaps there could be benches installed at a certain location and plaques added later. Halberstadt suggested something could be added in the gift policy to explain that at the end of the life of the bench, the original donor could be contacted to see if they want to replace it. If not, someone else could.

Fitzgibbon asked if there are benches that are already placed that could have sponsors.

9. Commission will be requested to review the proposed Water Street Streetscape Improvements Plan and Hillside Maintenance Plan.

Halberstadt explained that staff looked into the south side of the Water Street streetscape; some areas never had any improvements made; areas are overgrown; there are steep slopes; there is erosion because people are walking down the bank between Indiana and the marina, looking for the beach. The whole purpose of this study was to try to identify potential improvements and identify potential maintenance the city would need to do on a regular basis to keep the bank in a good condition. Just wanted to bring it to you and have you look at it and get your input.

Reinert asked if this area is a park. Halberstadt said it is not really a park; it is part of the road right-of-way. Fitzgibbon interjected that this has been talked about by City Council. Discussion ensued regarding some steps that exist in that area that are quite eroded; that people have been coming down there for years but the steps are not in good condition. Reinert noted that while this area looks like it could be private property it is city-owned. Discussion ensued regarding who maintains the area; whether the erosion is from people walking down there or from water run-off. McAlear asked whether Halberstadt is trying to suggest putting some ground cover in that area to stabilize the bluff. Reinert noted that that could be a spot for some benches.

Halberstadt explained that staff is asking the commission to review this information and if you have any comments, we can gather them at the next meeting.

Fitzgibbon suggested that the commissioners have this information provided by Halberstadt; the city wants our input; go out there and look at it so you do have an opinion. Halberstadt noted that this plan in front of you is not set in stone. "Don't feel that you can't make comments on this, it's open for your input. Staff will be getting input from the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and the Harbor Commission, also.

Reinert said perhaps you could put this on as Old Business for the following month to which Halberstadt agreed.

Fitzgibbons said, "We used to do a lot of field trips when she was on Parks Commission before. Toneman said he drives to the sites and looks at them. Reinert agreed that she does that, too. Fitzgibbon said that is part of what we should do as Parks Commission, visit the parks and give our input.

10. Commission will be requested to review a request for donation of a swing bench at Stanley Johnston Park.

Halberstadt noted this one is not on the bluff. This is a little different request; our donor is interested in donating a bench with some big chains connected to a structure overhead that you can swing back and forth on. Halberstadt noted that this will be more work for the donor in completing the design and he wanted to run the concept by the commission before any detail design work is done by the applicant.

Fitzgibbon's first impression is a liability nightmare. "If you get four or five kids swinging on this thing it could fall over. Are those things wide enough to support the swing?"

McAlear's concern is setting a precedent. "The next party says I want a double swing bench, or I want a merry-go-round." McAlear feels it would be better to limit the bench donations to a standard type and also is concerned about the liability issue.

Moore asked whether this construction is designed with a life expectancy for public use.

Halberstadt noted that liability may be higher with a swing bench, as the opportunity for injury due to misuse is higher.

Toneman noted that moving parts add liability.

Reinert thinks consistency is important throughout the city. The donor's Intentions are good but this is another situation where the city/Parks Commission needs to identify some things that are needed, rather than leave it up for citizens to come up with new ideas.

Halberstadt suggested looking at the last Parks/Rec Plan and steer people toward things we need.

McAlear said it is a wonderful problem to have; we have many donors but we do have to be very, very careful.

Reinert asked if the donor is looking for approval or discussion tonight. Halberstadt said his intention was to bring this to the commission to see if the commission even wants staff to go ahead and discuss us with the donor. "It is not worth having him going through the effort of

preparing drawings if the idea is not wanted.” Toneman commented, “It isn’t as much that we don’t want it, but that we aren’t ready to want it. We don’t have to rush into this.”

Moore stated that we should start with the gift policy.

Reinert noted that the city needs to be cautious. Some of the parks have a lot of space; just because it overlooks the river does not mean there has to be a bench provided. People can bring their own lawn chairs; more benches mean more maintenance.

Reinert asked Halberstadt whether he is asking for a motion or just asking advice to go back and talk to this donor. Halberstadt reiterated, “I don’t want to put the donor through the effort of developing detailed plans if the concept of a swing bench is not a popular idea.”

Reinert suggested that the commission talk to this issue during discussion of the gift policy.

Fitzgibbons spoke about the other benches are standardized, already meet the safety standards and are less maintenance. Reinert agreed that the commission is trying to look at having a developed plan and consistency as opposed to just putting things here and there.

11. Commissioner Comments

Reinert: Asked for an update about the Dyckman Beach sign and landscaping. Halberstadt responded that this is just one of those items that he hasn’t had a chance to put together plans and get bids for doing it. Reinert thought it was part of the street project and Halberstadt explained that it was not included in that project.

Reinert: Has come to understand Suzie’s concerns about the beach grasses encroaching on the sidewalks.

Reinert: Expressed her only complaint about the bridge project is that the sidewalk could not be widened. Town was so packed that people were walking on the street. We are growing and have more visitors.

McAlear: Requested an update about the numbers on the flags requested by South Haven Area Emergency Services (SHAES). Halberstadt said the direction was to go ahead and try some different sizes and colors of signs. McAlear stated this needs to be approved now. “The numbers on those flag posts are really important.” Fitzgibbons asked what has transpired within management and Halberstadt said it is just one that there has not been time to get kicked off. Fitzgibbon said we are giving direction that this needs to be done. Toneman since it is August this needs to move forward; maybe not in the final form but in some form. McAlear said, “Put the numbers up or let the management manage it and make some decisions on their own.” Fitzgibbon said it is SHAES is requesting this so she is surprised that the Parks Commission is being asked. Halberstadt agreed to bring it up with management.

Toneman: Loves to look at the agenda ahead of time and wishes he could get it two weeks before the meeting. Moore noted we got the packet Thursday and his weekend was so packed. Reinert noted that city staff is in the same position, as many of us are. The follow-up, getting it back on the agenda under old business, is important so we know what is going on.

Reinert noted that before Larry (Halberstadt) did this someone else did this and it was an entire position.

Moore asked what process is there to determine how far ahead of time we can get an agenda. Fitzgibbon said you can always add to the agenda if you need to. Halberstadt said in the case of City Council agendas there is a draft agenda issued and then a final agenda is added later.

White: Agrees with Fitzgibbon about looking at the sites. Has lived here for eighteen years but is not familiar with all the sites and would like to schedule a time to go to these sites and see what is there. Fitzgibbons suggested maybe if we don't have an agenda we could do a field trip. Reinert commented, "If we can find a parking place in the summer." Reinert encouraged people to get out there and see things even if not with a group.

12. Adjourn

Motion by Toneman, second by McAlear to adjourn at 6:58 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary