

**REGULAR ANDOVER OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING
SEPTEMBER 14, 2016
MINUTES**

The Regular Meeting of the Andover Open Space Advisory Commission was called to order by Chairperson Gretchen Sabel at 7:00 p.m., at the Andover City Hall, 1685 Crosstown Boulevard NW, Andover, Minnesota.

Commissioners present: Anna Dirkswager, Joy Faherty, Aaron Jarson, Jim Olson, and Suzanne Van Hecke
Commissioner absent: Kim Kovich
Also present: Kameron Kytonen, Natural Resources Technician
Jason Husveth, Critical Connections Ecological Services, Inc.
Amy Husveth, Critical Connections Ecological Services, Inc.

Prior to the regular meeting the Commission and staff toured the Dalske Woodlands Open Space area.

DALSKE WOODLANDS ECOLOGICAL FIELD ASSESSMENT AND VEGETATION SURVEY PRESENTATION

Jason Husveth, Critical Connections Ecological Services, Inc., stated that originally the surveys were completed the previous year for the other open space areas and this site was added in January. He reported he visited the site in June, July and August to provide a complete survey of the 39.5-acre site in the northeast corner of Andover. He noted the site contains several natural native plant communities of various ecological quality and highlighted the quality of some of the native plant communities. He stated Oak Wilt is a problem on the site and explained although there is not a concern for spreading there are portions of the canopy that are dead. He stated the larger landscape was fire driven, fire dependent landscape, noting that is not necessarily the case anymore as fire is rarely used to manage sites of that type and scale. He advised decisions will need to be made regarding what you have versus what you would like it to be. He recommended that during the winter months, clean-up occur of the biomass, that the woody matter be chipped or removed, and the wetlands mowed, raked and reset in order to simulate fire. He stated once that is completed you could introduce fire but there would be too much risk in the current state. He stated invasive species are more problematic on other sites but noted that it's not much of an issue on this site, although there are some invasive species that could be removed. He stated the following Tuesday night he will be giving a tour of large wetland restoration complex in Blaine with their Natural Resources Conservation Board and will be providing an hour long presentation at their City Hall. He invited interested Commissioners to attend. He noted a final report for this open space will be provided to the Board by the end of September, as agreed upon in the contract. He stated the report will include the recommendations he mentions including invasive species management, woody biomass removal, herbaceous biomass removal, and making a decision on the Oak Wilt in order to reset the system.

Commissioner Van Hecke stated when the Commission previously toured the site the parcel to the south stated that they had a fire about ten years ago.

Mr. Husveth explained fire used to occur more frequently on the site but that has been suppressed, which is what caused this system and its current status. He stated the wetlands will really benefit from fire and/or winter raking and mowing.

Commissioner Faherty asked how often you would treat with fire if the site were reset with fire.

Mr. Husveth stated first you would complete the mechanical removal in order to make the site safe to treat with fire and then you would retreat with fire every three years for the first ten years.

Chairperson Sabel stated it was mentioned that earthworms had caused damage and asked where the Commission would have noticed that.

Mr. Husveth stated the damage is throughout the site, noting that you would notice a very hard ground surface because the earthworms have consumed the organic layers in the ground. He stated it is so common in the Twin Cities that it is hard to recognize native forest soils. He stated further north there is six (6) to twelve 12 inches of organic matter which makes the ground much softer. He explained the comprehensive management plan balances the needs with the desires for the site but noted that would need to be weighed against the available funding as well. He stated the Commission would need to review all of the open space areas in order to determine where to start, noting that the Commission would need to choose items that they are able to complete. He provided the example of invasive species management and noted that if you do not complete that activity you really are not doing any improvement, or completing a fire and then if the Commission were to do nothing further that would really be for nothing.

Commissioner Olson stated although the Commission may have thought their work was wrapping up, it appears that it may be just beginning.

Mr. Husveth reviewed the steps that you follow through this process which begin with land acquisition, development of management plans, and implementation of those plans. He stated in Blaine they have had their program in progress for a longer period of time and were able to prioritize the projects in order to secure funding. He hoped to see some of the Commissioners at the tour in Blaine the following week.

RESIDENT FORUM

No one wished to address the Commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 13, 2016

Commissioner Olson noted on page one, the second paragraph from the bottom, it should state, "...~~foot~~ food plot..."

Motion by Commissioner Dirkswager, Second by Commissioner Olson, to approve the minutes of July 13, 2016. Motion passed 6-0.

DALSKE WOODLANDS MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Chairperson Sabel stated she agrees with the comments of Mr. Husveth that the Commission would need to determine their ultimate desire for the open space areas before they can take action on the recommendations.

Mr. Kytonen suggested the Commission briefly review the Management Plan.

It was the consensus of the Commission to include additional background information on the earthworms and damage they have caused. The Commission agreed that development of trails and better signage should also be a priority.

Commissioner Olson stated he would also suggest the road be wet down in order to provide better dust control.

Commissioner Van Hecke asked if the cost estimates included in the plan are accurate.

Mr. Kytonen replied the numbers are a formality and just a starting point, not the actual cost. He noted some of the work could be completed in-kind by parks staff. It was the consensus of the Commission to keep the trails simple at this time.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated although she would agree with making the site accessible, perhaps the actual trail placement should be delayed until some of the mechanical clean-up is completed.

Commissioner Van Hecke asked if there would be a point to try to get the Oaks reestablished because of the threat of Oak Wilt in Anoka County. It was explained that Oak Wilt doesn't kill all the oaks and it's not the only thing killing the oaks. Oak two-lined chestnut borer is also a problem and may be causing some of the mortalities. It typically only attacks stressed oaks though. The bottom line is there are still a lot of healthy oaks, and many can still be saved. It was the consensus of the Commission to add dead tree removal to the task summary list.

Chairperson Sabel stated rather than putting trails through the site, to begin with there should just be a trail to the site that makes it easier to see the open space site before you get to it with a sign posted to identify the open space entrance.

Commissioner Dirkswager referenced the boardwalk item and suggested that item be removed from the management plan. It was noted that the list includes potential items for the future. It was the consensus of the Commission to make two separate lists, the first with high priority tasks such as invasive species management and development of trails and signage; and the second list to include potential items for the future.

Commissioner Dirkswager asked where the funding would come from for these activities. It was noted there is a parks budget that has been used for some of the management activities and staff time is provided in-kind.

Chairperson Sabel referenced the management of native species and it was the consensus of the Commission to prioritize hazardous dead tree removal while still leaving some of the dead trees for habitat.

Mr. Kytonen acknowledged the amount of time and funds that would be required to remove dead trees. He noted perhaps there would be a partnership opportunity with a vendor that would have a use for the trees.

Chairperson Sabel stated there is a lack of funding, so the majority of items would not be completed until a future time when some type of funding is available.

Commissioner Olson stated he is planning to attend the tour in Blaine the following Tuesday. Chairperson Sabel and Commissioner Jarson stated they may attend if their schedules permit.

OTHER BUSINESS

a. Next Meeting: March 8, 2017

Mr. Kytonen noted the Commission had previously decided to meet quarterly but to hold those meetings between March and September. He noted that if the Commission wanted to meet more frequently, that could be done.

Chairperson Sabel suggested holding a meeting in November as the group would need to get organized if they are going to apply for grant funds.

Commissioner Dirkswager stated she would be interested in how much the Commission paid versus how much the City led in the process of the development of their comprehensive management plan. She volunteered to contact the City of Blaine staff to gather more information.

Mr. Kytonen noted the agenda for November or January, depending upon when the meeting will be held, would focus on discussion of a comprehensive management plan. It was the consensus of the Commission that the next meeting should tentatively be scheduled for November 16th at 6:00 p.m.

KIOSK SIGNAGE UPDATE

Commissioner Van Hecke stated Commissioner Faherty had developed a great template and therefore they had been working to fill in some of the areas discussed, such as the history section. She provided a draft of the history information that she gathered by speaking to the previous property owner who is very happy with the transaction and the fact that the land will be preserved. She stated the property owner is comfortable with the names being included. She noted on the backside of the document are rare species and wildflowers. It was decided that photographs could accompany the species list.

Chairperson Sabel stated she will contact Donna Aasness to gather more history on that open space for the kiosk at North Woods Preserve.

Commissioner Van Hecke asked the maintenance schedule for the open space areas, noting that the site that she visited needed mowing when she visited.

Mr. Kytonen stated he is not aware of the schedule but noted he could follow up with the parks department to determine a mowing schedule, install the Play/Clean/Go brush and signage installed. He stated he will also be laminating the kiosk maps before installing those.

Commissioner Van Hecke left the meeting.

Commissioner Faherty stated she would not be able to complete the kiosk signage until spring.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Kameron Kytonen
Natural Resources Technician

Drafted by:
Amanda Staple, Recording Secretary