

MINUTES
DeKalb Park District
Study Session of the Board of Commissioners
February 27, 2017
Hopkins Park Community Center
1403 Sycamore Road, DeKalb, IL

Public Meeting
7:00 p.m.

I. Meeting Called To Order, Roll Call, Pledge of Allegiance

President Phil Young called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Board members present: President Phil Young, Commissioner Dean Holliday, Commissioner Keith Nyquist, and Commissioner Dag Grada.

Staff Members Present: Executive Director Amy Doll, Superintendent of Parks & Development Mat Emken, and Accounting & Administrative Assistant Emily Bidstrup.

II. Action on the Agenda

Commissioner Holliday made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Nyquist. Motion carried by voice vote.

President Young asked if anyone would be opposed to listening to the nature trail discussion before the public comments section of the meeting. Commissioner Nyquist made a motion to switch item III and IV of the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Holliday. Motion carried by voice vote.

III. Nature Trail Discussion

Myron McCullough from ComEd advised the Board and the public in attendance what his company's plans were for the maintenance of the lines on the nature trail. He stated that the winter period was chosen to get ahead of the growing season and ComEd needs to remove vegetation that is currently 10 feet or taller in height or that will grow to 10 feet or taller. President Young and Commissioner Holliday asked what specific areas would be trimmed. President Young asked what types of species have been identified. Commissioner Holliday asked for a rough idea of how many. Commissioner Nyquist asked for a justification on the removal of the Sumac trees and noted the radical difference in what ComEd told the Board they were going to do and what they are proposing to do now. He asked why, after 5 years, is there a push to cut everything back to the ground. Mr. McCullough advised that only invasive species would be cut and it would be benefiting the District. Commissioner Nyquist asked why invasive species are ComEd's concern. Mr. McCullough stated that they are the greatest threat to infrastructure. Commissioner Nyquist asked if the 5 year trimming schedule is a new policy ComEd is implementing. President Young asked why all of a sudden this is happening. Commissioner Nyquist asked if he could hear

one of those representing ComEd say that they are mandated by law to trim the trees on the trail. Tom Ringhofer, Manager of Transmission Vegetation Management at ComEd, stated he would not say that.

Commissioner Nyquist read from documentation that stated the lines on the nature trail are lower voltage than the required voltage that ComEd needs to cut above and stated he believes it is a financial advantage to ComEd to cut them down. He stated he believes this is an area that ComEd owes the DeKalb community a debt and read a letter sent to him from ComEd's CEO that stated the District is responsible for the nature trail maintenance. Mr. Ringhofer advised that the District is responsible for maintaining the trail however the issue is with the trees that aren't clear 10-15 feet off the trail. Commissioner Nyquist stated that he sees ComEd using its easement rights to help what's in their best interest and asked why the Sumac can't be left alone.

Commissioner Nyquist addressed George Gaulrapp, External Affairs Manager at ComEd, and stated he isn't hearing much compromise. Mr. Gaulrapp advised that he has had personal talks with Commissioner Nyquist and does not see any compromise from him either. President Young stated that the District doesn't really have a plan for the maintenance of the nature trail but knowing how important it is to the community he would like to see where ComEd and the District can work together and come up with a plan for maintenance. President Young asked if any District staff has met with ComEd. Ms. Doll advised that ComEd has offered to meet but staff wanted to present to the Board first.

President Young mentioned the District's attorney has looked at the legality of the issue and while ComEd might have the legal right to trim, they need to recognize that when they leave the trail is still a part of the neighborhood. He stated the District would like to take on more responsibility and time should be spent on what to do next. Commissioner Nyquist stated that was fair but he is still not seeing much compromise. Commissioner Holliday mentioned possibly only planting species that don't grow over 10 feet and asked, on the off chance some did grow above that, if the District could trim them down before ComEd started their maintenance. Mr. Ringhofer advised that would be fine and mentioned getting a list of the species that the District plants. Commissioner Holliday asked if the trees that were clear cut 5 years ago were ever stumped.

Commissioner Nyquist asked the District's attorney, Jim Rock, if the District owns the land on the nature trail. Commissioner Nyquist and President Young talked about a conversation they had with a previous high ranking ComEd employee who mentioned that the main reason ComEd was trimming was to save money. President Young addressed Commissioner Nyquist and asked if his main issue was with certain species being cut and stated that a battle every 5 years over the same issue isn't feasible for the District. He suggested getting a professional to assess the property.

Mr. Gaulrapp stated that he would like to see a good partnership with the District. Mr. McCullough gave examples of how they treated invasive species at Lake Forest Park and how much it has recovered. Commissioner Grada stated the District needs to focus on getting species in there that are appropriate and asked if the wrong things are being planted. President Young advised that staff have been letting the nature trail grow out more and urged to come up with a plan.

IV. Public Comments

Marv Levinsky, Timber Trail, stated he was present the last time ComEd came in to cut and mentioned that promises were kept to replant but now only weeds are growing in that area. He stated that ComEd needs to keep their promises, learn to compromise and does not see how trees 10 feet or higher would be a danger to the wires.

Ivan Shols asked which herbicide is used and how it's applied and if it's possible to cut the sumac trees short.

Jane Levinsky, Timber Trail, stated she was part of the process the last time ComEd came in to cut 5 years ago. She said she hand counted 300 trees that were cut down. Ms. Levinsky continued by saying that what the public was told wasn't true and ComEd is not following the guidelines they set. She stated that she does not want the trees cut down and it's only just a cost savings for ComEd.

Dave McClary stated that from listening to the Board discussion he can tell the nature trail is a very important part of the park to the District as well as the public. He stated his belief that if ComEd were serious about their care for the community, DeKalb residents would have gotten a heads up. He stated the trail is important to the community and would like ComEd to keep everyone informed.

Woman who did not state her name mentioned that the nature trail is very appreciated by many in DeKalb and it keeps people healthy so she would like ComEd to respect the public's concern about it.

After public comment:

Mr. McCullough, Mr. Ringhofer and Mr. Gaulrapp addressed the public in attendance and stated that they do not want to cause turmoil in the community but need to be responsible in terms of safety. Mr. Levinsky asked for clarification on the easement and stated the trees that are replanted need to sustain themselves. The representatives from ComEd advised that they would be staying after the meeting to address additional questions from the public.

V. Adjourn Public Meeting

Commissioner Nyquist made a motion to adjourn the public meeting, seconded by Commissioner Holliday. Motion carried by roll call vote.

Meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.