

REGULAR ANDOVER OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING
MARCH 14, 2018
MINUTES

The Regular Meeting of the Andover Open Space Advisory Commission was called to order by Chairperson Gretchen Sabel at 6:00 p.m., at the Andover City Hall, 1685 Crosstown Boulevard NW, Andover, Minnesota.

Commissioners present: Anna Dirkswager, Joy Faherty, Kim Kovich, Jim Olson
Commissioners absent: Rebecca Dahlberg and Brian Perra
Also present: Kameron Kytonen, Natural Resources Technician

OATH OF OFFICE FOR COMMISSIONER OLSON

Chairperson Sabel administered the oath of office to reappointed Commissioner Jim Olson.

RESIDENT FORUM

No one wished to address the Commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – January 10, 2018

Motion by Commissioner Dirkswager, Second by Commissioner Faherty, to approve the minutes of January 10, 2018. Motion passed 4-0-1 (Kovich present).

DISCUSS REQUEST FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT NORTHWOODS PRESERVE

Mr. Kytonen stated that Mr. Haas prepared this item and the intent was to have a member of the Park and Recreation Commission present tonight.

Commissioner Dirkswager provided background information on how this request came to be noting that there was a movement from the residents near Northwoods Preserve asking the Park and Recreation Commission for a playground to be built within a recently approved development plat. She noted that the request was denied and the recommendation from the Commission was to suggest placing a shelter in at the Northwoods Preserve entrance. She explained that was not the desire of the neighborhood.

Chairperson Sabel stated that it was her interpretation that the desired location for the shelter was on the easement for the water line.

Mr. Kytonen stated that it was his interpretation that there was not an exact location for the shelter, simply a request for a shelter at that preserve.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that the original request from the neighborhood was to include a playground to be built in the development and clarified that the neighbors do not desire a shelter.

Commissioner Olson stated that this Commission does not have available funds and even if there were available funds, the OSAC cannot use their funds for building shelters.

Commissioner Kovich stated that there are many parks with those types of features and he would not support putting park features within preserves.

It was the consensus of the Commission to continue within the mission of the OSAC and not consider park features within preserves.

Commissioner Dirkswager noted that there was an additional suggestion from a member of the Park and Recreation Commission that perhaps a trail could be constructed through Northwoods Preserve to provide access to a park in a neighboring community. She stated that at this time there is private land that the trail would need to go through but that could be an opportunity for a trail connection when that land develops.

DISCUSS REQUEST FOR WATER FEATURE AT NORTHWOODS PRESERVE

Mr. Kytonen introduced the developer of White Pine Wilderness 4th Addition, which is adjacent to Northwoods Preserve. He stated that the developer is in need of fill and has proposed to dig and create two water features on the Northwoods Preserve site, which would provide the developer with needed fill. He noted that the trail would run between the two water features.

Nathan Jones, Tollberg Homes, clarified that the trail would be moved slightly and therefore would be rebuilt through this process. He stated that the area is currently low quality and low-lying land.

Mr. Kytonen identified the proposed location for the water features.

Commissioner Dirkswager asked the amount of buffer that would occur between the trail and water feature.

Mr. Jones replied that it would be a gradual slope and they would build up the trail to be more accessible.

Mr. Kytonen stated that the site currently does not have water features, and this would provide two ponds for the wildlife and the developer would reseed with natural vegetation.

Commissioner Dirkswager asked if the water level would remain or whether the area would dry out.

Chairperson Sabel stated that water would ebb and flow with the level of the water table.

Commissioner Kovich stated that there are wetlands all around the site. He noted that the City may not own that land, but it's still protected.

Mr. Kytonen stated that although there are wetlands, he did not believe that there is always standing water.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that she is concerned that the developer would dig to obtain their needed fill and then fill with water that may evaporate as the water table decreases and then the Commission would be left with a hole.

Commissioner Kovich stated that the Commission purchased these properties to preserve and believed that there are terms that would stop the Commission from doing this action.

Commissioner Olson stated that the referendum contained specific language as to what could be done with the funds. He noted that the previous property owners were also given certain promises that the land would be preserved. He did not believe that the Commission could approve this type of request.

Commissioner Kovich stated that this request is simply to take dirt from this site to fill in a hole that the previous developer created to provide fill to a previous leg of the development.

Mr. Jones stated that he believes that this project would be mutually beneficial. He stated that providing fill in this manner would reduce the number of trucks on the roads. He stated that this would provide a water feature for ducks and other native wildlife within the preserve and they would restore the area with native species for plantings. He noted that there would also be funds provided for the Commission to further restore areas within Northwoods Preserve.

Mr. Kytonen stated that the \$10,000 mentioned in the request could be used for other restoration efforts within Northwoods Preserve.

Commissioner Olson stated that the parcel was disturbed when the Commission purchased it and the land is not very attractive. He noted that this could be an opportunity to restore this area.

Commissioner Kovich stated that he believes that this would be a horrible precedent to set. He stated that if left as is, he believes that the area would turn into a beautiful wetland on its own.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that she agrees that she would be concerned with precedent. She also believed that it would be worth it to consider this request. She stated that a policy could be put into place to prevent precedent from being set. She noted that this opportunity could assist the Commission in increasing the value of this preserve.

Commissioner Olson stated that he believes that the value of the Commission is to protect these areas.

Commissioner Faherty suggested that the Commission consider whether this use of the land would be more “healthy” for the preserve than what currently exists.

Chairperson Sabel stated that the Commission is involved with restoration efforts. She stated that this is a highly disturbed area that has not grown back, and this could be an opportunity to improve the area.

Mr. Kytonen stated that these would not be stormwater ponds and therefore these would simply be wetlands. He provided the proposed plans, noting that the banks would be fully planted with native plantings. He confirmed that over time the vegetation would continue to fill in.

Commissioner Dirkswager asked the value of the dirt that would be taken for fill, noting that there would be a savings to the developer on transportation costs. She stated that an open water feature would be an amenity and would provide a benefit to the existing wildlife in the area. She stated that she would want to see a plan for the native plantings and which species would be involved, noting that perhaps the Commission could be involved. She stated that she would be concerned with the timing as there is a thinning of pines to occur in the future and taking those trees out could be difficult with the additional water.

Mr. Kytonen replied that the water would be on the north and explained that tree thinning would occur from the south. He stated that he does not estimate that the tree removal would occur in the near future.

Mr. Jones replied that there is roughly \$70,000 worth of savings. He stated that his plan would be to restore the area with a value of \$10,000 in restoration and provide an additional \$10,000 in funds to the OSAC for additional restoration efforts in the preserve. He stated that they are working with Prairie Restoration and that organization has suggested a traditional wetland mix of species. He noted that this will move to the Planning Commission and City Council in the near future and are hoping to begin construction in May or June and therefore are looking for direction from this Commission. He did not believe that waiting an additional quarter would be feasible.

Chairperson Sabel stated that the watermain easement was created prior to the purchase of the preserve land because the action could not be done after the City owned the land as open space. She stated that using that logic, she would think that perhaps this action would not be allowed.

Commissioner Olson asked if the Commission could even consider this action.

Commissioner Dirkswager provided additional background information. She stated that an easement is different than this proposed action. She stated that the City would be the authority on what type of action could occur within the preserve.

Mr. Kytonen stated that the Commission has been involved with extensive restoration efforts in different preserves and this could be seen as restoring the area.

Commissioner Kovich stated that this will be seen as the City allowing a developer to make money off mining open space areas.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that she is sensitive to the concern. She stated that the question would be as to whether people view the current condition as a better amenity than a restored wetland.

Chairperson Sabel stated that the Commission has concerns over whether allowing this activity would be possible. She noted that the City Council will be the body that makes the final decision on what could be allowed.

Commissioner Kovich stated that he believes the Commission should make a recommendation.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that setting aside the issue of precedent, she asked if the current scrub habitat is more valuable than water with restored prairie and funds to contribute to additional restoration efforts.

Commissioner Faherty agrees that she is thinking of which condition would provide the preserve with a better health overall and which condition would be preferred.

Commissioner Kovich stated that all the Commission has to do is look around. He stated considering natural succession, all the seeds from the surrounding areas will fill that area in and it will be filled with cattails.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that assuming that natural succession will occur, is it still worth it to have the additional funds for additional restoration efforts.

Chairperson Sabel asked if there was a management plan for this area.

Mr. Kytonen stated that there is a management plan but there was nothing intense planned for that specific area.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that prairies are intense to maintain and therefore one-time seeding may not be sufficient and may not sustain around the wetlands. She asked if this is the only section that would be vulnerable; containing dirt that has been previously disturbed that may be desired for this type of activity.

Mr. Kytonen asked if there would be a plan to ensure the wetland plantings are filling in as intended.

Mr. Jones replied that there would be a two-year assurance for the plantings.

Chairperson Sabel stated that the field was also a disturbed area. She stated that perhaps the adjacent developer would provide a similar request and asked what would provide the Commission the ability to deny that request if this request is approved.

Commissioner Dirkswager noted that the Commission would not be obligated to approve any request from a developer.

Commissioner Kovich stated that of all the restoration efforts that the Commission had in mind, this activity was not even considered.

Motion by Commissioner Kovich, Second by Commissioner Dirkswager, to deny the proposal on the basis of staying loyal to the terms of the original referendum, not setting precedent for requests within preserves, and continuing to allow the natural progression of the wetland to occur in this location. Motion passed 5-0.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that these requests may continue to come before the Commission and it would be helpful for new Commissioners to have the referendum language.

Chairperson Sabel stated that it would be helpful to have more clarity between restoration activities and these types of requests and perhaps a policy that defines the activities.

Commissioner Faherty agreed that she would have more structure to base decisions on if she has the original referendum language.

Mr. Kytonen noted that if the Developer decides to continue with this proposal, the City Council will hear this request prior to the joint meeting with the OSAC and the City Council. He confirmed that the Council will receive the recommendation from the Commission. He noted that the request will also go before the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Olson suggested that a member of the Commission attend the City Council meeting in representation.

DALSKE WOODLANDS PRESERVE BOARDWALK UPDATE

Mr. Kytonen reported that the Commission applied for a grant for a boardwalk to cross the ditch through the DNR's Federal Recreational Trail Program, noting that he included a letter of support from Chairperson Sabel and from a science teacher at Andover High School. He stated that he will update the Commission once he receives a response, which he estimated would be early in the summer.

Chairperson Sabel discussed the need for additional signage along the trails to help guide users. She noted that it would also be helpful to have signs along the roadway guiding visitors to the preserve to help balance the keep out signs.

REVIEW PARCELS OF INTEREST FOR POTENTIAL FUTURE NATURE PRESERVES

Chairperson Sabel stated that in January the future of the Commission was discussed. She stated that after speaking with staff, it was determined that it would be best for the Commission to have a specific list of items.

Mr. Kytonen stated that he and Commissioner Dirkswager met to review the original list of ranked properties from the Commission. He provided a list identifying the parcels that the Commission already purchased, including the price that was paid, along with additional parcels that the Commission had been most interested in and the estimated value of those parcels.

Commissioner Kovich asked if the intention of this list is to ask for an additional referendum.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that after speaking with other City staff, it had been mentioned that the Commission should create a list of priorities should there be additional funding available.

Commissioner Olson stated that in his opinion, it is not the job of the Commission as to whether there is another referendum.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that the point of the list is to show that there is a desire to continue maintenance of the existing preserves and a desire for long-term acquisition in the future.

Chairperson Sabel stated that perhaps there would be opportunity to provide additional preserves through different means in the future, outside of referendum, and therefore it would be helpful to have available funds. She provided background information on the beginning activity of the Commission.

DISCUSS AGENDA FOR JOINT MEETING WITH CITY COUNCIL

Mr. Kytonen reported that the Commission will meet jointly with the City Council in May.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated that she believes the list of potential parcels would be beneficial to bring to the City Council. It was the consensus of the Commission not to include names on the parcels on the list and just include size, rough value, and features. It was also noted that the parcels that have been purchased should be differentiated from the remaining parcels on the list.

Mr. Kytonen asked if there are additional items the Commission would like to discuss.

Chairperson Sabel suggested holding the joint meeting on May 22nd.

Mr. Kytonen stated that the Commission would meet at 6:00 p.m. and the City Council would join the Commission at 7:00 p.m. He noted that date may not work with the Council and he could then provide that information to the Commission.

Chairperson Sabel stated that goals should be an item of discussion.

Commissioner Dirkswager suggested that the goals be broken down into bulleted items such as continued management, the boardwalk at Dalske, and future acquisition opportunities.

Commissioner Kovich stated that perhaps the meeting starts with a State of the Preserves, which provides a highlight of each of the preserves.

Mr. Kytonen asked if the Commission should bring up a discussion on referendum.

Commissioner Olson stated that he does not believe that the Commission should bring up a referendum and only provide comment if the Council brings that up.

Commissioner Kovich stated that the Commission could bring up a discussion on the need for additional funds, noting that it would be helpful to have funds set aside.

Chairperson Sabel stated that it would be helpful to have opportunity. She stated that the Park and Recreation Commission has the opportunity to be a part of the discussion and request land for parks when development requests are made. She noted that it would be helpful to have a similar opportunity in terms of open space preservation when development requests come forward.

Mr. Kytonen stated that he will send a draft agenda to the Commission prior to the meeting to provide the opportunity for Commissioners to comment.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Faherty provided mockups for the Maple View Preserve kiosk.

Commissioner Dirkswager asked if a dispenser with dog waste disposal bags could be provided at Northwoods Preserve.

The Commission thanked Commissioner Faherty for the high-quality work she continues to provide for the kiosks.

Mr. Kytonen stated that he has been approached by an Eagle Scout that sounds interested in creating a kiosk in Dalske Woodlands Preserve.

Commissioner Olson referenced recent discussion at the City Council level regarding a development proposal, which would abut Martin's Meadows Preserve. He noted that the development request has been submitted as a PUD and would have lots varying in size, noting that some of the lots would be smaller than the minimum lot size. He asked what the Commission should be doing to ensure that they stay involved in this process as the small lots would abut the preserve.

It was the consensus of the Commission to bring up this development discussion at the joint meeting with the City Council.

a. Next Meeting: May 2018

Noted.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Dirkswager, Second by Commissioner Olson, to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Kameron Kytonen
Natural Resources Technician

Drafted by:
Amanda Staple, Recording Secretary