

Mine Falls Park Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes – August 7th, 2023

Attendees: Jeff Hannigan, Paula Lochhead, Pamela Anderson, Dick Gillespie, Laura Santer, Steve Kenney, Gene Whitcomb, Matthew Roscoe, Bryan Conant, Kathleen Palmer

Guests: **David Silva**

Call to Order – 7:01 PM

Approval of June Meeting Minutes – Motion (Jeff) Seconded (Dick); Approved

Parks Dept Topics:

- Successfully secured an opinion from State of NH Division of Forests & Lands on whether we should do anything specific about the number of downed and dead trees in the park. Their guidance aligns with current park management where any trees that are obstructing existing trails are removed as hazards, along with any partially fallen or leaning trees that could create a hazard. But otherwise, for removed trees that are cast to the sides of the trails or downfall away from the trails, they are encouraged to remain for the health of the park.
- Cove Trail signage is create for implementing a previous committee decision to discontinue use of the trail due to deteriorating conditions requiring a significant planning and improvement effort, if there is future interest in reviving the trail (not yet determined). Related to the public opinion topic below.

Public Guest Topic: Park Safety & Cove Area conditions

- Former Committee chairman David Silva joined the committee to express his concerns based on observations this summer about safety in the park, specifically as it relates to the influence of the Willow St. (Gate City Fence) bridge introducing non-recreational users to the Cove area. His concerns echo the original concerns of the committee when the bridge was first proposed that he (and the committee) agree are now being realized.
- Of the subject matter covered in the discussion, there are some elements that the committee is taking under advisement as directly relating to our work and volunteer efforts; within our scope but a challenge for our level of activity with monthly cleanups in terms of increased need for cleaning trash and graffiti at this end of the park.
 - All are in agreement that these have increased since the Bridge's installation not just in volume but in severity, for example numerous incidents of furniture, shopping carts etc. being thrown in the canal from the bridge.
 - And increasing risks to our volunteers when cleaning these areas due to the significant increase in unsanitary personal belonging and used needles.
- Of more significance and concern are the safety and reputation risks to the park and park users as noted by his anecdotal examples of his personal conversations with others about the park where it has been described as "sketchy." The city has noticeably increased efforts at remediating homeless encampments in the Cove area through dedicated large-scale cleaning efforts, but the inflow of new camping is at a level rivaling the camps removed.
- David is in agreement with the committee's decision earlier this summer to close off the Cove trail due to the challenges of handling the increasing season growth restricting the trail, but primarily for the unsettling experience of unexpectedly encountering homeless encampments along the trail. But he shares the same sentiment that this is an unfortunate outcome even if it is the sensible route to take.
- The emphasis of the remaining conversation reiterated the original concerns expressed by the committee that if the city were to proceed with implementing the Willow St. bridge, then it creates a

responsibility for the city to implement measures to counteract these expected new undesirable impacts to the park.

- **In closing: to date the committee commends the additional efforts (examples of camp cleanups from above) from departments like health and social services, but we would reiterate for increased presence in the park from the police dept to curb the increase in negative behaviors like drug use and people openly drinking on the paths and overlook structures in this end of the park.**

Committee Topics

- Fitness Structures
 - Committee reviewed some information compiled by Steve for examples of structure options and ideal placement locations. The committee is receptive to both the style and locations suggested, and the Parks department is receptive to proceeding with assessing price and installation options. As a result the committee resolved for Steve to continue formalizing details into implementation plans for future review.
 - Of emphasis by the committee is locating the structures at high-traffic park boundaries and selecting simple, durable equipment that will not be attractive targets for vandalism.
- August Trail Day Projects
 - Laura to lead a painting effort for the Cover overlooks
 - Paula to lead a painting effort for the fences/railings around the gatehouse
 - Dick to lead an effort to fully remove the stairs on the Cove trail as part of the closure
 - Jeff to lead an effort full both a full clean and excavation of the triangle drainage
 - Stretch goal, subject committee lead attendance, for some cleanup of the gatehouse parking lot focusing on materials that have built up from being pulled from the dam
 - Dedicated litter cleanup – YMCA/Boatramp area
 - Expecting at least two volunteer groups to attend with advanced notice
- Heavy Summer Rain impacts on the park
 - The committee identified two related areas of impact due to the recent excessive rains in the area of the gatehouse
 - First, the dirt portion of the road from the boat ramp to the gatehouse is due for what has typically been an annual smoothing/paving of the worsening potholes
 - Secondly, just inside the gate in this area at the intersection with Spine Road, the normal erosion trenching that occurs gradually is especially noticeable and needs filling in

Adjournment – 8:32 PM