

**Park Board Workshop
December 20, 2022**

Pursuant to due call and order, the Board of Park Commissioners, Dickinson Park District, met for a Special Meeting at 7:30 am, Tuesday, December 20, 2022, at the West River Community Center.

ROLL CALL: Present were Commissioners Scott Karsky, Tim Daniel, Jo Marie Kadrmas, and Nic Stevenson. Also present were Executive Director Benjamin Rae, Director of Buildings/Grounds Craig Pearson, Director of Recreation/Facilities Caleb Burgard and Clerk Leah Hoenke. Commissioner Zach Keller was absent.

Project Priority List – Executive Director Benjamin Rae reviewed and said the Project Priority List is separate than our strategic plan. Project priorities are listing things we would like to see completed. He said he will estimate the cost to give the board a better sense of progress, the dollars listed here are the dollars that were committed not necessarily the actual cost. He reviewed completed projects such as improvements at the ballpark, a new server for the district, mustang, new water heater at the ice center. We committed funds to other projects, such as \$110,000 per year for the infrastructure bond payment for the next 10 years we've committed 25% to paying off that project out of our capital betterment fund. Other projects in process are holes 1, 2 and 7 projects completed at golf course. Holes 3 and 11 are priority paths that will be completed next. The private cart shed we've put funds towards that project and will be completed in the spring. Update to the irrigation at the golf course is \$150,000 for next 3 years. Improvements to Crooked Crane Trail parking at different access locations to make parking easier. Friendship Park should be completed this spring. There is a new end date due to weather and supply chain issues; trying to commit to a May 1 deadline. Heroes Park is substantially designed but with inflation, original budget is now \$140,000. We'll need to decide to pull back on design or stick with original design. The \$90,000 that we have includes \$30,000 from police and fire, some from capital betterment and city funding. Moving forward to ballpark turf replacement. Dakota Community Bank & Trust will be funding a good portion over the next 10 years and meeting with other user groups to get more commitments. We currently have committed \$200,000 but will be closer to \$250,000, as part of the bid process we will ask for design and alternate design and go from there. Director Rae said he's not confident that the user groups won't put forth more money if we stick with same design we have now. The Big Sticks have told us that they'll give an extra \$5,000 for ballpark improvements. Discussion was held on the scoreboard – looking between \$25,000 to \$30,000 to replace existing. A digital scoreboard would cost closer to \$70,000 to \$100,000. Our intent on the scoreboard would be 100% sponsor paid. Discussion followed on sponsors and funding. Commissioner Nic Stevenson said that the scoreboard is a luxury, the improvement to the ballpark is what the user groups want. Commissioner Tim Daniel said we're getting debated on getting a new scoreboard, just know that it is out there and is being talked about. Director Rae said what he's found is best is to tell our story, so they understand where we are at. President Scott Karsky agreed and said they don't always understand that we're not trying to hold back on them, we only have so much to give. Director Rae moved on to say we are doing the playground for the sports complex and turf maintenance. We've made a commitment to help with the DSU tennis expansion, we've received \$10,000 funds from the USTA grant; the project is closer to \$300,000 right now and it will take more grant funding and community participation. He also said we'll work closely with hockey club to install the new condenser at the ice center, saying that the staff is getting more comfortable with the equipment maintenance. He asked if there were any other items, they would like an update on. Commissioner Nic Stevenson asked about Heroes Park. Director Rae said it is an expansion to Leisure Park that will include a turf underlayment along with a pavilion, additional benches and extending the fence around it. This will be a playground that is geared towards younger children for ages 2-4. He said the police and fire are strongly in support of it and have given \$30,000. Director Rae reviewed a future project of a splash pad, could be at a cost of \$250,000. Commissioner Jo Marie Kadrmas said the downtown includes a splash pad and she would like to see that completed and see the community's response. Director Rae said we have a meeting with Joel Walters at the city to get a clearer picture of programming and completion. One of the challenges we face is to identify what is the most useful to our community. He said everyone wants to know about a third sheet. The hockey club said the best they can do is \$3 million; the city could contribute \$2 million. He said Bismarck just put one in at \$15 million. We could potentially be on the hook for \$7-10 million which means we would have to raise the mill rate 4-6 mills for the next 20 years just for a third sheet of ice under that scenario. He wants to make sure the board understands what that looks like. The city has other commitments they want addressed. Commissioner Nic Stevenson said there is an advantage to an indoor training facility which would also take a large community effort. Director Benjamin Rae said we may need to be more aggressive and try to utilize other avenues on how to utilize the ice time. Commissioner Stevenson said it is important to let the community know that we are still two thirds short using all the max resources. Commissioner Rae said he will sit on a committee with the city to put our best foot forward on the value of

tourism in Dickinson. President Scott Karsky said he would like to see the development of the Patterson Lake land, there is so much potential. Director Rae said he has a meeting with the city in January that will focus on Patterson Lake improvements. Now that we own the land, we can utilize the land any way we like if it stays public and for recreational use. Where he's sitting is it is going to be hard to enhance if we don't take care of the algae issue. Commissioner Tim Daniel asked how extensive the conversations have been on water quality. Director Rae said he sat down with Senator Hoeven and we could possibly look into the water treatment facility to get more air flow into the lake, there were also discussions on dredging. He said the city has a task force and he is representing the park district on that.

Strategic Plan – Executive Director Benjamin Rae said this is a broad strokes plan and he's looking to get the board's feedback. The city is putting their focus on the Theodore Roosevelt Library and how to accommodate more tourism. For us, the staff priority is to address staff training and compensation of staff, especially part time staff. We can't attract workers at the wages we have now. Commissioner Nic Stevenson asked if there are any partnerships with the college with internships, etc. Recreation/Facilities Director Caleb Burgard said we get interns from the exercise science program, usually one every year. Director Rae said we would also like to start promoting part-time staff as a step to a full-time career. Commissioner Stevenson also asked if there is some trade off with fees with college students, can we trade hours with the university for work study hours. Director Rae said the university pays us for every student who lives on campus as part of their student fees but that is a good idea to look at possible work study hours. He said we have offered a new incentive that all part time employees will receive a free membership regardless of where they work, not just people who work at WRCC. He said we spend a million dollars a year for part time labor and to go up 10% in wages, that is \$100,000 and 20% is \$200,000. Based on market conditions we are probably 20% low to what we are operating. There are key areas where we would like to pay \$14-15 per hour to keep more stable staff. He also said you need core key people in full time positions, but you can have a lot of rowers in part time employees. Director Rae said in planning for the 2024 budget, part-time wages is a priority. For 2023, we'll need to be creative, address in small ways. President Scott Karsky said to look at our seniors who are a huge resource and are very valuable. Director Benjamin Rae said the other items the staff has are maintaining existing facilities, over building new facilities; we will not try to run everything ourselves but will work with user groups; will show a preference to enhancing a few parks over all parks and establish primary focus parks that would draw in people and put the resources there. He said he's working on putting together a list of those priority parks. Commissioner Jo Marie Kadrmas said she thinks that makes perfect sense, we have 31 parks, and it makes sense to have the primary focus on certain parks and consolidate some of the other parks. Director Rae said in the past it was great to have a park on every corner, now we are shifting away from that and having destination parks becomes more of a draw. Commissioner Stevenson agrees, the difference in our culture there are more organized activities, and this is a great view to consolidate the outdoor non used areas and look for more indoor opportunities. Director Rae added that pickleball is an example, we have outdoor pickleball courts, but the public wants indoor courts. Commissioner Tim Daniel agrees as well, people would rather come here and then stay and have coffee. Director Rae went on to say we can't continue to maintain our current level of service with our current level of funding. He then reviewed our capital betterment. Over the next few years, the city has committed quality of life funds to go up to \$200,000, saying that the city wants to hold off some of that in reserve to pay off the balloon payment of this building in 2025. After 2025 the bond will be paid off and that will free up a lot of funds for enhancement to this building. We are working to put together a list of priority enhancements to the building, pool deck, slide stairs, leisure pool play structure, remodel locker rooms, new carpet, remodel lobby, painting, HVAC upgrades, outdoor fitness. He reviewed the roofing issues. Benjamin said the cost for just the slide stairs could be \$50,000. He reviewed some of the other six figure costs. In 2025, we need to be prepared to look at any type of expansion after bond is paid off. He's not sure he can recommend right now what is best to utilize those dollars. He said the general fund is the fund we need more of. He reviewed the mill rate. It would be an increase to the average home, \$40/year. We are looking at other ways, grants, partnerships, etc. Commissioner Stevenson asked if Benjamin could send a funding sheet on the dollars for this building and the half percent dollars and where that money is utilized. Director Rae said he will give a complete overview of that picture. Commissioner Tim Daniel said part of the story is because of the success of this facility, we were doing well until COVID hit, before we weren't receiving the funds that we had access to because this facility was doing so well. Director Rae said he sent the funding request letter to the city. He would like the city to give us the money to put in our WRCC fund to ear mark for projects and track the dollars. Discussion followed on the half cent sales tax funds and what the intent is and how is utilized. Director Rae said he is presenting to the city tonight and he wants to explain why those funds are needed, so they understand that we are not frivolously using the dollars, our expenses have dramatically increased. He explained that the city assistance and quality of life funds are separate. Last year the city didn't give us all of the quality of life funds that they committed. Commissioner Kadrmas said by law they have to give us the city

assistance but not the quality of life funds. Director Rae said we received \$175,000 in quality of life. Discussion followed on city tax dollars that are generated. Commissioner Stevenson said over time the city has gotten used to the extra funding and we need to revisit the original intent and what we have rights to. He understands that we do operate under the city but getting back to original intent of the half cent sales tax dollars is our best avenue. Commissioner Daniel agrees, we need some extra help now. Director Rae said he and Craig Pearson are working on a good plan to demonstrate to the city why these funds are needed. Benjamin Rae said in our draft strategic plan, we will pare down to our top priorities. President Scott Karsky thanked the staff on their work. He believes we'll need to look at the mills and make some adjustments there. Director Rae said increases to the mill could get us far in addressing inflation and staffing issues. We want to be responsible stewards on our maintenance plans. Discussion followed.

Adjournment – MOTIONED BY: Jo Marie Kadrmas; SECONDED BY: Nic Stevenson to adjourn the meeting at 9:07 am. Upon vote, all aye. Motion carried.

PREPARED BY:

APPROVED BY:

Clerk

President