

**INVER GROVE HEIGHTS SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
MONDAY, JUNE 17, 2013 – 8150 BARBARA AVENUE**

**1. CALL TO ORDER** The City Council of Inver Grove Heights met in special session on Monday, June 17, 2013, in the City Council Chambers. Councilmember Piekarski Krech called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Council members Bartholomew, Madden, and Mueller; City Administrator Lynch, Assistant City Administrator Teppen, Parks and Recreation Director Carlson, and Deputy Clerk Kennedy.

Also in attendance were Parks and Recreation Advisory Commissioners Eiden, Hapka, Huffman, Johnson, and Schueller.

Mayor Tourville arrived at 7:20 p.m.

**2. PARK CHAMPIONS/PARK COMMISSION REPORT**

Commissioner Eiden stated in August 2012 the Parks Commission recommended that Council hire HKGI to update the system plan. A Park Champions group, comprised of 10-15 residents, was also created to participate and help direct the process. The group met seven (7) times over the course of a few months to learn about how the parks and recreation system was developed, how the system is used by residents, which features are most used/popular, and to identify the current and future needs of the system. The group was also provided information on how funding for the system is developed and what financial challenges exist in the future. He explained the goal of the system plan was to develop a 10-15 year vision for where Parks and Recreation is going, and a five (5) year prioritized guide on how to get there. The plan would address parks, recreation programs, facilities, trails, open space, historic and cultural resources. The plan would also help the City plan for a sustainable future that matches community priorities with available resources. He stated the City had considerable assets in its parks system and needed to gain public input to determine what is important to residents and plan for the future of the system.

Ms. Sara Wiplinger reiterated the Park Champions group was comprised of 10-15 resident volunteers who were advocates in the community and who were interested in the sustainability of the park system. She outlined the resources the group utilized to gather information. She stated the group reviewed the findings of the 2010 Decision Resources survey, a 2012 on-line questionnaire that received 490 responses from households over several months, a community open house, and a focus group meeting with stakeholders and recreation providers.

Mr. Mike Challeen explained the Park Champions main premise was “we need parks”. He stated parks and recreation was known to attract private investment. Across the country, access to parks and open spaces has become a measure of community wealth and a tool for attracting businesses and residents by guaranteeing quality of life and economic health. It was found that corporate CEOs identified employee quality of life as the third most important factor in locating a new business. Small company owners felt that recreation, parks, and open space were among the highest priorities in choosing a new location for their business. Parks and recreation was also an important factor in attracting residential investment. Single family residential properties located near open space were worth more than properties that were not. He reiterated that parks, recreation, and open space had been shown to provide tangible positive economic benefits. He explained the current state of the City’s parks included an aging infrastructure. He stated there was no Park Maintenance Capital Replacement fund prior to the year 2000. He opined that funding for capital repair and replacement had never been adequately funded or planned for by the City. The assets of the park system would require significant investment in the coming years to maintain what currently exists. He reviewed key components of the Inver Grove Heights parks system compared to other cities in Dakota County including Rosemount, Farmington, South St. Paul, Hastings, West St. Paul, and Mendota Heights. He noted the City ranked either average or below average in key categories including: miles of trails, parkland as a percentage of all city acreage, and parks per 1,000 people. He stated the City currently budgeted \$200,000 annually for the parks system and estimated \$500,000 would be required annually to maintain the existing amenities. Without increased funding, basic recreation facilities like playgrounds, tennis courts and recreation buildings would not be able to be replaced in the future.

Ms. Wiplinger outlined the recommendations of the Park Champions group. The first priority was to fully fund the Park Maintenance Capital Replacement Fund (444) by 2015. The group felt it was extremely important to take care of the City's existing capital investment in park and trail amenities. The second priority was to finance the existing system properly. The third priority was to develop a well connected park and trail system, particularly in the Northwest Area as it develops. The fourth priority was to make key park and trail improvements in the next five (5) to ten (10) years. She explained inadequate park funding would affect the quality of life of residents. She opined that the City's liability would increase, increased staff maintenance time would be required, amenities may begin to look unkept, amenities may not meet safety or ADA standards and would need to be removed, and users may feel less safe. She stated the City's financial position could be diminished as property values may decrease, businesses may not move to the City, or existing businesses may choose to leave the City. She provided examples of the reduction in amenities that could potentially occur if funding was not increased and continued to remain at \$200,000.

Mr. Challeen explained part of the second priority was to identify sustainable funding sources. He stated the group felt staff should be directed to develop sustainable funding recommendations. He noted possible sources could include the General Fund, park dedication funds, referendum, or franchise fees.

Ms. Wiplinger stated the third priority, in addition to focusing on the Northwest Area, included planning new parks and trails as the City grows to keep pace with increased demand from residents. When new assets are added an increase in the Park Maintenance Capital Replacement Fund would also be necessary. She noted this was contingent on the expectation that developers would pay for construction of new parks and trails, primarily in the Northwest Area.

Mr. Challeen reviewed the fourth priority to expand funding for new park development and make key improvements to the existing system to enhance the overall experience. He stated the most popular amenity in the park system was the trails. In the 2010 Community Survey it was found that 60% of residents used the trail system regularly. It was suggested that the existing trail system could be further improved by connecting the priority gaps, adding off road trails in the Northwest Area, and adding key connections in the southwest portion of the City and at Rich Valley. He reiterated the suggested improvements were meant to be completed over a 5-10 year period. He opined it was essential to make the trail system a community priority.

Councilmember Madden questioned how franchise fees could be used as a funding source.

Mr. Carlson stated the City would collect fees from gas and electric companies under the premise that they are using City property for the location of utilities.

Councilmember Madden stated the utility companies would simply pass that fee onto their customers. He added he was not in favor of charging additional fees because not every person charged would necessarily be a user of the parks system. He commended the Park Champions group for their work and stated the Council recognized the issues that needed to be addressed. He stated the problem was they needed to know where the money was going to come from before they could commit to specific funding levels for the system.

Commissioner Eiden stated the most important aspect was educating residents so they understood how much it would cost just to maintain the existing system. He asked the Council to consider and explore all possible funding sources to come up with a viable solution in the next five (5) years. He noted everyone involved recognized that all actions and funding priorities needed to be clearly justified to the Council and the residents.

Councilmember Bartholomew stated he would like to see usage levels for all of the system's amenities in order to make a determination based on need for funding. He opined the City needed to demonstrate a true justification and benefit for how the funding would be allocated across the spectrum of amenities.

Councilmember Madden opined future maintenance costs needed to be considered in conjunction with

any expansion of the system.

Councilmember Piekarski Krech stated citizens needed understand the true cost of amenities and then decide what they want and what is important to them. She opined there was not a lot of expendable money available. She encouraged the Park Champions group to get the business community involved and make them a part of the education outreach efforts. She stated the group had the difficult task of trying to get positive information out to the community that would inform residents and make them a key part of the decision making process. She noted she would not be in favor of a franchise fee.

Ms. Wiplinger questioned if everyone could agree that it should be a priority to take care of the City's current assets in the system.

Councilmember Bartholomew responded in the affirmative, provided they could demonstrate a true need and justification for the cost.

Councilmember Mueller suggested a usage analysis of the trail system.

Mayor Tourville stated it was a quality of life issue that was very important to many residents. He noted if the City did decide to proceed with a referendum the most important component of the process would be education of the residents on what the money would be specifically used for and what it would mean if the referendum was not passed.

Commissioner Eiden stated it seemed that the Council was taking a positive yet cautious approach to the issue. He added that everyone involved recognized the economic realities and challenges facing the City.

Councilmember Madden suggested that staff, the Park Champions group, and the Parks Commission focus primarily on the first priority, maintaining the existing system.

Councilmember Bartholomew stated the City may have to consider retaining open space for a period of time until funding becomes available.

Commissioner Hapka clarified the Council wanted to educate the residents to determine what amenities they want in the system.

Ms. Wiplinger commented that a lot of residents don't realize how much they would miss certain amenities until they are gone.

Mayor Tourville encouraged the group to put a dollar value to each amenity to determine what residents really want.

Councilmember Bartholomew asked staff to put together information for the Council that would show what the potential funding levels (\$500,000, \$400,000, \$300,000, \$200,000) would achieve and then prioritize the amenities included within each level.

Commissioner Eiden stated he would like to keep the Park Champions group actively involved in the process.

Councilmember Piekarski Krech reiterated the importance of assigning dollar figures to each specific amenity.

Commissioner Eiden noted there could be amenities that were no longer needed or used that could be eliminated from the budget and money could be reallocated. He stated the City had a considerable asset in the parks system and the goal was to preserve that asset.

Mayor Tourville opined the amenities of the parks system set the community apart from others.

### **3. ADJOURN**

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.**