

## DECORAH PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD MEETING MINUTES

### City Hall Council Chambers

Thursday, November 21, 2024 – 5:00 PM

1. **Welcome, Roll Call and Introductions** – Present – *Gaard, Bakken, Fuhrmann, Nichols, Kerndt. John Anderson* (City Attorney) attended. *Jon Geiger and Logan Hahn* from the Parks Department were in attendance. City Council Members *Zittergruen* and *Miculinich* were present. Several people were on Zoom. Meeting called to order at 5:03 PM.
2. **Visitors/Public Comment** - *Holtey* shared Ground Rules for Public Comment and Discussion Time
  - Be respectful and quiet while others are providing public comment
  - No exchanges between Park Board members and those providing public comment – This is not a Q & A session
  - Limit of 3 minutes and 1 time per speaker to share during public comment
  - The Chair for the Board of Commissioners reserves the right to the “gavel” and may take actions as they see fit to maintain control during the time of public comment
  - The public may remain for the discussion time between the Park Board of Commissioners but are not able to provide comment or input during this time.

*Danielle Dotzenrod (Saddle Club)* Talked about trail access for horses including Dunning, Ice Cave, Palisades and Van Peenen. Requested that mountain biking be banned from Van Peenen. Referenced correspondence letter from City Attorney in 2005 with Rick Edwards. Wants horses to be allowed on Carlson Park trails if they can't have exclusive use of Van Peenen. Shared about rules and enforcement for trail use. Also talked about safety and harassment from other trail users. Requested recusal from voting on matters. Wants full attention brought to public. Wants more time.

*Jody Bohr* – Talked about being a snowmobiler and helping fund bike trails through her state fees. Talked about choices that the biking community has options and can go elsewhere. Has been riding trails for 50 years. Referenced a share the road sign and how it applies to shared trail use. Shared the need for a safe area to ride, like they have ridden. Talked about 5 miles of trails isn't adequate. Too short and wants to have enough trails for longer rides (beyond an hour). Ended by sharing she would ride into town if the Saddle Club doesn't get what they are requesting and that the authorities (in blue) would have to deal with it.

*Erin Shaw (DHPT)* – Earns her dirt as a DHPT volunteer. Utilizes the trail system as a trail runner. Shared about the Two for the Trails – Athletic Brewing that she helped write and the importance of that role. Shared about grants improving trails. The grant was for repairing bridges and barbed wire. The submission was awarded \$15,000, short of the \$40,000 request. The project plan will be re-visited to identify the priorities and DHPT will explore other grants. Ended by stating the trails are a vital part of the community.

*Becca Putnam (Carlson Trail Coalition)* – Thanks Trail grant. Thanked everyone involved. Donators.

*Laurie Ludeking* – Proposed that Van Peenen just be used for horse riding and hikers. Concerned about multi use.

*Nick Peach (DHPT)* – Shared about the Buckthorn Blitz at Palisades “Triple Springs” trail. Talked about the CCC foundation that was uncovered in the process. 24 people showed up to volunteer and included 67 volunteer hours. Buckthorn, honeysuckle and deadfall were removed. Volunteers also picked up trash. The next volunteer day is set for December 14 to finish up at Palisades or work on brush piles at Van Peenen. January and February will also have Buckthorn Blitzes scheduled. Thanked Jon and Logan for assisting to help with these stewardship opportunities.

*Steve Zittergruen* – Expressed gratitude for the two grants to help strengthen our park system for generations ahead. Thanked Park Board for the additional (hard) work of listening to community and helping come to a decision regarding trail use.

*Mary Rayburn* – Grew up to Decorah. Was excited about Van Peenen when it opened. Shared that riding horses are a part of the heritage here and appreciate the visionaries who established the trails. Expressed the need for preservation. Talked about Seed Savers and donation gifts. Talked about the loss of Legacy Trails and restoring Van Peenen to a natural state, which is the purpose and in the spirit of the gift (of the land donation).

3. **Consider Approval of Minutes from October 17, 2024 (Regular Board) and October 30, 2024 (Work Session)** – *Kerndt* made a motion to approve the minutes. *Bakken 2<sup>nd</sup>*. Ayes: 5 Nays: 0. Motion carries.

#### 4. Department Reports

**PARKS** – *Jon Geiger* provided the report with input from *Logan Hahn* and *Corey Meyer*. Holtey share that the Parks staff are an experienced and talented staff. Tremendous assets to the community and taking care of the parks, trails and facilities often “behind the scenes.” They bring a lot of knowledge. Between Jon, Corey and Logan, they have worked for 13 agencies and organizations in the field representing state, county and city levels in Iowa and Wisconsin.

##### Highlights/Accomplishments:

Completion of Miller Park trail including:

- Placement of road bollards to prevent vehicles from accessing the trail
- Re-seeding/watering of the disturbed areas
- Installation of a wooden boarder surrounding the playground to help retain sand
- Native grass seeding on the disturbed areas not adjacent to the trail including: 2.1 acres of 9 grasses and 80 forbs
  - US Fish and Wildlife service seeded and provided seed cost saving to the city of approximately \$796.90

Completion of the Binzebo at Carlson Park:

- Ground preparation which includes adding fill and leveling the site
- Placement of Sono tubes for concrete in very specific locations
- Installation of the structure with the help of volunteers from the Decorah Rotary club and DHPT

Impact Crater marker at Van Peenen Park:

- Collaboration between Decorah Parks and Recreation and Decorah Chamber of Commerce

Addition of playground equipment at Mary Christopher Park:

- New playground equipment was added onto the existing structure to give better access to toddlers that cannot utilize the bigger equipment
- This project was funded by a local donor
- A new border was created to help retain playground surfacing and to maintain a safe fall zone

Hazard tree removal at Palisades:

- Removal of hazardous trees along the roadway at Palisades Park
- This project will continue to be ongoing

Creating Maintenance deduction areas within the park system:

- Revisiting areas that are maintained such as flower beds that can be restructured to minimize the number of resources required to maintain those areas. Thus, allowing more time to work on other projects and conservation work within our natural areas. Examples of these areas include around the park signs at Miller Park, Nordheim Park, and the swimming pool and including larger areas such as the dog park and the circle turn around at the east end of Dug Road.

Safety

- Leveled the concrete at the skateboard park
- Removal of the eroding rock face next to Ice cave. Restoration of vegetation
- Mulch replacement and monthly inspections of playground equipment
- Re-leveling of existing trail sections of Carlson Park
- Employee safety training:
  - Pesticide applicator annual re-certification
  - PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) (Grant for PPE Acquisition)
  - Other training averaging approximately 10 hours per employee.
- Trimmed up park trees to not interfere with ROPS (Roll Over Protection System) during mowing.

Installed new signage (blue signs at Dunning’s Spring and Ice Cave Road)

Added an additional driveway to lower Dunning’s Spring parking lot to help with traffic flow.

Past and future events/Partnerships:

Reindeer building in schools was held on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

- John Cline elementary school and St. Benedict's Catholic School's kindergarten classes
- Annual event that has been maintained by park and recreation staff for almost 30 years
- Next event is scheduled for December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Reindeer workshop at the park shop was held on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023:

- All ages welcome
- Pre-event registration-one reindeer per household
- We provide materials for up to 20 reindeer
- Next event is scheduled for December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Miriam Patton Events at the Community Prairie:

- RSVP/Butterfly Garden
- Monarch tagging
- Seed collection
- Crafting opportunities
- "Four Seasons of the Prairie" hike

Logan Hahn:

- Walleye Clinic
- Free fishing weekend/Trout Pond fishing event at Twin Springs Park
  - Possibility of partnering with the Decorah PD next year for the event.
- Earth day at the fairgrounds
- Bluebird boxes

Buckthorn Blitz:

- Organized by DHPT for the last couple of years
- Past events have been held within Van Peenen Park
- Removal of Buckthorn is the primary objective
- 1<sup>st</sup> event of the season was November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, with three upcoming events scheduled through spring of 2025 at both Van Peenen and Palisades Parks
- Park staff assists with personnel, equipment, cleanup of debris, and follow up to the areas that have been cleared up

Other events we have assisted with:

- Holiday light set up/tear down
- Mowing/picnic table for events at Van Peenen
- Touch a Truck
- Shuttling canoes for canoeing events
- Nordic Fest picnic tables and mowing for firework event
- Book Walk
- Scavenger Hunt
- Safety signage during TRT events
- Winter programs such as ice rink and ski trail maintenance

Conservation Corps. of Iowa

- Buckthorn removal at Ice Cave Preserve

Natural resources maintenance and enhancement:

Mary Lewis Garlic Mustard removal:

- Organizes volunteers for pulling events in the Spring/Early Summer

- Mary volunteers many hours locating, marking, and removing this invasive species. Our wild areas would look much different without her efforts.

Removal of invasive species:

- Removal of buckthorn trees at Pulpit Rock and along Pulpit Rock Road across from the campground this past winter and we plan to continue this effort this upcoming winter.
- Treat invasive species post burn areas of Community Prairie

Corey Meyer:

- Prescribed burns - development of plans, site preparation, conduct burns, and post burn evaluation
- Community Foundation Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Grant
- Decorah Water Quality Initiative Grant (WQI)- (Carlson Park and old Wastewater area). Site preparation (spraying, burning, tilling, and cover crop seedings)
- Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) Program and Opportunity
- Native Seed program- collect, clean, and reseed. Start prairie plugs for use in parks.

Forestry management plan

- Working with recommendations from the state forester to help create a plan within our wild areas
- Full detailed stewardship plan for Dunning's Spring Park to Palisades Park (forest complex)

Twin Springs Park:

- Trout stream shoreline protection/improvement/vandalism repairs
- Trout pond management

Future projects (2025):

- Continue to work on Forestry Management Plan, IRVM, watershed grant, and seed program
- Re-shingle some facilities/shelters
- Repaint the concrete floor inside Whalen Cabin
- Invasive species removal and control
- Archery range at the Will Baker Park (Athletic Fields):
  - Stands are already assembled
  - We have targets in hand
  - Need to:
    - Set up (paint) shooting lanes
    - Post proper signage
    - Establish and Post range rules
- Vegetation control efforts at Carlson Park including work within the gateway trail project
- Dahlen property development needs
- Trout stream shoreline protection/improvement at Twin Springs Park
- Vegetation removal from trout pond/ponds at Twin Springs Park
- Research grant opportunities at Dunning's Spring along the Upper Iowa River (bank erosion and safe access to the river)

Challenges/Equipment needs moving forward:

Lack of staff:

- We are need of more seasonal employees during the summer months. It has been a struggle to find staff willing to work a few months out of the year. We have been fortunate to have very dedicated staff, we just need more of them.

Invasive species control equipment:

- Due to the amount of parkland that is set aside as wild areas it is essential for us to acquire equipment that could be used to help control invasive species more efficiently. Such equipment could possibly be funded through the state IRVM or other agency programs.

Electric mower:

- We have tested and researched the possibility of purchasing an electric mower for next year

Tractor:

- We would like to get a tractor with more horsepower. Our current tractor does not have enough horsepower to run some of the attachments we have, which makes the tractor work harder than it needs to. Over time this could cause damage to the tractor. We hope to have trade in numbers before the budget gets set for next year.

## **RECREATION**

### **Coming to Close/ Review**

- Fall Frenzy - 100-150 people with Decorah Rocks
- COED Slow Pitch League - 7 Teams
- Parent Toddler Game Time - New Fall Program - 13 participants
- Pool (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade) - New Fall Program with Dan Kirkeby - 4 Participants
- Dodgeball Tournament - 6 Teams
- 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Turkey Shoot - 162 participants
- Adult Recess - Last “scheduled” series is Thursday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at The Landing Market - Continuation is TBD
- Applied for Million Coaches Grant

### **Ongoing:**

- Sharp Shooters - 99 participants
- Hoopsters - 26 participants
- Volleyball - Women’s League (Wednesday Nights) - A League- 7 Teams; B League- 10 Teams - Coed League (Sunday Nights) - 11 Teams
- Family Open Gym - Sundays 1-4pm
- Winter Registration Opened November 15<sup>th</sup>
- Letters to Santa Began November 18th

### **Coming Up:**

- Crafts for Christmas begins November 26th
- Turkey Trot - Setup in the Community Prairie November 28<sup>th</sup>- December 1<sup>st</sup>
- 2025-2056 Sponsorships - Mailed out the first week of December
- Reindeer Workshop and Reindeer Day at John Cline and St. Bens - December 10<sup>th</sup> & December 13th

## SWIMMING POOL

- Recruiting process for lifeguards and pool staff – beginning of December
- Diving well painted this fall

## CAMPGROUND

- Facilitating the annual Holiday Lights
- Winterized facility – Some hunters staying in loop (Oneota entrance)
- Full wood splitting mode
- Campground report (December 19) – Scott Vande Krol

### 5. Equestrian Trail Use in the Parks Discussion and Possible Action

*Nichols* opened the discussion about figuring this out. Raised the question, why we are at this point? Not everyone is going to be completely happy. Expressed that we need to have a spirit of compromise. Lots of concepts. Finding common ground. Shared that we have varying accounts when representatives from the Saddle Club and DHPT met with Travis and Marc. Shared that the neutral ground would be the 5 of 8 plan. That plan comes close to result of the plan from the September meeting between representatives.

*Kerndt* talked about making peace. Shared that his context and main reference point is the DHPT Map (from 2011) – Saw it when working with the parks. That plan was shared at different kiosks. Talked about horse symbols on that map. Added that when he was presented new rules and regulations, he believed he was voting on the trail use plan from 2011.

*Kerndt* shared from minutes he looked through from Park Board agendas. Thursday, May 9, 2011 – Approval for Public Television (Luther Cross Country). Board commended DHPT on the trail work and referenced a re-routed trail. Shared that in 2019 new signage was established through the Wellmark Grant. Referenced minutes from October 17, 2019 – Signs and safety were addressed in the Park Board minutes. No conversation on trail use and a lapse in conversation after that. Master Plan of Parks. Inventories. Talked about when trail 2021-2022 started putting up signs. Unsure of who put up the signs and stickers (no horse). New damage to trails. Shared about working through a plan. Has spent time out in the field and on the trails to see what could work. Working and communicating with both DHPT and Saddle Club. Talked about one trail that could be turned over. North 40 access. Would advocate for the DHPT 2011 trail use plan.

*Fuhrmann* did research on history at Luther library. Shared that from his research, horseback riders blazed the trails rather than build them. Added that hiking trails were mentioned before horse trails. Referenced the 1977 Rules and Regulations for DPR – horses prohibited except where signage exists. Referenced DHPT 2011. In the 1990's and 2000's, the time trials were organized time trials by the City of Decorah, not DHPT. During the last 20 years, what has happened? In 2005, horse riders (Barb Kellogg) asked permission to ride Fred in Van Peenen. In 2005-20026, a request to ride horses in Palisades and was denied by the Park Board. Any new trail to be built would be brought before the Saddle Club. Saddle Club is not doing the work but requesting to use the trails.

*Bakken* is concerned about the animosity between groups. Shared that previous Park Board minutes have been quoted. Wants to see this solved between the users of the trails. The tension and exchanges between the groups is not the best way to see this resolved. Suggested having a committee that wants to work on a compromise. Referenced the first meeting between Saddle Club and DHPT and City in September. Feels we should take a step back and have the staff work on a proposal to bring to the Board.

*Kerndt* shared about signage and accountability and finding a resolution.

*Gaard* shared he would like to see another group meeting with representatives. Another thought is the Park staff bringing a plan to the board meeting. Shared about being an elected board.

*Kerndt* added they are elected to make decisions.

*Nichols* talked about covering ground and a starting point for making a decision.

*Gaard* would like to see another meeting with groups and staff.

*Bakken* would like to have input and engagement with other city officials. Talked about non-residents influencing the decisions.

*Holtey* some components to consider in this process (Safety, Sustainability, Standards for Equestrian Trails) and talked about the work that people have put in to provide input during this process. Need to keep moving forward in this process.

*Fuhrmann* opposes the idea of re-convening with a trail committee or bringing the representatives together again. Doesn't feel like it would be effective. Shared that *Holtey* had shared plenty of resources to help in the process.

Board Members shared thoughts on the next steps. Talked about moving forward with a Work Session. Motion for Work Session. *Kerndt* made a motion for a Work Session on Tuesday, November 26 at 6 PM. *Fuhrmann* 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ayes: 5 Nays: 0 Motion carries.

**6. Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Program** – *Holtey* shared about the Roadside Management opportunity for Parks and Recreation and the City. Weeds and Brush, Erosion, reducing use of “broadcast” spraying, reduce mowing, planting smooth brome and fescue (deeper roots), integrated approach to managing roadsides, reducing operational costs, access to funding and equipment  
*Nichols* shared that he spoke with Corey about the program. *Geiger* shared about Street Department interest in the program and looking at opportunities for involvement. *Kerndt* shared the value of having someone involved like Corey with his experience as a Roadside manager for the Country and being able acquire equipment and resources. *Holtey* shared that they would have another Roadside Management meeting on Tuesday, December 10.

**7. Update and Discussion on Capital Improvement Projects** – *Holtey* shared updates on Carlson Park and the Dahlen Property.

Carlson Park - \$298,795 Awarded – Press Release. Funds will be available July 1. Bid set is nearing completion for 1A and 1B. Bid set to Board. *Nichols* asked for updates on maps and design.

Dahlen Property – ISG performed the planning services for the Preferred Concept Development and Resolution was approved at City Council meeting on Monday to move forward with bid design of Phase 1. *Kerndt* shared about pushing forward on the process for the Dahlen Property. There is pressure to find funding in short amount of time. Talked about the school field renovation and how that will be starting soon, and we'll be looking for field space. That will put pressure on Recreation Staff (Blake and Mallory) to find facilities for all their leagues and offerings. Stressed that we need to put together a good project. *Nichols* talked about funding mechanisms. Will ISG share potential funding sources for the project? Expressing that more funding would be available for flood mitigation. *Holtey* shared that ISG was working on a WQI Grant similar and that the department has familiarity with WQI grants (i.e., Carson Park Prairie Restoration and Old Wastewater Treatment Plant).

**8. Project Updates** – *Holtey* provided updates on the following projects.

Archery Range – Archery stands are assembled (mentioned in Parks report). Spring opening and event. “Dry run” for configuration purposes this winter.

Twin Springs “Steyer Bridge” Historical Sign – Delivered and ready for installation. Fall or spring “ribbon cutting” depending on the availability of Steyer family and Historic Preservation Committee.

Eagle Rock Sculpture at Campground – Delivered. Looks great! Met today to discuss the pedestal and installation. Spring installation. The Storlies (who donated the funds) stopped by the Park Shop to check it out. John Klosterboer will be constructing the pedestal with local limestone.

**Discussion On Splashpad** - *Gaard* shared about talked with a company for background information on a splashpad. Talked about the splashpad and shade structures. Shared about the designs. Many options. User friendly.

**Financial – Fiscal Year '26** – *Holtey* shared that the FY'26 discussion will be placed on the Tuesday, November 26 Special Meeting Agenda. Community Foundation Grant Projects *Gaard* shared we have the option of putting ¼ of the dividend back into the Endowment and ¾ into the Quasi-fund for greater flexibility. The Board agreed with this and has been traditionally what we have done.

**Other Business** – *Holtey* shared about the Asset Management informational meeting and the Forestry Stewardship Plan.

The next meeting will be Thursday, December 19 for the Regular Park Board Meeting.  
Tuesday, November 26 will be the Work Session at 6 PM.

**Adjourn** – *Kerndt* made a motion to adjourn. *Nichols 2<sup>nd</sup>*. Ayes: 5 Nays: 0 Motion carries.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Holtey", written over a horizontal line.

Marc Holtey