

UPDC

Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee Meeting Minutes

November 15, 2022

Chair: Ellen Fee

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

Staff: Leah Timberlake Sullivan, Program 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.

The October 18 minutes were accepted as written.

Midway Peace Park Tree Project

Jenny Keyser led the latest discussion about trees at Midway Peace Park.

After several years of planning and construction, Midway Peace Park opened in June of 2021. The park was intended to provide green space and add to the tree canopy in a low-income urban area.

Trees Are Dying in the Park

Jenny Keyser recapped the problem of the trees.

The design of the park called for planting 73 large trees. However, Park & Recreation officials say that only 50 trees were planted. Out of the trees planted, 33 have died. The trees were planted before drought of 2022. The trees died during the drought because of lack of water.

The Problem of No Water

None of the trees had a water bag when they were planted. Unfortunately, the park does not have a source of water for the trees. The park infrastructure is designed so that water from rain will flow away from the park.

A water truck might be a solution. However, a heavy water truck cannot be driven into the park. There is a water fountain for human use in the park, but the fountain is not turned on.

At the October meeting, we discussed some other ideas on how to get water to the trees. None of the ideas discussed appeared to be workable.

The Cost of Replacing Trees

Jenny is thinking about how to replace trees that have died.

Jenny described the cost for fixing the problem. The estimated cost to remove a dead tree is \$300.00. The estimated cost to plant a replacement tree is \$360.00.

We have a total cost estimate of \$23,000 to replace 33 trees that have died plus planting 3 additional trees.

Lobbying the City of Saint Paul

At the October meeting, we discussed lobbying the Department of Parks & Recreation to plant new trees. Jenny Keyser volunteered to contact the Saint Paul Parks & Recreation Department.

She contacted Andy Rodriguez, Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department Director. She told him about the trees that were dying and that we want the City of Saint Paul to plant replacement trees.

Andy Rodriguez responded by having two other Park & Recreation Department officials contact Jenny. Rachel Coyle, Urban Forester Supervisor, contacted Jenny. Allison Messer, Design and Construction Manager, also contacted Jenny.

The city has been planting tiny seedlings to replace trees that have been removed to treat the Emerald Ash Borer. However, Allison Messer said that the City of Saint Paul at the present time has no funds for planting the type of large trees needed to replace the lost trees at Midway Peace Park.

Possible Sources of Funds to Replace Trees

The City of Saint Paul wants to sell a parking lot near the park. They are talking to Concordia University as a potential buyer. Funds raised by the sale could be used to help Midway Peace Park.

If the City can't provide funds for trees, we are looking for other funding sources:

- The Saint Paul Parks Conservancy website says that they will soon launch a fund-raising project for Midway Peace Park.

- Minnesota United Foot Ball Club. Their website says that they donate to the Saint Paul Parks Conservancy.
- The Trust for Public Land.
- The Toro Foundation.
- The City of Saint Paul Sales Tax Revitalization (STAR) Program

Jenny Keyser said that an amount of \$5,000 from Cell Tower fund will not put a dent in the problem. However, funds from the Cell Tower might be combined with funds from one or more of the above sources to provide \$23,000 for replacing trees.

Jenny said that if we raise less than \$23,000, we may be able to plant less than 36 trees. However, we can plant enough trees to make a meaningful improvement.

Ellen Fee asked if would it help to get the Union Park District Council (UPDC) Board to pledge some cell tower funds.

Jenny said that making a pledge may not work because the grants from the Cell Tower fund work on a reimbursement basis. In other words, someone would have to purchase trees and then get reimbursed.

A Meeting with a City Council Member

Jenny Keyser has arranged a meeting with Russel Balenger, the Interim Member of the City Council. He replaced a Council Member who resigned. He represents Ward 1. The Midway Peace Park is in Ward 1.

The principal reason for the meeting is to advocate for funding for replacement trees from the STAR fund or possibly some other city funding.

The meeting will be a face-to-face meeting on December 1.

Jenny Keyser said that she thinks that we should request four people from the community to meet with Council Member Balenger. She is thinking that one of the four

should represent Skyline Tower. Another person should represent Gordon Parks High School.

The next UPDC Board of Directors meeting is on December 7. Ellen Fee and Jenny will report to the Board about results from the December 1 meeting and also other details about the tree replacement project.

No Mow Plan

The No Mow Area is an area of tall grass and Oak trees in the southwest corner of Merriam Park. Union Park District Council (UPDC) volunteers do work to preserve the No Mow Area as more natural park land.

Achievements in 2022

Jerry Clendenin talked about what volunteers have accomplished in the spring, summer, and fall.

We improved the area in a narrow strip of land along Merriam Lane. The strip was covered by Purslane, an ugly looking weed. We removed the Purslane in October, 2021. We planted grass seed.

Unfortunately, Ragweed took advantage of the bare ground. Before the grass grew up, Ragweed moved in and covered the strip. Ragweed formed a low wall of weeds along Merriam Lane.

In the summer of 2022, volunteers removed Ragweed and planted more grass seed. Unfortunately, the grass seed did not grow because of the drought. We have no practical way to water the area of grass seed.

Goals for Maintaining the No Mow Area

In Jerry Clendenin's view, progress is measured by aesthetics. We are making progress when the No Mow Area looks better. Jerry Clendenin said that the No Mow Area looks

better following work by the volunteers in the summer. Hopefully, the grass seed will grow and make the area even more attractive.

Jerry Clendenin said that he enjoys seeing a part of Merriam Park that is a more natural area. However, he does not want an area that is overrun by weeds.

Our usual contact at the Parks & Recreation Department is Mary Henke-Haney. Mary Henke-Haney talks about maintaining the No Mow Area as a “savannah” with Oak Trees, a few other mature trees, and Fescue Grass. Unfortunately, many ugly plants that we call weeds have moved in. The area is far from a perfect savannah. We are not meeting the Parks & Recreation Department goal of an Oak Tree savannah.

Jerry Clendenin proposed a goal for the volunteers who do maintenance work.

The goal is to see that every plant in the No-Mow Area is an attractive, nice-looking plant.

The goal is a long run goal. It is an aesthetic goal.

Improvements in the strip near Merriam Lane demonstrates how we can advance toward the aesthetic goal. We have removed ugly Purslane weeds and Ragweed. We have planted nice-looking grass in place of the weeds. If the grass grows in the spring of 2023, we will have a strip of land where every plant is an attractive, nice-looking plant.

Jerry Clendenin said that recent statements at Union Park District Council (UPDC) meetings indicate that most UPDC members support these goals.

Goals for Research

Jerry Clendenin has been studying books on gardening.

He wants to learn to identify all plants in the No Mow Area.

Jerry is researching the best times of year for gardening activities. For example, the University of Minnesota Extension Service website says that the best time to plant grass seed is from middle August to middle September. It is also desirable to know the best times for pulling weeds.

It will be helpful to learn about other topics:

- Controlling an area of wild raspberries at the west end of the No Mow Area.
- Determining if we can use the weeds that we pull out as nitrogen fertilizer.
- Encouraging the Fescue Grass to win in the competition with weeds.

Planning for the Next Maintenance Event

We discussed how to determine the best dates for 2023 No Mow maintenance events.

Jerry Clendenin suggests an event in April. The City of Saint Paul employees cut down the “weed trees” in the fall of 2022. A maintenance event in April, will allow us to get going before the weed trees grow back.

Get going early also allows us to get in two or more maintenance events in 2023.

Barb Deming said that she favors at least one maintenance event in fall.

However, Barb said that we should not pull weeds in October. In late fall, the seeds on dry weed plants will fall off and grow more weeds.

Barb Deming suggested that interested people should make contact by e-mail to work out a date for the next maintenance event.

Planning to Find New UPDC Members

Jerry Clendenin said that we should plan out maintenance events so that we encourage people who live near Merriam Park to volunteer to work on the project. The spontaneous volunteers may become Union Park District Council members.

He said that we need to consider dates that will attract volunteers.

For many past events, we have placed flyers in the neighborhood to invite volunteers.

The Native Plant Area Near the Keystone Building

In addition to the No Mow Area, there is a small garden with native plants. The smaller garden is near the Keystone Community Services building in Merriam Park.

Jenny Keyser asked about plans for this small native plant garden.

Barb Deming said that Union Park District Council people started the garden. A few years later, a volunteer group from Keystone Community Services removed weeds and placed mulch. She said that we had problems coordinating the work done by the Union Park people and the work done by the Keystone people.

Barb said that over time the Keystone group did more and more work on the garden. The Union Park District Council people did less work. Barb Deming said that now she considers the native plant garden to be a project of Keystone Community Services. Union Park people will not be working on the native plant garden.

A Sign for the No Mow Area

Barb Deming has written out a statement for a sign. The goal of the sign is to show the advantages of maintaining the No Mow Area. It also explains the role of volunteers.

A copy of her draft for the sign is attached at the end of these minutes.

Jerry Clendenin has looked at website for companies in the sign business. He is thinking of possible steps to produce a sign:

- Get some price quotes from sign vendors.
- Ask the Parks & Recreation Department for permission to install a sign.
- Request money from the Merriam Park Cell Tower Fund.
- Have a vendor make a sign using Barb Deming's copy.
- Work with the Parks & Recreation Department to get the sign installed.

All About Weeds in the No Mow Area

Jerry Clendenin has studied a book on weeds.

He is hoping to find a better solution for the “weed tree” problem. Weed trees are young trees that are growing where we want Fescue Grass. Seeds from mature trees that are not Oaks fall in No Mow Area and start growing. Employees from the Parks & Recreation Department cut down the weed trees every year. They apply herbicide to the cut trees. Then every year the weed trees grow back!

He suggests that we discuss which plants to designate as “weeds.” Some weeds are useful plants. For example, we can consider that some plants may occupy certain spots so that they prevent weed trees from growing.

We also need to learn better ways to control the plants in the No Mow Area that we do designate as weeds.

Jerry said that he would like to map the No Mow Area. Certain weeds only grow in certain parts of the No Mow Area. The limited areas make it easier to control weeds. For example, Canada Thistle grows in a sunny area from the middle of the No Mow to an area close to the wooden steps at the east end of the area. When we get the Thistles out of this area, the entire No Mow Area is largely free from Thistles.

Ragweed grows in several areas of the No Mow Area. However, it does not grow everywhere. We have cleaned up the Ragweed near Merriam Lane. Next, we might

clean out the Ragweed near the top end of the wooden steps. Jerry said that we can get control of Ragweed one small area at a time.

Cell Tower Funds Review

Allen Saunders appeared at the October meeting. He represented the Desnoyer Park Improvement Association.

He talked about the Desnoyer Park ice rink. The ice rink is the main focus for winter activities in the Desnoyer Park neighborhood.

Volunteers maintain and groom the ice surface. They work with a Zamboni machine. Unfortunately, the Zamboni is wearing out.

The Desnoyer Park Association would like to purchase a new ice sweeping machine. At the October meeting, we approved providing \$4,600 from the Cell Tower Fund for the Desnoyer Park Association to purchase the ice sweeping machine.

They would like to get a new machine before the Desnoyer Park Ice Rink & Winter Skating Party on December 30. However, they are running into a problem. They are not sure that they can get the machine purchased by end of 2022.

The Cell Tower Funds work on reimbursement basis. For this type of expenditure, Allen Saunders and the Desnoyer Park people need to buy the machine and present an invoice to get reimbursed. The Desnoyer Park people will have to collect \$4,600 from one or more citizens to buy the machine. One or more residents will be making a temporary loan until the Parks & Recreation Department pays.

A related problem is that Cell Tower Funds appropriated in calendar year 2022 must be spent in calendar year 2022. If the Desnoyer Park people are delayed and they purchase the machine in 2023, they will not get reimbursed!

If they don't get the machine purchased in 2022, the \$4,600 appropriated in 2022 will simply disappear.

We discussed ways for Desnoyer Park Association to get out of the dilemma.

A possible solution is for Allen to fill out another Cell Tower Fund Application Form and submit it in 2023. The Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee will have to review the 2023 request. The Union Park District Council Board of Directors will have to approve the 2023 request. It almost certainly will take weeks before the Desnoyer Park people are reimbursed.

Leah Timberlake Sullivan will talk to Allen about submitting another application.

Understanding the Cell Tower Fund Accounting

Jenny Keyser wanted to know who administers the Cell Tower Fund?

No one present at the November meeting actually knew who administers the fund.

Then Jenny suggested that Andy Rodriguez, the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department Director, can come to one of our meetings. He can explain how the Cell Tower Fund works. He could cover procedures for requesting funds and accounting for funds.

Ellen Fee said that it will desirable to have a tutorial on the Cell Tower Fund.

Ellen will contact Andy Rodriguez and invite him to make a presentation at one our meetings.

Jenny suggests a “wish list.” This would be a list of desirable projects so that we are ready to advocate for them at appropriate times. For 2023 we can plan out spending so that we use all of the Cell Tower Funds before the year ends.

The Merriam Park Cell Tower fund provides \$17,000 per year.

Not counting the Desnoyer Park ice machine, for the year 2022, we have approved payments of \$11,000.

We discussed the state of accounting for the Cell Tower Fund. The Union Park District Council website has a record of projects that have been funded with Cell Tower money. However, Jerry Clendenin said that it is hard for most people to find the spending record.

It is easier to find the Park Improvement Fund Application Form on the UPDC website. Citizens can also find the Park Improvement Fund Scorecard. These two documents are used to suggest projects that can be financed by the Cell Tower Fund.

There is a spread sheet with Cell Tower Fund projects. It lists the status of each project and the amounts appropriated and spent. Jerry Clendenin has a copy; however, his copy has not been updated since the Covid Pandemic started.

Leah said that the purpose of the spreadsheet is to maintain good accounting and to see that projects get done.

Other Updates/Ideas

Monitoring the Micro-Grant Projects

The Micro-grants provide funds for small projects that bring residents together through activities in their community. The grants are for \$400 or less.

For 2022, the Neighborhood Sustainability & Vitality Committee approved Micro-Grants for

- Two community gardens.
- A garden to grow tulip bulbs.
- A garden on a traffic round-about at Shields Avenue and Wheeler Street.
- A little free natural history library. This will be like a little free library for books, expect that it will contain interesting stones and fossils.

Leah said that she will contact the 2022 Micro-grant recipients. She will see how they are doing on their projects.

She will also ask each recipient to send her pictures.

Leah will report to a future NSVC meeting.

Motion to Adjourn

We adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

**See Attached Suggested Text for a No Mow Sign
on page 14**

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>