

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MEETING

Inver Grove Heights City Hall – Council Chambers

April 11, 2019

1. Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM by Chair Trenzeluk

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Chair Ted Trenzeluk, Aditya Jayam, Patricia Todd, Robert Heidenreich, Sarah Brass, Ken Johnson, and Lauren DiGidio

Commissioners Absent: Joan Gabriel (Resigned); Nichole Boehmke (excused)

Staff Present: Ally Hillstrom, Environmental Specialist
Eric Carlson, Parks and Recreation Director

4. Approval of Minutes for February 28, 2019

Commissioner Heidenreich moved to approve the minutes from February 28, 2019 as submitted, Commissioner Johnson seconded the motion. Motion to approve carried unanimously.

5. Approval of Minutes for March 28, 2019

Commissioner Sarah Brass moved to approve the minutes from March 28, 2019 as submitted, Commissioner Todd seconded the motion. Motion to approve carried unanimously.

6. Applicant Requests

a) City of Inver Grove Heights – Case No. 19-08c

Ally Hillstrom, Environmental Specialist, presented the fill request as detailed in the report. She noted the City owns the property of 6701 River Road, known as Heritage Village park. A park master plan was originally created in 2004 which has been updated over time. Since 2004, a 14-acre protected prairie and a 9-acre dog park were established. Phase 2 of park improvements requires placing fill to raise the elevation within the site to meet the goals of the improvements. Ms. Hillstrom stated the Environmental Commission is meeting because the subject property is within the Flood Fringe of the Floodplain. A conditional use permit is required by City Code when filling is in excess of over 1,000 cubic yards within the flood fringe. Filling in the area is consistent with the City Code so long as a qualified professional prepares an overall grading and erosion control plan and the permit is approved. Because this permit involved grading and filling, the permit was reviewed by the city's Engineering Department. The City hired WSB to create a grading plan. Roughly 70,000 cubic yards of soil will be placed within the larger park area, and 34,500 cubic yards of soil will be placed within the flood fringe. The fill will come from City street reconstruction projects. The Engineering Department reviewed and approves the proposed conditional use permit as it is consistent with the City Code. Based on the Engineering Department's findings, the Planning Department recommends approval of the conditional use permit as presented. Ms. Hillstrom stated the Environmental Commission has two actions available; to recommend approval or denial for filling an excess of 1,000 cubic yards of soil within the flood fringe.

Eric Carlson, Parks and Recreation Director, presented a site plan of the property. The park is located west of Doffing avenue and north of 65th Street. Mr. Carlson indicated where the flood fringe area of the property is located. Filling will begin in 2019 and the remaining filling will occur in subsequent years as soil is available from City street projects. Approval for all filling is being requested now to receive all needed approvals at one time. The City placed 2 feet to 4 feet of soil under the natural prairie area and dog park to remediate these areas from contamination. About 2 feet to 4 feet of soil will be brought to the remaining portion of the site to raise the elevation above the flood fringe so that future improvements will not be in danger of being flooded.

Commissioner Heidenreich asked if this falls into federal jurisdiction given that the Mississippi River is a federal waterway. Mr. Carlson responded that because the City is filling only within the flood fringe, the City is the local government unit (LGU) for the project and therefore does not need to seek additional permissions from state or federal governments.

Commissioner Heidenreich stated that 35,000 cubic yards is a lot of volume that holds a lot of flood water that as a result would go somewhere else. He asked what plan has been created for this and how others downstream would be impacted. Mr. Carlson responded that the required hydrologic modeling was completed and that no additional engineering is required to approve the plan as the filling will only occur within the flood fringe therefore, outside of the flood way.

Commissioner Johnson asked how the fill would affect the site's existing drainage patterns. Mr. Carlson responded that currently only minimal infiltration occurs on the site; only 2 inches to 6 inches of soil exist above bedrock. A stormwater management plan will also be developed by the Engineering Department to treat stormwater on the site to meet City Code standards.

Commissioner Heidenreich stated that flood fringes are an important part of our ecosystem and asked what is going to protect us when we take these away. He stated that he does not understand why this land needs to be improved differently. Mr. Carlson responded that the City is allowed to fill within the flood fringe and are doing so to remediate the site and to raise the elevation so that structures on the property are not in danger of being flooded. All work will meet all needed requirements.

Commissioner Heidenreich stated that as humans we do a lot of things that we are allowed to do that endanger our lives and the planet. He believes this is an example of where we create space when it is not needed. He stated that what is already there is an important part of our ecosystem. By filling this space, we will displace the water to others and intensify their problems. He stated these areas along the river are needed to offset damaging floods. He would not approve filling this area.

Chair Trenzulek stated that he believes the City does not have enough usable park land. He believes this is an opportunity to gain park land. He has heard alternative uses for the dog park land and is aware it is in demand. He is confident that the Engineering Department has taken Commissioner Heidenreich's concern into consideration. He asked if the park is currently flooded (based on current flooding conditions). Mr. Carlson responded in the negative. Chair Trenzulek stated this is good, because if this is currently flooded there are bigger problems than what this displaces. He agrees with Commission Heidenreich's concerns when people continue to construct dykes and force more water downstream, however he does not see this as one of those situations. He would approve the CUP as stated.

Commissioner Brass asked for a description of the goal “to ensure we have a fill situation rather than a cut”. Mr. Carlson responded that fill would be to add and cut would be to remove. Commissioner Brass asked for more clarification. Mr. Carlson stated he did not write that comment and is unable to answer the question further.

Mr. Hillstrom stated that she believes fill and cut was in reference to the contamination, and that to make the entire site one elevation it is preferred to fill the area instead of remove soil. Mr. Carlson noted that there are three sites within this property that had contamination. To remediate the site, the City chose to fill the site as opposed to removing the contamination to landfill. Both options were approved by the MPCA. By filling the site, the park area used for park improvements would be out of harm’s way from flooding. Although it was not considered the 100th year flood, the City recently experienced higher than average water levels from the recent flood. During this the park area was not flooded.

Commissioner Johnson stated that in 1965 and 1969 this area was flooded. Mr. Carlson responded that Swing Bridge Park has a sign noting the water elevation of past floods. The 2019 flood level was higher than the 2014 flood, but the 1965 flood was still several feet higher than the 2019 flood level.

Commissioner DiGidio asked if a flood at the 1965 flood level would be above the elevation of the park after it has been filled. Mr. Carlson responded that at the new elevation of 701 feet the area would not get wet. Any structures floor would be at an elevation of 704 feet.

Ms. Hillstrom noted that the Planning Department has requested comments from the Department of Natural Resources but has not yet received a response.

Chair Trenzeluk asked if Ms. Hillstrom has received any comments from the public. Ms. Hillstrom responded in the negative but that this item will be reviewed by the Planning Commission on April 16 and the City Council on April 22.

Chair Trenzeluk made the motion to recommend approval for the conditional use permit with the conditions presented, Commissioner Jayam seconded the motion. Motion carried (5/2 - Heidenreich, Johnson).

Mr. Carlson asked the Commission if they wanted more information on the park’s schedule and design, to which the Commission applied in the affirmative. He presented the anticipated schedule for approvals and development. Phase 2 will include an inclusive playground which will exceed ADA standards, allowing anyone in a wheelchair will be able to get to all activities.

Chair Trenzeluk asked how much of the project has been approved by the City Council. Mr. Carlson responded in concept but not in reality.

Mr. Carlson displayed digital concepts of the play structures. He noted that the site designs will reflect past uses of the area. The design will recreate the old village by including a school house, townhall and fire station. The site plans include a restroom, picnic shelter, playground and sidewalks that mimic an old railroad station. A parking lot will be constructed during this phase. A historic interpretation with objects and panels will be created to tell a story about what this area meant to the growth of the City of Inver Grove Heights from its inception to today.

7. Other Business

Chair Trenzeluk reminded the Commission of the Environmental Commission Conference on Saturday, April 13. He will attend.

Ms. Hillstrom reminded the Commission that April's regular meeting on Thursday, April 25 will be cancelled due to today's Special Session.

Chair Trenzeluk reminded the Commission of the Commission Appreciation Dinner on Thursday, April 18.

Ms. Hillstrom stated that there is one opening for the Environmental Commission. The City has received a few applications. Chair Trenzeluk noted the Commission should hold an election at the May meeting to select a Chair and Deputy Chair.

8. Adjourn

Commissioner Heidenreich moved to adjourn at 7:35pm. Commissioner Jayam seconded the motion. Motion approved unanimously.