

UPDC
Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality
Committee Meeting Minutes

March 21, 2023

Chair: Ellen Fee

Committee Attendance: Jerry Clendenin, Barb Deming, Kirsten Fryer, Jenny Keyser, Louise, David Tierney

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

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.

Corrections to February Minutes

Barb Deming requested some changes. We discussed a few minor corrections.

The most significant change was in describing the history of the Cell Tower Fund. The corrected minutes will include the statement:

Responsibility for developing recommendations for spending Cell Tower Funds was given to the Merriam Park District Council Parks and Recreation Committee (now the Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee and part of the UPDC).

Jerry Clendenin changed the minutes.

The corrected minutes will be posted to the Union Park District Council website.

Update on the Project to Replace Dead Trees in Midway Peace Park

Jenny Keyser reported on a meeting with Russel Balenger, the Interim Member of the Saint Paul City Council. He represents Ward 1. Leah Timberlake Sullivan and a representative from Skyline Tower also attended the meeting that was in December, 2022.

The meeting was about trees in Midway Peace Park. Many trees were planted in the park. Then the trees died in the drought of 2022. The meeting was about ideas for removing the dead trees and planting new trees.

At the meeting, Council Member Balenger suggested that we apply for a STAR grant to cover the expenses for new trees. STAR stands for Sales Tax Revitalization. The STAR

grant program provides funds for neighborhood improvement projects, including landscape projects.

Jenny said that we are going to follow Council Member Balenger's suggestion. We will ask for a grant of \$25,000. The application is due by April 12. We need to make our request to a group of 21 people who are the Neighborhood STAR Board.

The STAR grant is only part of the project. Jenny Keyser said that there are three parts to the project.

Part 1 will be done by the Parks & Recreation Department. They will use internal Parks & Rec funds to set up water service to Midway Peace Park. We expect to have water in June or July. There will be water at the drinking fountain as well as water to care for trees and other plants.

Part 2 is the work to remove the dead trees and plant new trees. Money from the grant will cover the costs, including purchasing new trees from a nursery. The Parks & Rec Department will not pay for replacement trees. However, the STAR grant means that we will be using a different form of taxpayer money.

Volunteers from the Tree Trust and other volunteers will plant trees in the fall. They will work with Rachel Coyle, the Forester for Saint Paul Parks & Recreation.

Part 3 of the project will be "in kind" donations of volunteer work. Organizations in the neighborhood near the park will organize volunteers. The volunteers will water the trees once a week. The watering project will go on indefinitely, unless rainfall does the job for us. The Parks & Recreation Department will not water trees.

The official applicant for the STAR grant will be the Union Park District Council. The UPDC will be the lead organization for the tree project and the fiscal agent.

We are working to avoid past mistakes. The original Midway Peace Park trees were planted in the spring. We will plant replacement trees in the fall. The new trees will be more likely to survive if they are planted in the fall.

A Sign for the No-Mow Area of Merriam Park

We decided to add a hyphen to the official name. The southwest corner of Merriam Park in future should be called the No-Mow Area.

We discussed Jerry Clendenin's idea of how to produce a sign for the No-Mow Area. His idea is to contract with a sign company. There is a sign making company that he prefers. We can order the sign and pay with Cell Tower Funds. He said that the advantage to his plan is that we keep control of the sign design. Also, the contract will allow us to get the sign made quickly. If we have Parks & Rec make the sign, the overworked City of Saint Paul employees may not get around to our project for weeks.

However, by consensus, we selected Barb Deming's idea. Her idea is to ask the Parks & Recreation Department to make the sign.

We reviewed language for the sign as written by Barb Deming. Some committee members suggested adding more details to the sign. By consensus, we decided not to add language.

A copy of the language for the sign is attached to these minutes.

Instead of putting more information on the sign, Leah Timberlake Sullivan and Ellen Fee liked the idea of directing interested citizens to the Union Park District Council (UPDC) website. The website can have more information about the No-Mow Area. The bottom

part of the sign will have directions on how to connect with the UPDC website by cell phone or by computer.

Leah said that she will send an e-mail to Andy Rodriguez. She will state that this e-mail is to follow up on the discussion of a sign at the February meeting. She will include the proposed language for the sign. Then she will ask Andy about how we should proceed to get the sign. Leah will send a copy of the e-mail to Ellen Fee.

When Andy responds, Leah will work out the details that are necessary to get the job done.

Everyone at the meeting liked the idea of placing the sign at the bottom of the hill and just to the west of the wooden steps.

Cell Tower Fund Application Schedule

We discussed major problems with Cell Tower funding. A chronic problem is that we don't spend the money that we have. Funds not spent by the end of the calendar year go to waste.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan remarked that we are cautious about spending and the caution results in money that is not spent. Louise said that it is discouraging that money goes unspent. David Tierney said that we need to balance controlling our budget against the desire to spend all \$17,000 that the Cell Tower provides each year.

More Ideas, Better Ideas

One solution is to create more good ideas that make wise use of the Cell Tower money. We have many unmet needs. These needs could be met by investments using Cell Tower funds. Barb Deming suggested that Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee

members should work harder at generating ideas that make use of the funds to solve problems.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that NSVC members should not be shy about submitting ideas. NSVC members have substantial knowledge of community needs. NSVC people are also personally invested in projects related to parks.

Leah also pointed out that the Environment & Parks Committee Cell Tower Funds Scorecard tends to encourage a consistent level of quality for proposals. Every person submitting a proposal has to answer the same questions. The answers determine the score for the project.

Barb Deming said that we need a new approach to distributing funds geographically. Most Cell Tower money goes to projects connected to Merriam Park and to Desnoyer Park. As things stand now, the Cell Tower Funds Scorecard gives priority to projects connected to Merriam Park or to Desnoyer Park.

However, Leah pointed out that we have not yet had any conflicts over use of funds. The Scorecard is helpful for promoting a fair distribution of funds.

No one suggested making changes to the Scorecard.

Events are the Biggest Items

We analyzed the use of Cell Tower Funds. Events are biggest funding items. The annual events listed below take up the bulk of our \$17,000 annual Cell Tower revenue.

Community Events and Their Costs for 2022

Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam	\$4,000
Midway Peace Park Event	\$3,000
Desnoyer Park Picnic	\$3,000
Desnoyer Fire & Ice Winter Event	\$4,000

These projects are sometimes called “legacy events.” They come up every year. To manage our funds well we need to do a good job of managing funds for the legacy events.

Because they take up so much of our budget, Leah Timberlake Sullivan suggested special attention for funding the legacy events. She suggested that we arrange for funding all four events at the March meeting for each year. This will ensure that all costs for the events will be covered. She said that we should consider funding for all other projects after securing the funds for the events.

Leah said that voting on funds for event in March will get the funding process going earlier in the year. This will move us toward the goal of using all funds during the year.

A Motion for Funding

Jenny Keyser proposed a motion to reorganize our funding process:

Each year at its March meeting the Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee (NSVC) will consider dedicating money from the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund for

Ice Cream Peanut Butter & Jam,

The Desnoyer Park Summer Picnic,

The Midway Peace Park Fall Fun Event,

The Desnoyer Park Fire & Ice Winter Event, and any other proposed community events.

The committee will not consider providing Cell Tower funds for other projects until funding for the above events is established or rejected.

Each year at the June meeting the NSVC will consider funding for other projects.

For the year 2023 only, the NSVC will consider funding for the community events at the April meeting. For the year 2023 only, the NSVC will consider funding for other projects at the July meeting.

Ellen Fee determined that all NSVC members present had attended at least three NSVC meetings. Therefore, all people attending the meeting were considered to be voting members.

One member abstained from voting. All other members voted in favor of the resolution. The resolution passed.

Micro-Grants Program

The Micro-Grants provide funds for small projects that bring residents together through activities in their community. Other goals for the Micro-Grant Program are described on the UPDC website.

Ellen Fee said that for years the UPDC Neighborhood Involvement Committee administered the Micro-Grant Program. However, the Neighborhood Involvement Committee was merged with the Environment & Parks Committee to form the Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality Committee (NSVC). Now the NSVC administers the Micro-Grant Program.

How to Apply for a Micro-Grant

The Neighborhood Involvement Committee will now accept applications for Union Park District Council (UPDC) 2023 Micro-Grants.

Interested citizens can find an electronic application form on the UPDC website. People who want a paper application form can contact Leah Timberlake Sullivan, Executive Director. Ellen Fee will update 2023 application forms and flyers. She will send them to Leah.

Ellen described recent Micro-Grant projects. One example is a garden near Dayton Avenue and Fairview. It was set up in 2022 by a Girl Scout troop. After Ash trees were removed, the scouts used the tree stumps as planters. A UPDC Micro-Grant provided funds for garden supplies. Another example was the project to paint a decorative design on the pavement at the intersection of Inglehart Avenue and Herschel.

Micro-Grants are for \$400 or less. The UPDC provides a total of \$1600 for Micro-Grants. The UPDC website has guidelines for Micro-Grant projects. The website describes projects that are acceptable and it lists the kind of projects that do not qualify.

Due Dates for Applications

There was a brief discussion about due dates for applications. We adopted the same deadlines as in prior years.

May 15 will be the due date of for the first round of applications.

Proposals submitted after May 15 will be approved on a “rolling basis.” Residents of the Union Park area can submit Micro-Grant application after May 15. However, the Micro-Grants have to be approved at a meeting of the UPDC Board. For applications submitted after May 15, the UPDC board will not approve funding until the July meeting or a later meeting. For 2023, the last day to submit requests for Micro-Grants is September 1.

We discussed how to get the word out to people who may want to apply for grants. Ellen said that we will have an announcement in the April 1 Union Park District Council e-Newsletter. We will put out messages on social media and by word of mouth.

There is a need to get out the word so that people apply now. Jenny Keyser said that many grants are awarded for gardening projects. It is important to encourage gardeners to apply in time to get grants to buy supplies for the planting season.

We discussed making a special effort to encourage members of under-represented groups to apply for Micro-Grants. Kingsley Hollon-Coleman is the UPDC Community Engagement Associate. He is also a Macalester College student. We will work with him to find non-white people and others who are not well represented by the UPDC. We will encourage members of these groups to apply for grants.

Reviewing Applications

At the April NSVC meeting we will organize a process for reviewing and ranking applications. We will invite past Micro-Grant award winners to be on the review panel. We will review the earliest applications at the April NSVC meeting.

We discussed how we will process payments to people who win Micro-Grants. Ellen Fee said that we will plan to make payments by June 1st to people who get the early grant awards. Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that she can get checks from the bookkeeper who handles the UPDC account at the City of Saint Paul. Leah will deliver the checks to people who win awards.

The requirement to get Micro-Grants approved at UPDC Board meetings slows down the process of awarding grants. Leah suggested that we work out a way to award grants so that so that we don't have to get Board approval each year.

Anything else/suggestions for next time?

Most of the April agenda will be devoted to voting on resolutions to fund community events. We will also review Micro-Grant requests.

Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

An attachment to the minutes is on the next page.

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>