

Parks Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 14, 2014
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, Moore, Toneman, White, Reinert
Absent: Comeau

3. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Fitzgibbon, second by Moore to approve the agenda as presented.

All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes – October 8, 2013

Motion by Fitzgibbon, second by Toneman to approve the October 8, 2013 regular meeting minutes as written.

All in favor. Motion carried.

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

None at this time.

6. Dog Park

Joan Hiddema, 212 Monroe Street. Summarized their request and stated that dog parks have become very popular in many cities. Their volunteer group has had a dog park on leased land since 2012. The group has done the things necessary to qualify for grants; we have the organization, 501(3) c status, a board, volunteers, etc. The piece that has been a stumbling block is the fact that we are located on privately owned leased land. The request is for support from the city to help us find a place to locate the dog park so it can be a municipal park for the purpose of applying for grants. Hiddema has learned that there are people who use a dog park because they can no longer walk their dog. According to research, there has been a thirty-four percent (34%) increase in the past five years in the building of dog parks in cities. More households now have dogs than children. A dog park

becomes a small community, a social outlet. Hiddema stated that liability insurance is the group's largest single expense.

Moore asked what exactly the group is looking for to which Hiddema stated her wish list would be three (3) acres, a perimeter fence and water. Hiddema is also confident that she could raise the money for some of the amenities. Spoke with the city manager and he said that now is the time to ask.

Gildea outlined the way the budget and priority setting process works and noted that if the commission would support having a dog park as a municipal park, location aside, now is a good time to let council know that. The commission needs to decide if there is a benefit to the city to have a dog park.

Reinert asked what permanent fixtures there are in a dog park to which Hiddema responded that the fence is the main one. Reinert asked about a lease and Hiddema reiterated that entities that award grants want the property the dog park is on to be owned and permanent.

Moore asked what the cost would be to the city. Hiddema said the current membership dues are twenty-five dollars (\$25.00). Gildea noted that county and other municipal parks that she is aware of that have dog parks do charge. Hiddema said it is usually a fee to ensure that dogs have licenses. In response to questions, Gildea noted that checking that would come back on the city.

Moore said he would be in favor of it, there would be start-up costs, but cannot see any downsides. Hiddema said we would like to be somewhere that the dogs would not disturb others, noting that their current location is ideal since there are not a lot of residential properties nearby and because Al-Van is a no-kill shelter, they use the park, too. However, Hiddema pointed out that the current property is valuable industrial property which could eventually be used to expand the Do-It business.

Toneman said location would be a great part of it, as well as parking, water, etc.

Fitzgibbon noted that when she started on the Parks Commission in 2003 a dog park was something wanted then. Liability was a factor in not moving forward. We would like to see some things at the SHARP Park, such as the dog park, soccer fields, and other things but the Casco Township Planning Commission wants to see a plan for a completed park; they want it all to happen at once.

Discussion ensued regarding the old dump site by Meijer's.

There was discussion regarding the skate park group working with the city; the skate park supporters raised the money, got the equipment, etc. which is the same as the dog park group would be doing for the dog park. While it is not thought that City Council would not want a dog park, but finding three (3) acres in the city is a problem. SHARA (South Haven Area Regional Authority) was formed to have oversight of SHARP Park.

Hiddema just wants the Parks Commission to perhaps speak to City Council, noted there are volunteers available to help with maintenance and perhaps even installing the fence. Hiddema pointed out that volunteers installed the existing fence at the Do-It site.

Fitzgibbon said finding and securing the land will be the biggest problem.

Reinert asked how long their lease is to which Hiddema responded that their lease goes through 2015.

Moore suggested speaking to someone at South Haven Township regarding a particular property. Fitzgibbon noted that the piece Moore is speaking about was purchased as a possible alternative site for the sewer plant.

Reinert said perhaps you should look into the options of leases. Hiddema agreed that leasing from a municipality is better than leasing from a private individual from the viewpoint of applying for grants.

Toneman suggested combining the dog park and the disc golf so they could share the parking, etc.

Reinert agreed that is a good idea. Hiddema agreed that leasing from the township could work well for both. Neither would be permanent.

Hiddema said people come from Bangor so dog parks pull from around the city to the dog park. Gildea noted that the property they are talking about by Maple Grove will eventually be a city dump.

Hiddema would like to see the Parks Commission support the idea. Fitzgibbon asked whether a motion was needed to which Gildea responded, "You could make a motion of support but if the board is in agreement, there does not have to be a motion."

Reinert noted that the Parks Commission agreed that they are in favor of the idea of a dog park and would like to support it once some property has been secured.

7. a. City Park "Kids Corner" Name Change Request

Michael Ross, St. Joseph Street. Stated that his mother was born here as Marilyn Park in 1930 and lived and died here. Park's parents lived here long before that. Requests this action because while he knew of the Carnegie medal since he was a child, he was not aware of its significance. When his mother passed away, his father had the medal at the funeral and Ross realized it was something special. He recently retired from the military and lives on St. Joseph Street near the Kids Corner Park. Noted that he has not seen a sign there proclaiming the name of the park.

Discussion ensued regarding the name of the park. Gildea noted that the park was named for the person who purchased the original land grant in what became South Haven. Ross noted that Monroe Boulevard and Monroe Street border the park. It was clarified that the park's name is Monroe Park and the wooden structure was built in the 1970s and called Kids' Corner. Gildea noted her intention of installing a sign that says "Kid's Corner at Monroe Park."

Ross has been in contact with the Goodwillie's who lived here for many years and told him about this event from their perspective. Ross noted that it is important to him when he thinks of his daughter and granddaughter who live in Grand Rapids. He has noted that not many

places honor women. Stanley Johnson Park is a nice park, Ross indicated he had walked in it, he does not know who it is named for but it must be someone that did something noteworthy. Ross pointed out that when people drive by, whether they know what he did or not, they know that he did something significant. If people went by the park and it was named for his mother, they would see her name and it would indicate that the City of South Haven honors women as well as men.

Moore asked about the questions in the staff report to which Gildea noted that she put the questions there to help with discussion.

Reinert thanked Ross for coming in with his request and noted that these questions have to be answered because they are all valid. Reinert asked, "If we start changing the name of existing parks, what will stop that from becoming a trend?"

Ross asked if anyone else has ever asked to change the name of the park. Gildea said not that she knows of but her experience has been that once people see something like that happen, people will come out of the woodwork with similar requests. Reinert and Moore pointed out that there are options already in place in the city for memorials for loved ones.

Reinert asked whether Ross has any other options in mind. Dissette called him and told him about the bench program. Ross explained that he was not sure whether the bench was an actual bench or what.

Moore asked whether the Van Buren Overlook is named for someone. Gildea said Joyce Thompson paid to have the overlook put there in honor of her daughter, and there are three (3) memorial park benches there. Thompson also maintains the gardens at that site.

Ross asked about the property along the Monroe Boulevard bluff which the city recently acquired. There was discussion regarding whether improvements were going to be made in that area and whether memorial benches could be located there.

After further discussion, both Toneman and Reinert proposed that Ross should work with Gildea and determine the best place to install a memorial bench. Reinert said she enjoys looking at the benches and reading the memorial plaques; noted that the nice part of the memorial benches is that people actually use them. It is a good way to handle memorials, Reinert believes.

Motion by Fitzgibbon, second by Moore that the commission does not recommend renaming a park but that Michael Ross, the applicant, work with Gildea to determine the best way to honor his mother.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Gildea will contact Ross in March and they can work together to determine a good spot for a memorial bench.

7. b. Commissioner Comments

Moore. Said in the last few days he has observed people out on the ice floes by the piers. Fitzgibbon suggested we put a notice on the website. Gildea will look into seeing if the city could put out a press release.

Toneman. Was glad to hear talk about the skate park; very happy with how it turned out but does want to address the idea of shade for the park. Gildea said once she gets back in March will set up a meeting with the skate park group. Reinert suggested some benches and picnic tables for observers, outside the fence, away from the area where kids are skating...

8. Adjourn

Motion by Toneman, second by Fitzgibbon to adjourn at 6:56 p. m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary