Coon Rapids park bond issue projects approved

By Peter Bodley on February 20, 2013 at 1:57 pm

The Coon Rapids City Council Tuesday approved a list of proposed projects to be included in a park bond referendum this fall as well as a preliminary project budget.

The council action also included approval of the parks, trails and open space system master plan update completed last year by WSB & Associates.

The council had met with its Parks and Recreation Commission Feb. 12 to discuss concerns that the commission had – parks to be included in the bond issue and a possible new park in front of the Coon Rapids Ice Center.

The list of projects approved by the council Tuesday for a park bond referendum Tuesday, Nov. 5 reflected consensus reached by the council and commission Feb. 12.

Under the scenario approved by the council, a park bond issue of up to $21.3 million would be placed on the November election ballot for voters to decide.

But two separate bond sales would take place five years apart and the projects would be split into two phases to be completed over a 10-year period, according to City Manager Steve Gatlin.

Tax impact for a $150,000 value home would average $88 a year over the 10-year life of the bonds and an average $175 a year for a home valued at $300,000.

That would be the high end, said Mayor Tim Howe.

"We will be asking voters to make their own decision on whether this would be a good investment in our future," he said.

According to Howe, both the council and commission have spent a lot of time working on this project, the commission longer than the council.

"There is a lot of focus on the trail system," Howe said.

The council has directed that a resident survey be done in March/April by Decision Resources to gauge public support for a park bond issue and if it comes back negative, then the council has the option in early May of pulling the plug on the referendum.
As presented by staff and approved by the council Tuesday, the phase one proposed project list includes these park and trails projects plus cost estimates.

- Reconstruction of Sand Creek Park, $6,107,000.
- Reconstruction of Riverview Park, $2,007,000.
- Trail construction on Coon Creek, Sand Creek and 85th Avenue, $1,740,000.
- Sidewalk gaps, $1,000,000.
- Construction of Evergreen Dog Park on city-owned property in Evergreen Business Park to replace Trackside Dog Park, $82,000.
- Construction of Boulevard Park in front of the Coon Rapids Ice Center, $500,000.
- Reconstruction of Riverwind Park, $400,000.

Total estimated cost of the phase one projects is $11,836,000.

Phase two projects planned include:

- Reconstruction of Lions Coon Creek Park, $962,000.
- Reconstruction of Crooked Lake Beach Park, $770,000.
- Construction to fill in remaining trail gaps (Mississippi Regional Trail, northern and middle linkages) and sidewalk gaps, $6,885,000.
- Reconstruction of Delta Park, $290,000.
- Reconstruction of Mason Park $427,000.

Estimated total cost of the phase two projects is $9,334,000.

Back in November 2012, the council had a work session to discuss the park, trails and open space master plan and while holding off on approving the plan because of issues that needed further discussion, the council consensus was to move forward with a park bond issue this fall to allow voters to decide.

The master plan had ranked projects in three tiers with tier one being top priority.

But in January at its 2013 strategic planning session the council tweaked the project makeup of the referendum.

Still included were the complete renovation of Sand Creek and Riverview parks and major trail and sidewalk improvements, but work at Crooked Lake Park would be scaled back to include parking lot and playground rehabilitation and some other work, but not a complete renovation, nor would the beach be reopened, according to Gatlin.

The council also asked the commission to recommend three or four neighborhood parks as the highest priority for needing improvements for inclusion in the park bond issue, Gatlin said.

Neighborhood parks that appear in the final project list are Riverwind, Delta and Mason parks.

According to Gatlin, staff met with Decision Resources, which has conducted community surveys for the city in the past, following the November 2012 work session to get its perspective on the park bond issue.
It was Decision Resources’ strong recommendation that the city should conduct a specific park survey on possible support for the referendum, Gatlin said.

That is projected to take place in late March or April under a timetable for the park bond issue presented to the council by Gatlin.

“Decision Resources has a very good track record of predicting the success of referendums based on its survey,” he said.

According to Decision Resources, the most important elements of a successful referendum include providing “something for everyone” and being “affordable,” Gatlin said.

Jason Amberg, WSB & Associates, has presented the council with descriptions of planned improvement in the parks that will part of the park bond referendum and will have concept designs and cost estimates completed in May, according to the timeline scenario presented to the council by Gatlin.

The council would be asked to review and approve the concept designs at its May 21 meeting assuming it had not had a change of heart following the survey and decided not to go ahead with the referendum.

To sell the park bond referendum to voters, a steering committee will be organized for public outreach efforts.

The council approved a contract with WSB & Associates last year for the updated parks master plan when it became clear that there was not funding available for a planned reconstruction of Riverview Park.

According to Gatlin, in the years 2002-2011 the city spent about $7 million, or some $700,000 a year, on major park and trails improvement projects paid for by using a combination of park dedication fees, general fund tax levy and grant funds.

“Funding is no longer available to continue this annual improvement program,” Gatlin wrote in a memo to the council for the October 2012 work session.

At this time, many of the city’s major park and trail facilities have safety concerns, handicap accessibility issues and, for the most part, show normal wear and tear after 20-30 years of use, he wrote. “Many of our facilities are outdated in terms of current park planning standards and are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain,” Gatlin wrote.

The city has some 40 parks, which include athletic fields, ice rinks, sliding hills, play areas and skate parks, and more than 20 miles of trails covering nearly 900 acres.

Development of the park system began in 1959 when Coon Rapids became a city and natural areas were set aside as public space for residents. A lot of the development took place after voters approved a park bond issue in the 1970s.

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