

Fertile City Council Minutes
Special Meeting
August 22, 2018

The Fertile City Council held a special meeting on Wednesday, August 22, 2018 at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Center. The meeting was a joint meeting with the Agassiz Environmental Learning Center Board to discuss the Master Plan for the AELC. Present were: Mayor Daniel Wilkens and Council members Linda Widrig, Reid Jensrud, and Stanton Wang. Present from the AELC were Craig Engelstad and Gary Kiefert. (Wilkens, Jensrud, and Wang also serve on the AELC Board.) Also present were City Administrator Lisa Liden, AELC Education Director Danielle Spiten, Wayne Goeken, Jacob Mans, and Linda Kingery.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Wilkens at 6:35 and he began with a brief explanation as to the purpose of the meeting which was to discuss the Master Plan that the AELC was currently working on for the Greater MN Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) application. Wilkens then asked Jacob Mans to further explain the planning process.

Jacob Mans introduced himself to the group and then gave a synopsis of the community outreach meetings that had been held earlier in the summer. As a result of those meetings, there were some ideas that were offered by the community at all three meetings. Those ideas included better trail signage, fixing the deck, and ATV trails in the sand hills. Mans then went on to explain that the Learning Center and the City both needed to discuss any potential new uses at the AELC such as ATV trails and that any new use needed to be addressed in the context of the current contracts the City had with the Dept. of Natural Resources and also the National Park Service. Mans stated that he would like further input and guidance from the City Council and AELC Board of Directors on any potential change of use and whether those changes should be addressed in the Master Plan.

City Administrator Lisa Liden then asked for clarification from Jacob Mans on whether including ATV trails on the Master Plan is possible without a full commitment to add that use later on. Including it in the Master Plan would basically keep the “door open” to further explore ATV use and trails at the AELC. Liden also noted that, according to the literature on their website, that MN Parks and Trails has prioritized addressing the need for more motorized trails in MN parks.

Liden then asked if including possible ATV use would hurt the AELC’s chances at getting designated as a park of regional significance. Mans responded that it wouldn’t hurt anything but that care had to be taken in addressing the matter in the Master Plan and to try to tie it into education and conservation efforts that were already stated as goals of the Learning Center.

Mayor Wilkens then went over the history of the first plans for the “Old Mill Park” when the City first sought State and Federal funding for the project. The original plan called for a man-made lake which ended up not being feasible due to soil conditions. Other plans also included a dormitory and classrooms for longer term education programming, but the funding for that fell through.

AELC Board member Craig Engelstad then asked Jacob Mans for clarification on the Master Plan process and whether to include all the AELC is currently doing as well as plans for what could be done in the future. Mans stated that the Master Plan should encompass all current and future possible activities.

Mayor Wilkens then explained that he had met with Joe Hiller of the DNR and that Hiller had indicated that paved trails for current uses would be okay but that any motorized use would require asking for a change of use with the DNR and NPS. That change of use would also likely trigger the need for environmental studies and that those studies were quite expensive and took a great deal of time to complete since many agencies were involved in the process.

Linda Kingery then introduced herself to the group. She explained that she was with the U of M Extension Office and that she had provided assistance to other organizations with their Master Plan process. Kingery then gave an overview of the stated purpose of the AELC as it has been written in past plans and also in the first step of the GMRPTC process. As part of that first step, Council had passed a resolution in June of 2017 to complete the application. Kingery noted also that one thing stressed heavily in the original application was the unique natural environment at the AELC. Upon review of the application, the AELC potential was ranked as high.

Kingery then went on to explain that the Master Plan should follow the initial application as to goals, plans, and activities and that potential ATV use didn't really tie in to the original application. This was followed by a long discussion on soil erosion and sensitive areas of the AELC and how ATV use could impact certain areas.

Council member/AELC Board member Jensrud then clarified for those present that ATV use would just be on the perimeter trail that is currently used for snowmobiles in the winter. This was followed by further discussion on enforcement of trail use with some present expressing their concern that ATV's would not stay on the perimeter trail. Administrator Liden brought up the fact that enforcement was already an issue with snowmobiles and horses and that perhaps they shouldn't be allowed out there anymore either if ATV's were excluded due to enforcement issues. Also discussed was the erosion issues associated with heavy horse use on some of the trails.

Craig Engelstad then asked Linda Kingery if she was recommending that ATV use not be included in the Master Plan. Kingery responded that it wasn't her decision on whether or not to do that since that would be up to City Council and the AELC Board. Kingery did caution, however, that ATV/motorized use is a deviation from the current purpose of the AELC and also from the purposes stated in the original application.

Council member/AELC Board member Stanton Wang then asked Craig Engelstad about the reasoning behind the location of the current snowmobile trail around the perimeter of the AELC. Engelstad and Wilkens both explained that it was the easiest route to follow and that it also avoided the more sensitive areas of the AELC such as the dunes and the oak savannah. Further discussion was then held on trail use, erosion, enforcement issues, and signage.

AELC Board member Gary Kiefert then referred to the original agreement between the AELC and the City which states that signage and trail maintenance are the responsibility of the City. This was followed by a discussion on the problems that had been encountered with providing permanent signage at the AELC. The main problems were that the current map was not complete with all the trails marked and that some felt the map should be simplified by including some sort of colored loop system.

This was followed by further discussion on how to fit ATV use within the established goals and purpose of the AELC. Jacob Mans suggested that trail riders would have to be members and perhaps take a class about conservation at the AELC before being issued a trail sticker to use ATV's or other motorized vehicles on the property.

Reid Jensrud then commented that we could discuss the matter for hours and come to no conclusions and that he just wanted to include ATV use in the Master Plan. After further discussion on ATV's and how multi-use trails would work it was decided that Jacob Mans would look at how to include motorized trail use in the Master Plan in such a way that it would fall within the AELC's goals and purpose.

There being no further business, the joint meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m. on a motion by Reid Jensrud.

Daniel Wilkens, Mayor

Lisa J. Liden, City Administrator