

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Board of Park Commissioners

April 3, 2024 - 6:30 PM

Community Room

933 Michigan Avenue, Stevens Point, WI

OR

[Zoom Teleconferencing](#)

Meeting ID: 897 4372 6758 | Passcode: 403419

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By Phone: +1-312-626-6799 (US Chicago)

Discussion and Possible Action on:

1. Roll Call.

Present: Alder Broderick, Freckmann, Disher, Glodosky, Alder Keymer, McDonald, Okonek, Przybylski, Alder Shorr, Sorenson, Winn

Also Present: Mayor Mike Wiza, Chief Moody, Marc Christianson; Digitally: Chris Radford, Nick P, Allison Birr, WAOW, Tina Klish, Amber Lenard, Luke Lenard, Amelia Lenard, Ken Wanta, Todd Ernster, Tom Schrader, Elliot Nimmer, Michael Steinbutt, Madelyn Milligh, Grace Burhop, Will Scheder, Collin McNamara, Jessica Lauterbach, Dawson Lauterbach, Addy Lauterbach, Steven McKay, Tim Gullah, Lynn Markham, Tate Breckhart, John Quirk, Emily Morris-Larsen

2. Approval of February 7, 2024 meeting minutes.

Motion to approve by Disher, second by Glodosky, passed 11-0.

3. Request from Alderperson Kneebone to discuss extending Walker Street through park land to Old Wausau Road

Chairperson Sorenson recognized Alder Mary Kneebone to provide background on the agenda item.

District 7 Alderperson, Mary Kneebone, stated this item started as a request to her to place this item on the public works committee agenda for discussion since she was a member of the public works committee. Kneebone said this wasn't anything she was pushing for or anything she knew much about. Kneebone said she has done a lot of research since the request came in and has spoken with multiple directors, the mayor and visited the site in person. Kneebone said she can see both sides and that she believes the options should be discussed and that her colleague, Alder Christianson, would explain what the request is really about.

District 1 alderperson and current council president, Marc Christianson, stated he was the individual who spoke with Mary Kneebone and Alder Dean Shuda and that he felt this was an important issue that needs to be discussed. Christianson said there are

other things on the official street map for Stevens Point including a design for the extension of Walker and an extension of Maria Drive. Christianson said his point of his discussions with Mary and Dean were that this is a long-range decision and that it will impact the city long term. Christianson said that long-term decisions are typically council decisions and that day to day operations are the purview of the mayor and city staff but that this is a longer-term decision and deserving of more discussion. Christianson said that he is not asking for the extension to go through and that he thinks options could be looked at with additional information about the types of trees and the number of trees impacted by a hammerhead vs. going straight through. Christianson said he would like to hear information from the various directors and that he had spoken with four directors about it. Alder Christianson said those four directors have indicated that the hammerhead was not the best solution. Christianson said there is enough difference of opinion among the entities and that he spoke with the engineer who did the design on Walker Street and the engineer told him that he designed what they were asked to design. Christianson said he asked him why he didn't respond with more detail in the public information meeting and the engineer said he recommended the design include going straight across the park parcel for snow plowing, for extension of utilities and increased access. Christianson said he agrees with Alder Kneebone and can see the both sides and believes it should be discussed by council.

Alder Christianson questioned the wording on the agenda on if it was an action item. Christianson said he thinks it is good for this group to weigh in and share their opinion but it needs to make it to the city council for a thorough discussion.

Chair Sorensen stated that since the parcel is parks, the Parks Commission should be the starting point for the discussion. Sorensen said that limited information was provided on this request for the packet so he asked Director Kremer to prepare some background on the property.

Director Kremer gave a presentation regarding the conservation of the park area, including:

1. Bukolt Park is one parcel which consists of 56.59 acres
2. The parcel is zoned conservancy
3. Newspaper articles indicate since 1925, a decision to not develop this portion of park land was made. At that time, the portion of Bukolt Park on the west side of Old Wausau began being developed.
4. Legacy trees that would be impacted (trees ranging in age from 60 to 215 years old)
5. Other aspects of conservancy and public use on the property
6. Internal discussions between department directors in which directors agreed the hammerhead achieves the needs of each department
7. The hammerhead design from the Public Works Department was displayed
8. Displayed an internal drawing showing residential lots that the Community Development Department created for the parcel and mentioned the memo from Public Works Director, Scott Beduhn, which expressed written support for the

road extension. Director Beduhn's memo stated "the greatest value would be realized with the development of the adjacent lands".

Director Kremer recommended the park commission move forward with the hammerhead and not proceed with the road extension. Director Kremer stated concerns that this request may include developing park lands and not just be about the extension of the road. Director Kremer stated the City of Stevens Point has never developed park lands and this would set a dangerous precedent.

Director Kernosky stated that he believes the hammerhead option is the right choice. Kernosky said the only reason to put Walker Street through would be if the city were to pursue development. Kernosky said putting Walker Street through without property tax revenue from development doesn't make sense. Kernosky said that this request is not from the Public Works Department or the Community Development Department.

Kernosky stated that he and Director Beduhn agree that the hammerhead works.

Kernosky said he believes that there is internal disagreement about if it is the authority for Park Commission to look at the road right of way or to look at the future road map. Kernosky stated that he leans on no. Kernosky stated he believes the Park Commission authority is to look at whether or not to develop the area adjacent to the right of way.

Kernosky stated that as a former park worker, conservation is really important and that retaining this area as natural land is in the best interest of the city. Kernosky stated he sees the park commission's authority as telling the common council that the commission doesn't want to develop the parcel for residential uses and that Kernosky recommends that the common council knows the commission doesn't intend to sell or develop and recommending to council that they go through the formal approval process to remove the extension of Walker Street and Maria Drive from the official map.

Kernosky stated it is not Director Beduhn or Director Kernosky who is pushing the road at all and they believe the hammerhead works. Kernosky stated he can confidently tell the commission to keep the green space as is.

Fire Chief, JB Moody, handed out a paper which displayed five options for the fire department for new construction that meets the fire service standards. Chief Moody said that for fire and EMS suppression, the best option would be to push the road all the way through. This allows utilities under the roadway, it allows the department to come in from two directions and it is the ultimate Cadillac version. Chief Moody said there are other options that will work and the diagram he provided shows other options. Moody said they look at three primary options, pushing a road through, cul de sacs and hammerheads. Moody said as long as they meet the codes, the fire service is okay with these projects. Moody said after discussing these options with all directors and in working with the parks department, the fire department felt the best option was the hammerhead to preserve as much of the parks area as possible. Moody said it meets the codes and meets all the standards and that they can service the area well and be successful with what has been designed with a hammerhead. Moody said he looks at the safety of their members and their department too.

Alder Keymer thanked the chief and asked if any of these alternatives that would have a smaller footprint which would work for this area. Moody said he felt the hammerhead was the best option for this area was the hammerhead.

Chief Moody said typically the through street is option a, cul de sac is option b and the hammerhead is option c. Moody said in this location, he felt the hammerhead is option a to meet the codes and standards while protecting as much of the area as possible in the park.

Chair Sorenson recognized people in the audience wishing to provide public comment.

Amber Lenard, 200 Forest Street, stated she lives on the corner of Walker and Forest and that they were attracted to that area due to the forest and park land. Lenard stated they value having this space available to their family and neighborhood and that she would hate to see the road go through there. Lenard urged the committee to not consider putting the road through.

Luke Lenard, 200 Forest Street, stated the road would go through that lots of people would drive through there to Bukolt Park and that the road would get too much and too fast of traffic for the kids in the area. Lenard stated the five-way corner by the dump along with this new intersection would create a problem. Lenard recommended a gravel bike trail through this area and drainage for people who water in their basements in the area.

Amelia Lenard, 200 Forest Street, stated she would hate to see the wildlife or trees go down. Lenard stated she enjoys the wildlife and walking down there every day. Lenard stated she often plays with friends there and they built a fort down here. Lenard said she really enjoys playing there and thinks it would be good to not destroy as much wildlife and trees as possible because tree is really good for the environment. Lenard said she agrees with her father about the bike path. She said the path is already there that wasn't built but people created it from all of the people walking there. Lenard stated it is unnecessary for the road to go through that beautiful forest.

Tom Schrader, 1825 Miller Court, stated that he was the park director for 35 years. Schrader stated the area is very important to him and that he wanted to speak about the memo from the public works department. Schrader stated the memo starts out about plow trucks trying to turn around at the dead-end street and that the hammerhead takes care of al of that. Schrader stated Kernosky had a comment about the grid system but that planning goes in cycles. Schrader stated that years ago it was cul-de-sacs and round roads and then in the 90's it became called new urbanism with grid systems but that in 20 years it will go back to rounds and bends. Schrader stated the memo talks about fire protection in the memo but that Chief Moody said the hammerhead works and meets all of the codes. Schrader stated that the official street map is mentioned and that there is a conflict between the official street map and official park plan that are both adopted and that they conflict. Schrader said that when you talk about taking things off the streets map, he remembers recently that Reserve Street

from Fourth to Stanley was taken off the map several years ago to make it a walking path. Schrader said another one was Prais Street north of the hospital became a walking area. Schrader said East Avenue by Jefferson School is not there anymore and is now grass. Schrader stated he doesn't think it needs to come off the street map because there are three examples that it has happened and wasn't taken off the street map. Schrader stated that in the memo it states the decision to extend Walker Street was made decades ago. Schrader stated that it was decided decades ago to not extend it or run it through for 100 years. Schrader stated it comes down to the sentence in the memo about the greatest value would be realized with the development of the adjacent lands. Schrader states it comes down to if the city extends the road it would be to develop it. Schrader stated that he hopes the commission takes the fire chief's recommendation about going with the hammerhead to save all of those trees and the residents in that area who love using the area.

Sorenson asked Kremer if the memo being referenced is available to the public. Kremer stated anyone wanting the memo could contact his office or the City Clerk to receive a copy.

Tim Gullah, 308 Walker Street, stated he was there on behalf of his 94-year-old mother who has lived on Walker since 1953. Gullah said that growing up he couldn't reach around the trees and 60 years later he is glad to hear the commission is thinking about saving the area. Gullah said he is concerned about the environmental impact of the area by putting the road through. Gullah said the noise and light pollution from the area is annoying and it would be worse if the road goes all the way through. Gullah asked why we are talking about putting a road through now when there was already approval for the hammerhead. Gullah said to put this under the map and go on by leaving this area a park for kids and grandkids in the future.

Jessica Lauterbach, 425 Front Street, stated they lived in the neighborhood for six or seven years and that part of the reason they stayed in the area was greenspace and Bukolt Park. Lauterbach said they use the space almost every day by walking the trails. Lauterbach stated she walked the area every day of her pregnancy and that this area is swampy and you need boots. Lauterbach stated they want green space for their children and these are natural areas that her children can play in. Lauterbach said it would be devastating to see a street go through or development in the area. Lauterbach said there is history there and that they walk the trails in the winter and in the dark with headlamps. Lauterbach said it would be devastating to their family to see a road go through there. Lauterbach said she hopes the commission makes the right decision on the area.

Steven McKay, 1808 Clark Street, stated he works for the parks department and that he agrees with what Director Kremer stated and that one of the benefits of keeping this area is that we don't have a lot of parks with unstructured play areas. McKay said that it isn't a huge area but that he feels it is a benefit for kids in the community to be able to imagine play in this area by keeping this in the park system.

Tate Breckhart, 1817 Maria, stated he grew up a few blocks from this extension. Breckhart said he has helped pack down the trails in this area and that he enjoys walking and riding his fat bike through this. Breckhart said this is a beautiful piece of land and that he has climbed up the 165 old white pine that Director Kremer showed the commission. Breckhart said the view from the top of that tree is beautiful. Breckhart said adding a road would take away a lot of those and it would take a large part of the forest. Breckhart said it would open it to a lot of traffic and that it would lead right to the city salt barn. Breckhart said it could really up the noise and traffic levels and that sixth avenue is a wider street and sees a lot more traffic the way it is. Breckhart said it would add cost to the tax payers bills to revise the road and that you have access to Old Wausau Road by using sixth avenue. Breckhart said he thinks it is a beautiful park and he hopes the road doesn't go through because it would be solving a problem that doesn't exist.

Lynn Markham, 302 Georgia Street, stated she has lived there 17 years and that she was looking for woods when they moved there so her kids could play. Markham said her kids have ridden their bikes around town for many years and they discovered this parcel before she did. Markham said that her kids came across this two-mile loop because this is nicer than being on roads. Markham said she knows Bukolt has lots some big pine trees due to salt and she doesn't want to lose trees on this parcel. Markham said she would like to know how many trees are lost with the hammerhead. Markham said she supports what Director Kremer asked earlier on if the city pursues this extension that the city needs to know what this means past just where the pavement goes in. Including what roots will be damaged adjacent it. Markham said she understands the trail comments but that she believes it is beautiful the way it is now and that a trail would do damage too. Markham said she believes Stevens Point is a special place because of our actions which speak louder than words for tree city. Markham said to grow something similar to this would take more than 150 years. Markham said development should go where we have a parking lot or bluegrass field exists and not where we have this old of trees. Markham said she has seen great horned owls and a red shouldered hawk up in this area.

John Quirk, 325 Front Street, stated he would like to focus on the issue of the street map and park plan. Quirk said the park plan was developed by the park commission and approved by the council. Quirk said the street map was put together by the plan commission and approved by the park commission. Quirk said the two things don't agree with each other but one thing does not trump the other one. Quirk said that he gets the feeling from the way people talk that they think the plan commission is more important than the park board and that the street map is more important than the park plan. Quirk stated that the land is zoned conservancy and that there is no street right of way going through there. Quirk said that just because someone drew it on a map doesn't mean that it has to be built. Quirk said he has lived here for 30 years and also worked for the city for 30 years as a communication person. Quirk said he put meetings and programs on the city's cable news channel and that he started the city website. Quirk said he was the first one to begin using social media to put city information out to the public and that he put the meetings on the city's radio station that was started a few

years ago. Quirk said he heard some things tonight that he felt were offensive. Quirk said the hammerhead idea had public information meetings and the design went out for bid and received bids which were opened yesterday. Quirk said this idea was discussed at staff but the city council president stated he talked to the designer outside of a meeting and those discussions are supposed to take place at the city meetings. Quirk stated in 30 years running the camera, he had only been in front of it four times. Quirk said one of those other times were defending Bukolt Park against the salt shed expansion. Quirk stated when that happened, the things they were told were going to happen were not done in the end. Quirk said that sort of thing is unacceptable, this was in a plan, there were public information meetings and it was in the budget and discussed.

Quirk said it is really disgusting to hear that this is what we approved at meetings but I talked to so and so. Quirk stated to please not listen to those things and that if this was a trial, though he knows this is not one, that stuff is hearsay and inadmissible. Quirk stated it is sad to hear elected government officials do that and he hopes the park commission does not let that kind of stuff persuade them either way.

Chris Radford, 155 Virginia Circle, stated he grew up in the area and spent countless hours of exploring and enjoying our community parks. Radford said he was on the cross-country team and enjoyed the comments from Markham and her son. Radford said he has been working in natural resource management for over 20 years and is currently the executive director for the North Central Conservancy Trust (NCCT). Radford said the NCCT is the local land trust with offices located in the Village of Whiting. Radford said they serve 8 counties in central Wisconsin and work with land owners to develop conservation easements to permanently protect ecologically significant landscapes for the benefit for the environment and community. Radford said the land trust has protected over 5000 acres of land and they own several properties including the 5-acre parcel adjacent to the north end of Bukolt Park and the 2-acre island just off shore of Bukolt Park. Radford said their organization has been a proud partner of the City of Stevens Point and Green Circle Trail with the acquisition, stewardship and maintenance of the community benefits of these two adjacent parcels. Radford expressed his opposition of the extension of Walker Street into Bukolt Park to Old Wausau Road and to encourage others to oppose it as well. Radford said Bukolt Park was established 100 years ago and provides countless benefits to the community and the natural environment. Radford said the proposed extension of Walker Street or any associated development of the area would not only be devastating to the conservation and recreational value that the area currently holds, but it could also erode the trust and reputation of the city's leadership, governing bodies and those who are entrusted to protect our dedicated park areas, not destroy them or develop them. Radford said not only would it destroy some of the ecological qualities of the area but it may set a precedent of dismantling of other similar land protection agreements. Radford said one of the most appealing things of the Stevens Point area are the green spaces and recreation areas that are protected by and maintained by the City and protected by the parks commission.

Christianson stated he talked with Todd Ernster and that the trees in question are not in

the path of what is being proposed. Christianson stated he wanted to make it clear that he is not necessarily in favor of the road extension and that he is not worried about the product but he is worried about the process. Christianson stated he agreed with John Quirk that these things need to be discussed at meetings. Christianson said they were presented at public information meetings but they have not been on a council agenda. Christianson said that was his goal of having it on a committee agenda so the city could have these discussions and perform the due diligence. Christianson stated that Todd was under the impression that the extension would run straight west. Christianson said that the design that is being considered comes down at a 45-degree angle. Christianson stated he still understands what he saying that large trees would be impacted and he is not there to promote the idea.

Kremer stated that at tonight's meeting the commission was not in a place to say if a road is going to be angled or not angled. Kremer stated the parcel in question has way more than the legacy trees that were mentioned. Kremer stated that these trees are massive and that the drip lines of the trees are large and there are significant consequences and impact to a road. Kremer stated he wanted to underline that statement to the commission.

Mayor, Mike Wiza, stated he wanted to talk about how the city got here. Wiza stated the request didn't come from staff and that it came from Alder Christianson through Alder Kneebone. Wiza stated that Christianson is familiar with how things work and that council sets policy while staff executes that policy. Wiza stated that council made a policy to extend sidewalks but the council does not get involved with how many squares go in front of a house. Wiza said the policy making authority lies with council and the execution of that policy lies with city staff. Wiza stated that Christianson wishes to see it discussed. Wiza stated that discussions go back to late 2022 and that since this northside construction would be over \$1,000,000 it was on the April ballot as a referendum question. Wiza stated that this project has been being talked about internally since 2022. Wiza stated that in June of 2023, the city began the capital process for 2024 and had council approve it. Wiza stated this was talked about and Chief Moody wanted to make it easier for the fire trucks to turn around so all of the directors, who meet twice per week, talked about this. Wiza stated there was three options, run the road through, use a hammerhead or put in a cul de sac. Wiza stated the cul de sac was shut down quickly because it was in a park and it is conservancy. Wiza stated we talked about running the street through but since this is a park, it is zoned conservancy, the comprehensive plan has it as park, the parks plan has it as park and the future land use plan all call it out as park, the majority of the directors all felt the hammerhead would work and be most suited. Wiza stated the hammerhead design does not need a street dedication or change the park use. Wiza stated to run the road through it needs plan commission and must dedicate 60' feet of street width which is bigger than the lot his house is on. Wiza stated the estimated funding for the design was estimated at \$2.9 million back during referendum time in April of 2023 was approved by referendum and then approved at the October 16, 2023 meeting for the capital budgeting process. Wiza stated this request came up at the 11th hour after over two years of work by staff when Alder Christianson talked to Alder Kneebone about

wanting a discussion on the design but no one talked with him about it. Wiza stated to his knowledge no one talked to directors about it but that he found out today that Christianson had spoken with four directors about it. Wiza stated there is a map from 1961 that shows a potential street that could have gone through there. The Mayor said that this is the only piece of paper that says that and the future land use plan, comprehensive plan and parks plan all call for it to remain conservancy and a park. Wiza stated it was never dedicated nor does it appear anywhere else. Wiza stated we already have a spending problem and that over the years the city has implemented public infrastructure that we can not afford to maintain. Wiza stated policy decisions were made to limit the creation of any new public infrastructure that makes sure we could pay for it into perpetuity include the plowing, salting and patching. Wiza stated that early estimates were \$2.9 million dollars but that the total project, including utilities, came in at \$8.2 million dollars and that doesn't include the estimated \$30,000 for the redesign of the hammerhead or include all of the construction costs to punch the road through to Old Wausau Road. Wiza stated this road would not have any income generated to support the other maintenance and that this land has been park and has been for generations. Wiza stated because it came in at the last minute, the bidding is already done and the bidding is done. Wiza said the bid is open and the project is ready to go. Wiza said if we change the design, we will delay the process and get into a bid from mid to late summer that will cost more. Wiza said staff tried to research as fast as possible and that this triangle was listed in a deed by EB Grant Estate and this person's obituary was 1897. Wiza stated we don't know yet if it was sold to the city or dedicated. Wiza stated people frequently chose to donate land to the parks as a way to preserve their property. Wiza stated examples of Groholski Park and Iverson Park. Wiza stated if we take this and we run this road through so the plow truck driver can turn around, it may impact future people who consider donating land to the city by breaking that trust. Wiza stated that parks are important and that it is more important than just residents as it serves as a tourist attraction. Wiza stated the council sets policy and that it is outside their authority to get involved with how that policy gets carried out. Wiza stated it costs money to put in a change order and delays the project. Wiza said park commission and pretty much every other committee is advisory to council so the council could still bring it up at the common council. Wiza said if anyone has feelings and thoughts they should contact their city alders. Wiza stated stopping this project is not a 30 percent design but a full design that is already bid out. Wiza stated he recommends that the commission reject any further destruction of parkland and motion to proceed with the vetted, approved, designed and already bid design of Walker Street.

Chair Sorenson brought the discussion back to the park commission.

Commissioner McDonald said that as much as she hates to see destruction of any trees and she would like to see the road stay as it is, she understands the commission needs to have consideration for public safety.

McDonald made a motion to proceed with the hammerhead instead of a through road on Walker Street, second by Przybylski.

Alder Broderick thanked Christianson and Kneebone for bringing this item to discussion. Broderick said that she believes just because a question is asked and the answer is a resounding no, doesn't mean the question should not have been asked in the first place. Broderick said that Christianson and Kneebone have received a lot of very direct criticism that she believes is quite unfair and frankly stoked unnecessarily. Broderick stated that we have heard from absolutely everyone and that the hammerhead makes sense. Broderick said there is not a compelling reason to destroy legacy trees and this one is close to home for her and she is one of the people who pass through those woods frequently. Broderick said one of the magical things about this place is that there isn't a defined trail and a tree might fall and the path meanders around it. Broderick said she encourages everyone to support the hammerhead that has already been approved and she has heard from more constituents on this than any other item.

Commissioner Glodosky stated he has been on the commission more many years and this is the worst proposal he had ever seen come through this board in his tenure. Glodosky stated no one owns the land and we are here to protect it for people who will be here long after the people at the meeting are gone. Glodosky referenced a Irvine Park in Chippewa Falls that was set aside in 1906 and that people that had the foresight to set aside that land. Glodosky said Stevens Point is going to expand north and east and that people who live in this area need the greenspace that we currently have. Glodosky stated he is definitely against the development.

Alder Keymer stated she agrees with the motion and appreciates having additional information that was presented in the meeting and felt the discussion had been useful. Keymer stated that the city amends the official city map but that she had never seen the map until she requested it from Director Beduhn. Keymer said she felt it would be useful to look at the official road map through the other commissions and to make changes to it based on what we know now. Keymer stated it has been useful and people care about this topic and she is grateful for this conversation.

Commissioner McDonald stated we need to make it clear that our parklands are not available for development, for roads or for building houses.

Alder Shorr stated the accessory dwelling item was discussed for additional months and having additional discussions on this item is probably good. Shorr stated there was no argument for development or support being expressed for extending the road. Shorr stated that one thing that could be given a little more consideration is accessibility within the parcel regarding a trail for those with mobility issues. Shorr said he still has a question about weather the parcel is suitable setup with folks who need accessibility. Shorr stated he doesn't think the grid system is a way of fashion or that cul de sacs are coming back.

Commissioner Disher stated he wanted to reiterate the importance that people who donate land should not allow us to put a road through or develop those parcels. Disher stated what's to stop us from putting condos along the river in Pfiffner Park to make

money. Disher stated parks are for people and they are not for profit so we should keep it park.

Chair Sorenson called for a roll call vote. Motion passed 11-0.

4. Director's Report

a. 2024 project updates

b. Park Technician, Craig Wuthrich, retiring on April 1, 2024 (18+ years of service)

c. Recreation events update

- Spring scavenger hunt now open (March 27 - April 14)

- Easter egg hunt downtown (March 30)

d. Logging update on West River Drive Park and south of HH along Rocky Run Road

No action.

5. Adjournment.

Motion to adjourn by Disher, second by Okonek; meeting adjourned at 8:12.