

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members
Park and Recreation Commission Members
FROM: Bill Waller, City Administrator
DATE: September 19, 2024
RE: Meeting Minutes
September 16, 2024

The La Crescent Park and Recreation Commission met at 5:30 p.m., on Monday, September 16, 2024, in the Wieser Park Pavilion at Wieser Park. The following members were present: Maseray Bangura, Patti Martell, Marge Loch-Wouters, Jon Steffes, Sarah Wetterlin, and Paul McLellan. Commission member Diana Adamski was not in attendance. Also in attendance were Teresa O'Donnell-Ebner, Chris Fortsch, Larry Kirch, and Bill Waller.

1. It was the consensus of the Commission to approve the minutes of the July 29, 2024 Park and Recreation Commission meeting as presented.
2. Community Development Director Larry Kirch was in attendance at the meeting and reviewed the following projects with the Park & Recreation Commission:
 - a. Root River State Trail Extension.
 - b. Bike/Pedestrian Bridge connection to Miller's Corner.
 - c. Application for Federal Assistance – Root River Trail Planning and Design Grant.
 - d. Overlook Plaza Project.
 - e. South 6th Street Improvement Project.
 - f. USA Cycling Gravel National Championships.The summary that was presented at the meeting regarding these projects is attached to the meeting minutes.
3. It was agreed that the next Park & Recreation Commission meeting would be November 18th, 2024, and that agenda items would include signage at the Blue Lake Canoe/Kayak access and the dog park, along with a visual/digital counter at the bike/pedestrian bridge.
4. There being nothing further to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:45 pm.

Park and Rec Board Notes – 9-16-24 meeting

2a) Root River State Trail Extension – Through a Memorandum of Agreement to Jointly Cooperate between Houston County and the cities of Houston, Hokah, and La Crescent, a Citizens Exploratory Committee was formed. La Crescent City Staff and Houston County staff from the Economic Development Authority have staffed the committee. The committee prepared a Root River State Trail Extension plan which has been approved by all three cities and the county. The plan confirms the State approved DNR plan from 2011. The plan does not include a specific trail alignment. The DNR state trail plan also did not have a preferred trail alignment. After the 2011 plan was approved by the DNR Commissioner, little to no local work was done on the trail extension until 2021 and 2022.

The MOU trail plan calls for entering into a Joint Powers Agreement between the three cities and the county. The trail plan also calls for searching for and pursuing funding sources, securing land rights for the trail bed and encourages the four entities to become members in the Southeastern Minnesota Association of Regional Trails, the Root River Trail Towns organization, the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, the Rails to Trails Conservancy, and the Bicycling Alliance of Minnesota.

2b) Bike Pedestrian Bridge to Millers Corner – The city received a \$30,000 MnDOT Technical Assistance Grant to hire the city's engineering company to assist the city in making a federal discretionary grant application for trail construction. This grant is funding additional engineering feasibility of a trail alignment between the Wagon Wheel Bike-Ped Bridge and Miller's Corner. In 2023, MnDOT funded a planning corridor Action Plan for the same corridor. The Action Plan has been used to seek other funding sources. The City Engineer Tim Hruska, is working with MnDOT right-of-way data, LIDAR data and cross-sections from a previous DNR study. The community preference is for a trail between the highway and the railroad. However, the DOT would like the city to keep the option open of putting a trail on the west side of Highway 16. The feasibility work should be done by the end of the year so that the city can apply for a federal discretionary grant like Safe Streets 4 All or Transportation Alternatives,

2c) Application for Federal Assistance – Planning and Design Grant – The city applied back in July under a new Federal grant program called the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP) to fund \$525,000 planning and design plan for the entire corridor from the Wagon Wheel Bike-Ped Bridge to the City of Houston. That grant, if funded, will include the federal processes for evaluating historical and cultural resources and natural resources. This plan will seek to define a specific corridor based on overall feasibility from an ownership standpoint along with avoidance and minimizing impacts to natural, historical and cultural resources.

2d) Overlook Plaza Project - The city received a \$60,000 grant from the Blandin Foundation as a "Boost Grant" in 2023. The city is matching the grant with \$20,000. \$5,000 is being used to pay the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center for their assistance. The city entered into agreements with the University of Minnesota, Resilient Communities Project (RCP) for \$6,000 to fund three graduate students in the Masters of Urban Planning Program – Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs for a Capstone Project. The students completed a project with several recommendations. The city is

working on implementing those recommendations. This summer, the RCP sponsored two summer scholars to continue the work of the capstone students' work. This summer's work included two case studies (Red Wing and Dakota County Parks), several Placelt! Community workshops, a field day with an Indigenous youth group from the Ho-Chunk Nation and interviews with several Indigenous people from several tribal communities.

The city has been developing relationships with several of the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers from the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, the Meskwaki Nation in Iowa and several Dakota Sioux communities including the Prairie Island Indian Community and the Lower Sioux Indian Community. Building on the work of the capstone student work and the RCP Summer Scholars, future work includes selecting an artist or artists to develop a concept for Overlook Plaza and for the city engineer to create plans and specifications for the plaza. Staff is also seeking other funding sources for construction of the plaza. The project also includes an educational component as well as creating a Land Acknowledgement Statement and possibly an MOU/MOA or a more formal Programmatic Agreement. The city has been invited to the Indigenous Persons Day in La Crosse by the Ho-Chunk Nation to have a booth at the event.

2e) South 6th Street Improvement Project - The city applied for funding in 2023 (not funded) and again in 2024 for a MnDOT Alternative Transportation (infrastructure) grant. It was funded this year for \$201,000 to create curb extensions at 6th and Elm Streets and to create a 10' path on the north side of South 6th to the Aquatic Center and also to South 7th. Other improvements include narrowing up the street, pulling in the cul-de-sac to create a rain garden and a street reconstruction project that included new water and sewer infrastructure. Houston County is funding the curb extensions at Elm and South 6th. This project was identified in the 2017 Bike-Ped Plan Update. The project will be constructed in 2025.

2f) USA Cycling Gravel National Championships - The city was selected to host this event in 2025 and 2026. Explore La Crosse and a group of local gravel bike riding enthusiasts submitted a proposal to host the event in 2023 but Gehring, Nebraska was chosen for 2023/24. The same group assisted in putting forth a 2025/26 application earlier this year. The event will be held the same weekend as Apple Fest in 2025 and again in 2026. Preparations are under way and a Local Host Committee must be formed to work with USA Cycling and their event contractor. Local support will be needed for sponsors, volunteers and assisting in creating the course. USA Cycling is excited to have the event here as they love the terrain and gravel roads in the area. There will be, perhaps 750, cyclists or more and their families in the area. People will often come and pre-ride the course once it is released. The final course has not been selected but will be known soon. Gravel riding and racing has taken off over the last 15 years and USA Cycling recognizing that, created a national championship for gravel racing. Anyone can race in the event if they get a USA Cycling membership. On October 5th, there is a local race/ride called The Old Fashioned in Hokah and is being sponsored by Paul Reardon and Driftless Cycling. There are 20, 40, 60 and 100-mile options. Paul and his wife Liz assisted in helping with the RFP process with Explore La Crosse.