

City Council Retreat  
City Council Chambers

March 8, 2011  
12:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor – Joyce Hudson  
Council members Jeff Kennedy  
Gary Fritch  
Tim Strauser  
Jeff Whiting  
City Administrator Bruce Clymer  
City Attorney Mike Bacon  
City Clerk Connie L. Dalrymple

Also present: Shane Gruber, Tim Lauer

Mayor Hudson opened the meeting at 12:00 noon. Advance notice and a copy of the agenda were given to the Council and members of the press. City Council meetings are conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, a copy of which is available for public inspection on the north wall of the Council Chambers.

The purpose of the retreat was to discuss the practices, expectations, needs, and goals for the care and maintenance the 80 plus acres of City parks.

Park Caretaker Tim Lauer and Administrative Assistant Shane Gruber provided information on current practices including schedules, equipment used, chemicals used and general dates of application, seeding, winterizing, snow removal, tree maintenance, and manpower.

Administrator Clymer asked for comments on issues the staff should be aware of:

Kennedy - Tree care -- lack of and improper pruning / mulching and tree damage  
Need for continuing education in all areas

Whiting - 4-plex because it generates revenue and could be used for bigger and more events.  
Drainage is a major issue there. A rain shower generally makes it unusable for more than just a few hours.  
Need for continuing education

Strauser - monuments being moved or nicked in the cemetery. While it's bound to happen, damage should be eliminated as much as possible and fixed immediately.  
More swings in the parks

Fritch - Cemetery stone issues could be a communication issue  
Always favors continuing education.

Clymer noted that wind rows of dead grass have recently been an issue as well as dead grass plastered on the stones. Before that it was crab grass. He asked if anyone had grass issues and all felt the grass had improved dramatically. Mayor Hudson also noted many compliments on the improvements in the parks and hearing some concerns with stones at the cemetery. She feels the parks are to be enjoyed for family use and will not be picture perfect. The Park Department consists of one man and part time summer help so if the Council wants to make changes, they

need to prioritize their emphasis, be it a budget increase for more help within the department, equipment, or contracting some work such as tree care.

Responses to concerns and possible solutions:

Tree Care: Council member Kennedy envisioned more than one person in the department. Two full time, plus summer help, would also allow for repair of the sprinklers and proper tree care. People see the improvement in the grass, but proper tree care is long term and most people don't know the difference. For example, chemicals can be applied to kill weeds and next year the grass is great. Improper tree pruning means structural issues 20 years later. It takes a lifetime to grow a tree and trees have more than monetary value. Most tree care is a winter project. Lack of knowledge as to how and when is a problem. He'd like to see a certified arborist on staff, and once certification is obtained, 10 hours per year of continuing education is required. There are tree care workshops in North Platte annually. The Nebraska Nursery & Landscaping Assoc. has classes in conjunction with the Turf Grass Conference and there is a Tree Care Arborist Conference. Extra help in the summer won't solve the tree problem. Trimming and pruning is winter work.

Administrator Clymer asked how important the tree issue is to everyone, from an administrative viewpoint.

Whiting asked how tree care is different than it was 10, 15 or 20 years ago. Nate Baker, on the electric crew, has had some training and helps out with trees.

Mayor Hudson suggested there may be a need to outsource for winter care, allowing a set number of hours. Kennedy again commented that tree pruning and maintenance is winter work, and the mulching has not been done properly.

Tim puts in about 200 hours overtime in the summer and if the weather co-operates, he can keep up with part time help. Maybe we can look for part time help with more interest in tree maintenance. Tim does take classes and we're constantly trying to improve what we do in the parks.

4-plex:

We have installed a drainage system on field 4, removed dirt under the fence and replaced the fence. We've also worked on drainage at Lake Helen. Scott Foster, Rec Director, is working with the Field Pro applications and that helps but he is also responsible for scheduling and teams. We can't dedicate one person to the 4-plex.

Rent for use of the 4-plex was discussed briefly.

Cemetery:

Trimming around stones after mowing to prevent grass on the stones.

We purchased a rear discharge mower that pretty much eliminates grass on the stones. The growth inhibitor has also helped the cemetery.

The riding mowers are big and operators don't always know when they bump a stone. Perhaps using a push mower around the stones, and the riding mowers between, would help.

Perhaps the equipment we have is too big for some areas and a stand behind mower might work better.

Mayor Hudson asked Administrator Clymer to put the list of concerns and the solutions offered together and get it to the Council for further thought and discussion.

Strauser moved, Kennedy seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 1:08 p.m. Roll call vote: Yea - Whiting, Franzen, Kennedy, Strauser. Nay - none.

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Joyce Hudson, Mayor

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Connie L. Dalrymple, City Clerk