



Approved: May 22, 2023

**CITY OF ARDEN HILLS, MINNESOTA
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL WORK SESSION
APRIL 24, 2023
6:00 P.M. - ARDEN HILLS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, Mayor Grant called to order the City Council Special Work Session at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor David Grant, Councilmembers Emily Rousseau, Tena Monson and Tom Fabel

Absent: Councilmember Brenda Holden

Also present: City Administrator Dave Perrault, Public Works Director/City Engineer David Swearingen, PTRC Members Mark Kelliher and Kerri Seeman, and Director of Operations and Programs at Great River Energy Todd Rexine

1. AGENDA ITEMS

A. Buckthorn Management Discussion

PTRC Member Kelliher stated there was a small group of PTRC members that started exploring the idea of renting a herd of goats to raze buckthorn in the parks, initially thought to be a pilot project of one to two acres. After identifying vendors, they started to explore funding. Green River Greening's focus is ecological restoration and can identify and apply for grant funding. There is a grant cycle underway for legacy fund monies that closes May 26. He said the focus for this meeting would be the long-term solution with Great River Greening.

Mr. Kelliher said Great River Greening has compiled estimates of what four parks would cost to remediate. The four parks (Hazelnut, Floral, Perry and Chatham) could be done over the course of five years. The City could commit to accomplishing certain tasks that could be paid for with money, or use staff and volunteer resources as "in-kind" contributions.

Director of Operations and Programs at Great River Energy Rexine stated that he had walked the sites and put together a rough estimate of what buckthorn removal would look like over a five year period. They apply for grants every year from the Outdoor Heritage Fund for easement acquisition or restoration of public lands.

Councilmember Fabel asked what forms of restoration they engaged in other than buckthorn.

Mr. Rexine stated they did prairies, forests, woodlands, upland habitat and stream and lakeshore restoration.

Mayor Grant asked who wrote the grants.

Mr. Rexine said he and his staff did. They have two additional grant writers. They would write the grant and take on the grant administration for the duration of the grant and keep the documentation for seven years after the grant is completed.

Councilmember Monson asked if they had done any buckthorn removal and restoration in the metro area and what results they had seen.

Mr. Rexine replied they have, and they currently have a large project in Dakota County. They are also working with St. Louis Park.

Councilmember Rousseau asked what the cost was to have them write the grant.

Mr. Rexine stated there was no cost. They would be submitting a proposal for Land and Water Legacy Funds for natural resources. They would like to know if the City has an idea of how much they could match, as they would be asked that when they go to hearings in August. Communities do a cash match, some use their own staff to help defray the cost of certain things, like buckthorn disposal. Sometimes public works will help, sometimes cities will open up compost sites for contractors to deliver to, sometimes cities will work on one section while the city works on another section. It depends on the degree of staff and volunteer capabilities.

Mayor Grant asked what is typical for cities to match?

Mr. Rexine said they try to get matches around three to one; 25% from the municipality, 75% grant.

Mr. Kelliher noted the 25% could be in-kind or actual dollars.

Mr. Rexine added it could be volunteer labor or contracted labor. If the contracted labor was hired by the city it would go toward the 25%. The county workers that do work for the city could be counted.

Councilmember Monson thought a 25% match from Arden Hills would be roughly \$120,000. She thought this was a fantastic idea. She wondered if they were thinking to use goats at all locations or just some.

Mr. Rexine said it would be a mix as goats have pros and cons. If there are a lot of dogs around they can sometimes spook the goats, they need electric fencing and they won't take the big stuff down. They are just one tool to use.

Mayor Grant asked how they get to the point that the buckthorn doesn't come back again.

Mr. Kelliher explained that the first year they would hit it hard, then crews or goats would go back in over the next four years to hit back resprouts and seedlings. He recommended not doing all parks at once. He recommended Floral and Hazelnut Parks to start, or possibly just one. The key is getting to the point of being able to manage the buckthorn.

Mayor Grant asked if once they do an area if they put in shrubs or trees or something else.

Mr. Rexine said it is usually recommended to put a grass seed down that allows you to still use herbicides, and if you did a prescribed fire that could run through the grass and kill the buckthorn. They do fires in some cases.

Mayor Grant wondered when the legacy funds run out.

Mr. Rexine said it was a five-year grant cycle and proceeds from sales tax dollars go to supporting the system. There are approximately ten years left on the 25-year approval.

Councilmember Fabel wondered if it would be more efficient to use circular ground cutters instead of goats.

Mr. Rexine said there wasn't any objection to using machinery, the cost was about the same. Goats allow not using herbicide so it's sometimes about perception.

Councilmember Monson added that when the goats eat it they destroy the seeds.

Mr. Kelliher said a University of Minnesota study showed that revegetation can outcompete buckthorn once you take the buckthorn down to something manageable. It's possible that in a project where the buckthorn has been removed and replanted with native species the buckthorn won't resurge or would be manageable.

Councilmember Monson said Arden Hills has such a great canopy and great nature that she felt having an ongoing commitment was important to the city.

Public Works Director/City Engineer Swearingen explained that the RCWC crews have been utilized for buckthorn management by slashing and treating the buckthorn. The parks are on rotation. Hazelnut, Floral, Cummings and Chatham have been worked on.

Mr. Rexine noted that they have taken out just female buckthorn and it was successful for a couple of years, but when going back to the sites they are choked out again because there were females in the seed bank that came back up. So now they usually try to treat all of them.

Mr. Kelliher explained the grant money won't become available until fall of 2024, so the interim solution could be discussed at a future work session. Working with Great River Greening, Council would need to decide which parks and how many acres they would like to have worked on.

Mayor Grant said they had indicated other funding sources other than the legacy funds.

Mr. Rexine said there was also the Environmental Natural Resources Trust Fund, but that application process is closed for this year.

Mayor Grant asked if PTRC had volunteers come to help, would their hours be counted and at what rate?

Mr. Rexine said that was correct and it was usually at about \$25.00 an hour.

Councilmember Rousseau asked if it could get added to tonight's meeting for approval.

Mayor Grant replied that they won't be having four-person work sessions going forward, this was a special meeting so it could come forward to the Council on May 8. Councilmember Holden will have to come up to speed on her own.

Councilmember Fabel asked if the grant application was park specific or could they ask for the money and decide where to use it later.

Mr. Rexine said he does have to submit a parcel list with the grant application.

Mayor Grant clarified that they would submit a parcel number for a park, a management plan for five years, and a match amount would be specified. In subsequent years we could submit for further grants for further parks.

Mr. Rexine said that was correct.

Mayor Grant said they would have to ask PTRC if they would be willing to be part of the crew. He felt Council should choose which park and which budget.

Councilmember Monson would like to know what park PTRC recommends.

Mayor Grant asked what level of work Great River Greening could take on for the city.

Mr. Rexine said they could do it all, but would also want to work with City staff. He would phase it for better success rather than take on all the parks at once. He thought Floral or Hazelnut would be good starting points because they've already had some work done. Chatham has a lot of density, and for Perry Park he would want the County on board to work on their land adjacent to the park. That could be a joint proposal between Ramsey County and the City.

Mr. Kelliher noted there are other funding sources such as the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Arden Hills Foundation with a possible fundraiser.

Mayor Grant said the Foundation has been used as a funding source. People could give to the Foundation and the Foundation could give the money to the City to use as part of the match.

Councilmember Rousseau asked for clarification that if they put this on the May 8 agenda the Council would authorize moving forward with GRG and the PTRC would provide a recommendation of which parks to start with and a grant request amount.

Mayor Grant added it should be stipulated as a 25% match. Council would weigh in on how many phases and how many parks to do. PTRC can make a recommendation and Council would look at funding.

Councilmember Fabel stated that he was impressed with the volunteer work that has gone into this project so far.

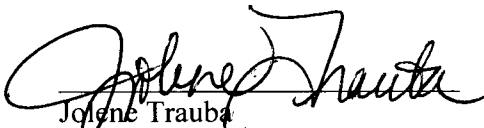
Mr. Kelliher said there is a lot of passion within the community to eradicate buckthorn, and many people are involved. The city could make the designation of which park they'd like to start with and if that changes that could be edited in at a later date. He also hopes to come back with more information on interim solutions assuming Council decides to go forward with the long-term solution of working with Great River Greening.

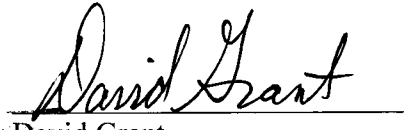
4. COUNCIL/STAFF COMMENTS

None

ADJOURN

Mayor Grant adjourned the City Council Work Session at 6:52 p.m.


Jolene Trauba
Deputy City Clerk


David Grant
Mayor