

UPDC

Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes

February 20, 2023

Chair: Ellen Fee

Committee Attendance: Jerry Clendenin, Kirsten Fryer, Jenny Keyser, Barb Deming, Jerome Getz, Jen Getz Miller, David Tierney

Staff: Leah Timberlake Sullivan, Executive Director, Union Park District Council

Guest: Andy Rodriguez, Director of Saint Paul Parks & Recreation

Assign Note Taker

Jerry Clendenin will take notes and type minutes.

Introductions/Approval of Agenda

An agenda was sent out in advance of the meeting. The agenda was accepted without changes.

Guest Speaker: Andy Rodriguez, Director of Saint Paul Parks & Recreation

Mr. Rodriguez came to talk about Cell Tower Fund, but first he acknowledged a tragic incident at the Oxford Community Center. In January, a young teenager was wounded by a gun shot. Andy Rodriguez said that the Parks & Recreation Department is working to improve safety at Parks & Rec property.

Some History of the Cell Tower Fund

Andy Rodriguez reviewed some history of the Cell Tower Fund. In 2005 a company that is now called T Mobile approached the City of Saint Paul about setting up a tower to support mobile telephone equipment at Merriam Park. The Parks & Recreation Department arranged to collect rent from T Mobile for their use of the tower. Parks & Recreation established a program to give 80% of the base rent to the Union Park District Council (UPDC) for projects and programs at Merriam Park & Desmoyer Park.

The fund was Intended for special projects that are not part of the usual City of Saint Paul budget. The fund sound not be used to support ordinary obligations of City.

Barb Deming added some detail to the history. A member of City Council pushed for setting up the Cell Tower Fund. She said the Cell Tower Fund was not popular in the early days. Several neighborhood organizations declined to work with the Cell Tower Fund. UPDC took charge of the Cell Tower Fund after other neighborhood organizations did not want to get involved.

Barb got involved because the fund was being used for many projects that she considered bad ideas

Andy Rodriguez said that in the early years, Parks & Recreation failed to use all the rent revenue for projects and events in the Union Park Area. Therefore, Parks & Recreation

did a reset. They had accumulated funds that should have been spent in the years from 2005 to 2012. So, they used some of the accumulated funds to build a pathway from Prior Avenue across Merriam Park. The project cost \$50,000 in 2015.

Unique Fund, Unique Problems

Andy Rodriguez said that the Cell Tower Fund is unique. No other organization in the City of Saint Paul is like the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund. The unique structure makes the fund difficult to manage.

Andy Rodriguez said that one problem is that a majority of projects go over bid. The volunteer members of the UPDC have little knowledge of construction costs. For example, the UPDC may approve \$5,000 for a project and the lowest bid from contractors is \$12,000. Many over bid projects cannot be completed.

Another problem is turn over of people. There are staff changes at the Parks & Recreation Department. There are also changes of people at the Union Park District Council. People who start projects with Cell Tower Funds leave. The replacement people do not know how to complete the projects.

Andy Rodriguez said that we can improve the situation by designating people to handle contacts between the UPDC and Parks & Recreation. Designating contact people can help to get around bureaucratic problems. Leah Timberlake Sullivan is the contact person at UPDC. Andy will designate a person at Parks & Rec to handle contacts with the UPDC about the Cell Tower Fund.

A major problem is with the approval of funds and the timing of projects.

A 2015 Document

A 2015 document states when the money should be spent:

“Parks and UPDC agree that future annual proceeds covered under this agreement will be spent on eligible improvements and programs within the calendar year that they are received. If approved projects or programs are not completed within the calendar year, both parties agree that said funds will be encumbered and used for implementation in a future calendar year.”

From a letter to the Union Park District Council from the Parks & Rec Dept.

Andy Rodriguez said that many projects fail because the work cannot be completed in the year that the cell tower funding was authorized. As the above quotation says, money not spent becomes “encumbered.” Andy Rodriguez explained that encumbered means that funds not spent by the end of a year are placed in a special City of Saint Paul account. The money still exists, but we cannot spend it.

The encumbered Cell Tower money can be retrieved, but the bureaucratic process is difficult. Andy Rodriguez said that we could possibly recover unused funds and put them toward a sizeable project. He noted that playground equipment in Merriam Park is old. Replacing play equipment might use up some encumbered funds.

David Tierney noted that after the Cell Tower Fund was established, negotiations allowed funds to be used for events. The funds are not just for construction projects. The above quotation from the 2015 document says that funds *“will be spent on eligible improvements and programs.”*

Programs include things like plays performed by the group Shakespeare in the Park.

Andy Rodriguez said that he is open to different arrangements for managing funds.

A No Mow Sign Project

Barb Deming suggested we talk through the project to create a sign for the No Mow Area. This small project can demonstrate how to use Cell Tower Funds.

Jerry Clendenin has done work on the sign project by locating more than four sign companies. He will study the companies' web sites. He wants to determine which companies might build the kind of sign that we need.

He intends to visit some of the sign companies. He will ask for assistance to create a mock-up. He intends to show the mock-up at UPDC meetings and also to City officials. He wants to see what kind of sign is acceptable to all parties.

He intends to create a proposal with a suggested design. The proposal will include an estimated cost. The proposal will also have a plan for installing.

An attachment to these minutes shows the suggest sign copy. The statement was written by Barb Deming. Also attached is a suggest design for the sign by Jerry Clendenin

If enough people express support for the proposed sign design, Jerry will request money from the Cell Tower Fund.

If the sign project is not on track to be completed by the end of 2023, Jerry intends to delay requesting funds until the start of 2024. This is to avoid getting funds encumbered.

Andy Rodriguez said that for a small project bidding is not required. The sign will be a simple project. There will be no construction contracting. We can send him an e-mail with details. Then Andy can approve.

Andy said there are vendors that the City of Saint Paul works with. The vendors can provide a sign. Also, City employees might make the sign.

Jerry said that he intends to adapt his plan as necessary.

Andy Rodriguez said let's figure out a way to get the sign done!

Andy Rodriguez left meeting.

Ellen Fee said that she hopes that we can get Andy to attend a future meeting.

2023 Workplan for NSVC

Ellen Fee led a discussion about revising the Workplan for the Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee.

The Annual Workplan is a document required by the City of Saint Paul. The 2023 Workplan should state what the NSVC plans to do this year and how we will do it.

Ellen Fee also brought up the topic of our committee mission statement. In past years, the Annual Workplan had a statement for the committee's goal. It was the goal for the Environment & Parks Committee, the committee that became the NSVC. The goal statement is:

“Use a community engagement process to make improvements in current and potential future parks and recreation spaces.”

We will take up revising the mission statement at a future meeting.

The usual workplan is a spreadsheet with five columns:

1. Activities. Provides a detailed description of each activity.
2. Anticipated Outcomes
3. Time Frame
4. Person(s) Responsible for achieving outcomes
5. Achieved Outcomes (report at end of year)

Ellen Fee displayed a spreadsheet that followed the traditional workplan template. Ellen Fee filled in the spreadsheet as we discussed each activity. Later she will edit and revise the spreadsheet as necessary. Then she will send copies to NSVC members and others.

Some Activities Discussed for the 2023 Workplan

<p>Create a Template for Plans for Community Events</p> <p>More about this activity is in the minutes from January, 2023.</p>	<p>We discussed making a template that can be used by UPDC members. We want a template that can also be used by non-members who want to propose an event.</p>	<p>Our goal is to have a template completed by the end of 2023</p>
<p>Plant Trees in the Midway Peace Park</p> <p>More about this activity is in the minutes from January, 2023.</p>	<p>We discussed replacing 36 trees that died. We discussed drought-resistance species. We also discussed ways to water new trees.</p>	<p>We discussed working with Friends of Midway Peace Park and with the Tree Trust.</p>
<p>The Midway Peace Park Fall Fun Event</p>	<p>The goal is to host an event that is fun, accessible to all, and culturally relevant.</p>	<p>The location is the park near Skyline Tower.</p>
<p>Support community events at Desnoyer Park</p>	<p>Desnoyer Park Improvement Association holds a picnic event in the summer and a winter event with ice skating.</p>	

Host or support events at other parks in the Union Park area	We will consider events at Iris Park, Dunning Field, and Aldine Park.	
Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam	Support the event that is usually held in late summer or early fall.	ICPB&J is at Merriam Park.
No Mow Area Maintenance	Organize volunteers to work on two maintenance events. Work with the Parks & Rec Department to create a long-term plan for the No Mow Area	Try to engage people who live near Merriam Park.
Create a sign for the No Mow Area.	The sign should state that UPDC volunteers maintain the area. The sign should also explain the environmental benefits from the No Mow Area.	Work with sign vendors and the Parks & Rec Department
Advocate for recycling and reusing	Aim for zero waste at the Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam and other events.	Bring neighborhood environmental issues to the attention of city officials.
Composting	Work with the Eleonor Graham Community Garden. Work with Merriam Station Garden.	There is a composting drop off site at Dunning Field

Composting & recycling facilities	We discussed drafting a letter to the City of Saint Paul. The letter will request better facilities.	We will request the UPDC Board to endorse the letter.
Engage marginalized groups	We discussed how to involve more people with composting & recycling and other projects.	
Managing the Cell Tower Fund More about this activity is in the minutes from January, 2023.	Develop a sustainable plan. We discussed establishing a scope of projects eligible for funding. Engage in dialog with citizens and city officials to determine how to use cell tower funds.	Make use of all the money available for a year.
More on managing the Cell Tower Fund More about this activity is in the minutes from the Environment & Parks Committee meeting of March 17, 2021.	Work toward sharing information about Cell Tower projects with marginalized groups. Work toward sharing resources.	
Scholarship Program	Leah will contact the 2022 scholarship winners to see how they are progressing.	
Climate Action	Foster engagement in the City of Saint Paul Climate Action Plan	Invite a City official to speak at an NSVC meeting.

Support Union Park Gardens	Invite gardeners from Eleonor Graham and Merriam Station gardens to an NSVC meeting.	Determine what the gardens need.
Micro-grant Program	Continue to administer the program to provide small grants for neighborhood projects.	Encourage more people to apply.

Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

There are three attachments to the minutes.

Attachments to the minutes are on the next pages.

Suggest Text for a No Mow Sign

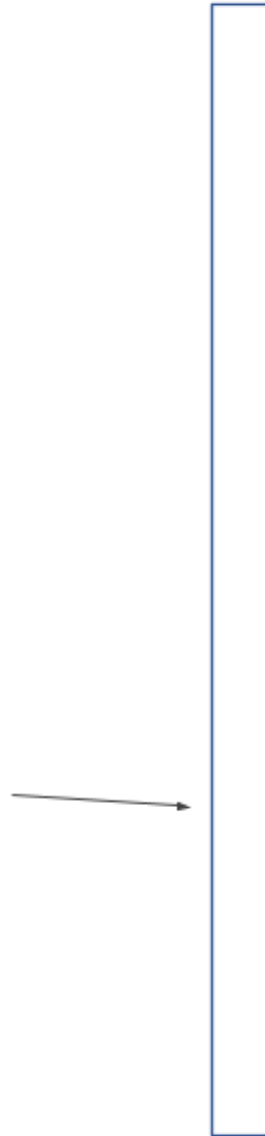
No Mow Grass Area

Volunteers maintain this area of naturally growing tall grass and oak trees. The grass is a blend of cool-season fescue grasses that require very little water, due to a large dense root system that also serves to inhibit weed growth. Not mowing this section of the park cuts down on noise and air pollution, reduces stress on mature oak trees, and allows new oak seedlings to grow naturally.

To volunteer, contact the Union Park District Council at <https://link to Union Park website>

Sign design from Jerry Clendenin

- Place sign where dogs will not urinate on it.
- Place near Merriam Lane.
- Have a plan to repair in case of vandalism



No Mow Area

Text suggested by Barb Deming.

Wooden stake, about 2 X 4"