

**CITY OF ST. FRANCIS
ST. FRANCIS, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
July 18, 2012**

1. **Call to Order:** The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Rich Skordahl.
2. **Oath of Office:** Joel Olson
3. **Roll Call:** Present were Chairman Rich Skordahl, Commission Members, Roni Ronyak, Ray Steinke, Joel Olson, City Council Member Tim Brown, City Planner Nate Sparks (Northwest Associated Consultants), and Planning Commission Secretary Kathy Lind.
4. **Adopt Agenda:** MOTION BY STEINKE, SECOND BY OLSON TO ADOPT THE JULY 18, 2012 PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA. MOTION CARRIED 4-0
5. **Approve Minutes:** MOTION BY RONYAK, SECOND BY STEINKE TO APPROVE THE JUNE 20, 2012 PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED 4-0
6. **Public Comment:** None

7. **Ordinance Discussion – Keeping of Bees.**

BACKGROUND

In area cities, there have become more frequent reports of people keeping bees on urban lots. This has caused issues between neighbors and complaints to the cities. Currently, the City of St. Francis does not have any direct ordinance relating to the keeping of bees.

BEE KEEPING ORDINANCES

Generally, cities regulate bees as “livestock” as they are common elements of agricultural uses. St. Francis allows livestock on parcels greater than 5 acres in size in animal enclosures greater than 100 feet from any property line but does not specifically mention bees in the list of animals so regulated. Many ordinances restrict non-agricultural uses to one hive per parcel.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE

Based on how the City’s current ordinances are structured related to animals and how other cities approach this issue, the following draft ordinance language is proposed for the Planning Commission’s discussion:

8-3-5: KEEPING OF BEES.

- A. Bees may be kept on parcels five (5) acres in size or greater.
- B. No parcel may have more than one hive unless it is an agricultural use.
- C. All hives must be kept one hundred (100) feet from any property line.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Planning Commission members requested that Nate Sparks present the above changes in final form at the next planning commission meeting for recommendation to City Council.

8. **Comprehensive Planning Discussion – Park System Goals.**

BACKGROUND

The St. Francis Public Works Department had requested an analysis of the current park system and the future park plan. The goal is to evaluate the current system and plans and make recommendations on how to more efficiently and effectively deliver service to the public. This review included inspections of the parks, review of acquisition records, and a comparison of the existing Park Plan against the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Upon this review the following issues were noted:

- The current park system has several parks with service area overlaps. A few parks have very limited residential service areas. A more targeted approach to acquiring active park land is recommended. This would result in the need for changes to the current Park Plan.
- The current park system and plan both feature numerous smaller parks requiring additional maintenance activity leading to depleted funding for replacement and development. A policy towards fewer, larger parks is recommended to be included into the Park Plan. Consideration of future maintenance costs should be carefully considered before building parks and trails.
- Several parks have limited usable area or visibility from the right-of-way resulting in underdevelopment and vandalism. Minimum park site selection criteria are recommended for incorporation into the Park Plan. Existing parks not fitting the criteria should be improved, reclassified, or divested.

The Planning Commission is asked to review the recommendations brought forward from this analysis for consideration of making revisions to the existing system and plans.

RECOMMENDED PARK SYSTEM PLAN POLICIES

At the time the City of St. Francis adopted the current Park Plan, the method for determining the amount of parkland necessary was to match population projections to the amount of land acquired throughout the system. This is a valid way to assess parkland needs when tied to actual land use. Since the adoption of the plan, some land use assumptions for the City have changed. Many of the areas targeted for future parks are now going to have significantly fewer future residents. Some areas where parks have already been acquired will also have fewer residents than initially planned.

The current plan also seeks to have established many small, minor parks much like has been the past park development practice in the past. This is an effective practice when supplying recreational needs to targeted areas of population. The Public Works Department has noted a concern that the expense of upkeep and development for the number of existing and future parks may be above likely budgeting thresholds. Thus, the goal would be to keep the same level of recreational planning available while finding ways to more efficiently provide park related services. This will ensure that the City can afford the routine maintenance for existing parks while also having enough resources to take care of future park needs.

Park systems that seek to maximize efficiency need to have a vision and policies to guide the realization of this goal. The following are the key components to maximizing efficiency within a municipal park system and properly choosing sites for land acquisition:

Categorization

Parks should be clearly categorized based on use. This allows the City to focus resources in appropriate manners. It would be recommended that the City focus on just two key active park categories and categorize the existing parks and future parks as such. The two major categories should be simply neighborhood and community level parks. Programming for community level parks would be facilities that draw from the City as a whole such as ball fields and other such facilities that would require parking lots and sanitary facilities. Neighborhood level parks would be for playground equipment and other limited facilities intended to serve residents within the service area.

Accessibility

Parks should be located on higher classification roadways. Parks should not be located on local streets where users will interfere with the residential nature of the area. Parks should have sidewalks or trails leading to the site from the neighborhood residences. Every park should be designed to handle the traffic it

generates. Parks should connect to one another and key community facilities via the trail and sidewalk system.

Usability

Neighborhood parks should be of a size that reflects the community values but are recommended to be between 3 and 10 acres in size. This allows for more centralized facilities which lowers maintenance costs and increases the usability of the park. Parks that are intended to serve the community as a whole should be 20+ acres in size unless they serve a special purpose for which a smaller site is sufficient. Parks should be given names and signage that are independent of the subdivision that they are found in to avoid deterring residents from other neighborhoods using the park. Existing parks may not meet these standards and can be considered for expansion, replacement, supplementation, or reassignment.

Visibility

Parks should have good visibility into the site from the right-of-way and the neighborhood. Good visibility increases safety and limits opportunities for vandalism and crime. Vandalism results in premature replacement costs.

Maintenance

In order to limit liability, park equipment should be replaced on a regular schedule. The City should plan on replacing equipment and amenities every 20 to 25 years and begin routine safety inspections. A capital improvement budget should be made to track replacement costs. The City should plan on replacing equipment as a priority before new equipment unless new priorities are developed.

Trails are usually maintained by the City. Sidewalks are usually maintained by the neighboring property owners. As more trails are installed, the more the City is committing resources to maintaining trails. In some situations, a sidewalk or bike lane could serve the same purpose of a trail. Trails that the City does not wish to maintain and are not used year round by the public could become seasonal and closed during winter. Trails should be put on a regular maintenance schedule which should include seal coating and planning for replacement.

Open space should only be acquired in fee title when there is an identifiable public purpose. Ownership of the land comes with responsibilities for maintenance. When the City does come into ownership of property, low maintenance vegetation should be considered. If an open space parcel is remote, contracting of maintenance may also be considered.

Service Areas

The community should establish an appropriate distance for a service area. It is common to utilize a ¼ to ½ mile radius for neighborhood park service areas, as this is a common standard for walking distance. Parks serving neighborhoods should serve more than one development. Parks should be located in areas that are accessible to as many people as possible to maximize use and limit the total amount of parkland needed to service the community.

The City of St. Francis has some rural residential neighborhoods. It has been the City's practice to provide parks in these areas for the residents. This policy should be re-examined. Rural development densities are lower and the service areas would end up with a very limited amount of residences within ½ mile. Larger scale community parks or other types of special destination parks are appropriate for rural areas provided they are not dependent upon a central location.

PARK SERVICE AREA ANALYSIS

In order to establish whether or not the City has acquired adequate or excessive parkland, a service area analysis should be conducted. Parks should have independent service areas serving residential neighborhoods. A map was included showing each park with a service area of ½ mile around it. It should be noted that Highway 47, Rum River, and other such barriers lie within several of the service area circles, so care should be taken when analyzing overlap.

PARK SYSTEM AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The City of St. Francis had made a practice of acquiring land for parks and natural areas within most new developments. The Public Works Department has expressed interest in exploring a new direction that maximizes efficiency within the park system in order to limit future budget increases due to maintenance of parkland. If the City chooses to go in this direction, the following actions would be appropriate, as part of a Park Plan Amendment:

Adopt new park categories and definitions

The existing park plan uses “Complex”, “Mid-Size Park”, and “Small Passive” as categories. Instead, it would be recommended for the City to use “Neighborhood Park” and “Community Park” and focus acquisition of parkland on active park facilities. The park category definitions should fit the concept of fewer, larger parks. Acquisition of natural areas and open space should be primarily done through easement agreements.

Consider maintenance responsibilities for park plan components

For every component in the park plan, the maintenance responsibility should be considered. Additional parks mean additional maintenance costs and routine scheduled replacement. Future park areas should be limited to what is necessary and what can serve the public in an efficient and organized manner. Trails should only be used when a trail is necessary to separate bicycle and pedestrian traffic from higher classification roadways. Bicycle lanes and sidewalks could replace trails on the trail plan when feasible.

Set minimum standards for acceptability in new park acquisition

Minimum Park standards should be established in order to ensure new parks are a fit within their intended category, accessible, usable for their intended purpose, visible and safe, easy to maintain, and have a specific service area. Such standards should be incorporated into the park plan to ensure the City is communicating its intent to the public and potential sub dividers of land.

Re-evaluate the need for rural neighborhood level parks

The City completed a Park & Trail Plan in 2005. This Plan establishes general priorities and policies for the City’s park system. The Plan was completed prior to the City’s 2030 Land Use Plan. At the time the plan was developed, the City was anticipating future rural residential development. The updated 2030 Land Use Plan set a new minimum development density of one unit per 10 acres in the rural portions of the City. A large number of parks are contemplated in the plan for the rural areas. This may not be appropriate any longer due to this change.

Revise park search areas

If the steps above are taken, the City should also review the current park search areas. The current methodology was to tie search areas to places where the City wanted parks in the future. A more efficient method would be to tie parkland to the areas with a higher number of future housing units.

Consider divestment of parks with inadequate or overlapping service areas

Divesting parkland is a serious matter that should only be done in cases where the park was acquired for a purpose that no longer fits within the City’s goals and policies. If the above steps are taken, it would stand to reason that the City would have a difficult time justifying the maintenance necessary to keep Royal Oaks and possibly Edgewild.

Prior to divestment, the City would need to process a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and in some cases a rezoning. A small number of parks in the City were platted as parkland but none have been considered for this process, as they are currently open space and wetlands. Otherwise, all parks have been platted as Outlots. To be utilized for a purpose other than park, the City or the buyer would need to replat the property. If the property is in a Planned Unit Development, the PUD may need to be amended. Any money acquired from divestment would need to be placed in the Park Dedication Fund.

Incorporate maintenance schedules into park budgeting

In order to provide the safest parks possible, the City will need to set routine maintenance and replacement schedules. The cost for replacing and maintaining equipment should be put in line ahead of new acquisition to ensure there are enough resources to do so.

Require park concept plans with new dedications

Prior to accepting any parkland, the City should require the developer to show the proposed park can meet the needs for which it has been acquired. This can be done by requiring concept plans showing needed facilities within the public park.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Planning Commission finds these concepts to be acceptable and requests additional analysis be conducted and have a draft revisions to the Plan for review at the next Planning Commission meeting for recommendation to City Council.

9. **General Discussion Items by Planning Commissioners.** None

10. **Adjournment:**

MOTION BY STEINKE, SECOND BY RONYAK TO ADJOURN MEETING AT 8:03 P.M. MOTION CARRIED 4-0

Kathy Lind, Zoning Secretary

Date