

Skate Park Special Committee

July 2nd, 2018

The Merrill Skate Park Special Committee met on Monday, July 2nd, 2018 at 4:00 p.m. in the basement conference room at Merrill City Hall.

Members Present: Dan Wendorf, Kyle Gulke, Kate Baker

Visitors: Brad Gulke, Ron Peterson, Rose Marie Peterson, Nancy Meier, Melissa Schroeder, Jeremy Ratliff, Corey Bennett, John VanLieshout, Ryan Schwartzman

Wendorf called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and introduced himself and asked that the other members of the committee introduce themselves as well.

The next item on the agenda was to define the purpose of the committee. Wendorf began the discussion with a brief history of the current skate park on Polk Street as well as the most recent skate park initiative in 2016-17. Wendorf read the memo in the packet from Mayor Woellner regarding the purpose of the committee. It was stated in the memo that the committee "has been created for the purpose of recognizing, researching, and then recommending the location, design, and funding opportunities for a new skate park to the Merrill Parks and Recreation Commission."

The next item on the agenda was to begin compiling a list of potential skate park sites. Wendorf began the discussion by passing out a recent summary that he presented to the Parks & Recreation Commission. The skate park summary discussed the process that the Commission went through for the existing skate park, as well as the recent process when discussing potential locations during a citizen initiative in 2016-17. Wendorf said the most recent initiative for a new skate park was brought forth to provide a destination skate park (minimum of 25,000 square feet) in a location that was safer than the current site and more accessible to visitors from outside of our community. Wendorf stated that the Parks & Recreation Commission was and is supportive of a new skate park but some of the locations that were proposed (for non-park sites) were either not supported by neighboring businesses or did not fit with current or future use plans for certain city owned non-park properties. Wendorf stated the person driving the initiative decided to stop pursuing a new skate park. Wendorf stated that there was extensive discussion and thought that was put into the current site and there is room there to expand if needed (current site is approximately 5,100 square feet) and there is room to expand. The biggest issue with the current site is safety. The Polk St site is located at the confluence of two one way streets and a side street and can be challenging at times to cross in either direction. The main question moving forward with this site is can the safety be improved sufficiently enough to warrant future consideration of this site. Wendorf then went into the other locations that have been discussed in previous Parks & Recreation Commission Meetings. Some of those include: Festival Grounds, American Legion Building area, Streeter Square, Stange Park, Municipal Parking Lot south of Main St downtown), MARC, Ott's Park, and the Memorial Ice Rink area to name a few. Wendorf also mentioned that he has asked City Staff to help compile a list of other City owned vacant properties that could potentially be considered viable so as to give the property a new purpose and not change the current usage/function of an existing park. Wendorf asked both members for their thoughts on location and if they have any preferences. Gulke began by saying the existing site is not safe because of the road crossing difficulties and he favors something more centrally located if at all possible. He also said he does favor the idea of two smaller skate parks in different locations to potentially provide more access to more users. Baker

stated that she likes the potential of a vacant building that could provide four season usage and that she has heard that skaters are looking for simply a little more space to free skate, and she also likes the idea of multiple smaller scale skate parks. Wendorf passed around a few skate park photos from other communities around the Country and pointed out that quite a few of them are not much larger than ours but the layout is more skater friendly. Gulke stated that he likes the idea of incorporating art into the design that would also serve as a skate amenity, similar to the photos of one of the skate parks. Alderman VanLieshout added that the Health & Safety Committee has concerns regarding the safety of the current site. Police Chief Bennett shared the current ordinance (Sec. 36-185 Play Vehicles) stating that it shall be unlawful for any person to operate or ride a skateboard, roller blades, roller skis, roller blades, etc. on any city street or roadway where a sidewalk is available and the defined streets that they are prohibited. Bennett stated that wherever the new skate park is located we should also consider revisiting the current ordinance to allow for a more practical usage of skateboards.

Wendorf wrapped up the location discussion by saying there are many sites to consider and that he would like to wait and see a list of other non-park, City owned properties before finalizing any lists to bring forward to the Parks & Recreation Commission. The committee agreed that it is a good idea to wait and take a thorough look at all possibilities before moving on any sites at this time.

Wendorf then moved the agenda to Public Comment.

Melissa Schroeder stated she would like to see a Parks & Recreation Commission member on this special committee that has been around through the previous skate park discussions in 2016-17 to give perspective. She also shared her disapproval for the Streeter Square site due to similar safety concerns on Third St, current usage as a quiet greenspace area, and potential for increased noise especially with two churches, funeral home, and close residential areas.

Nancy Meier stated she lives across the street and notices a lot of families using the park for quiet green space and believes that Streeter is not a good location. She also said that traffic on Third St can pose similar safety issues as the current location in that it can be quite busy. She also had concerns over parking, especially with the churches and funeral home utilizing some of the same street parking that would compete.

Ryan Schwartzman requested the meetings be held upstairs in the Council Chambers so that they can be video recorded like other city meetings.

Ron Peterson suggested the current equipment at the current skate park be moved to where the Stange Park tennis courts are right now. He said that is centrally located and could potentially serve the same purpose but off of busy Hwy 64.

Jeremy Ratliff implored the committee to stick to the task at hand. He said that there is going to be opposition to virtually any/all sites that are discussed and/or chosen but it is important for progress to pick one and go with it.

Wendorf stated that the next meeting is to be determined. He would like to wait until he has additional (non-park property) information for consideration before being scheduled.

***Motion Gulke, seconded by Baker to adjourn at 4:57 p.m.

***Carried unanimously

Dan Wendorf, Recording Secretary