

## **Item 23-0456: Resolution #4-R-23 To Support Pollinator & Wildlife Habitats in Ellen Kort Peace Park**

**Parks and Recreation Committee**  
Mon, May 08, 2023 6:30PM

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 09:32**

All right. 23-0456 resolution 4-R-23 to support pollinator and wildlife habitats in Ellen Kort Peace Park. Do I hear a motion?

**Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 09:45**

Motion to approve.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 09:46**

Second.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 09:47**

Motion has been made and second to approve any—Mr. Gazza?

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 09:52**

Yes. Thank you, Chair. In preparation for this item on the agenda I talked to staff and ask them if they would—to see what their thoughts are. And basically, they brought forward some facts for consideration that we should remember.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 10:12**

One would be that we don't own the entire park, that the WE Energies side of the property is something that is something that we do not control, so other than that we have an agreement with them that we will mow their side of the grass. So, if that were not to be mowed, some agreement would have to be made with We Energies.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 10:34**

During a normal May, when the park is, I guess, you know, not under construction and you'd have significant amount of turf down there, you could get a significant amount of grass down there. We—something that we had said in the past, we went to all thatching mowers for sustainability and got away from baggers. So, the cleanup of the clippings, if that was an expectation after the month is up, being it's very visible would, one, take time. Our grounds manager indicated could take up to about three quarters of a day he figured, and then hauling them clippings off site. So, a lack of staff basically comes down—he said, you know, a lot of students start coming near the end of May. So, it could be challenging for him.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 11:33**

We do, per the policy for managing turf, we do spray the parks for weeds every other year. So, in that case, if you sprayed that park the year before, there may be very little anyway for the insects to for pollination.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 11:53**

And then in regards to the current Park, it was just basically turned up or graded for seeding, but due to the weather, they didn't see it yet. So, this year is a little bit different than in a typical year, if this was brought forward. Right now, it's about 50%, or more dirt, because of the construction that was down there along the trail. And then, you know, we'll be seeding that. And so, likelihood is none of that's going to come up between

now and the end of the month to. So, this year is really an anomaly, you know, for the park as a whole. So just a few comments that that were made.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 12:38**

Aldersperson Schultz.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 12:40**

Thank you. This is a great discussion, because a lot of these comments—er that are considerations of things that I'm thinking about as we're talking about just doing this sort of blanket "don't mow it for the month." And the one thing we don't want to do is create work for staff or a situation where we have a ton of biomass on that large open space. And suddenly, three weeks into May, we've got 12–16-inch grass, and now staff's got to deal with it. Has it done any good? That's a really viable—that's a significant concern, and I think a question that we've got to consider when we're doing this.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 13:11**

I guess it's fortunate that we have this kind of anomaly year and maybe we take advantage of it, given the fact that I didn't realize it was up to 50% that's dirt and not seeded yet, but that helps our situation.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 13:28**

No Mow May is evolving a little bit. I don't—I mean, I think initially it was "let it alone for four weeks and see what happens", but we're starting to, we're starting to retool the notion that that's a good thing. Grasses get to a certain length and didn't—they're no longer helping the pollinators. So, if it's two or three weeks into May and we're 12 inches, and there's no flowers, I would rather Park and Rec go in and take care of it, then let it go till it's 18 inches tall and then a real a real challenge for staff to get in there, and thatch it down, and move it back into the soil.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 14:02**

So, you know, I'm open—we'll talk here, but I guess I might entertain a slight modification to this, be it further resolved, that allows staff to get in before the end of the month, if it gets to a certain height and becomes untenable for staff to deal with it.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 14:18**

By the same token, I'd like to see staff consider doing it for the year in that space and evaluate the frequency that we currently are mowing and maybe back that off. Maybe do it half again as much, or you know, if you find that comfortable letter where you can grow it and then mow it instead of doing it every two weeks or whatever the schedule is, maybe it's every four weeks. And I think that to me is a better outcome because it says that the city is trying to try and engage in the No Mow May philosophy, but we don't really want to tie your hands. I don't—that's not what our goal is. We really want the city to say "Okay, we'll give this a shot." I'd rather you have some license to do things in that green space with a lawn because, frankly, we don't know what it's going to do. I'll turn it over.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 15:07**

Aldersperson Wolff, did you...?

**Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 15:11**

Thank you, Chair. So, I also noted some things that I think need to change about the resolution we wrote. There were some questions and discussions online, as well as from you and with other Council members. And I think

potentially, like Alderperson Schultz said, which I think is a great idea, and what his suggestions were, but of course, I'd like to hear from you on that.

**Alderperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 15:36**

I also think we need to specifically state whether or not we're doing this every year, or how long we're doing this for, and whether or not we would be doing this for when the park is actually developed, which I'd like to say for the record, I didn't see that happening once the park is actually developed. This would be more while it's just a greenfield. We would just try to help pollinators while it's sitting there, kind of a thing.

**Alderperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 16:14**

Thank you, Chair. In our recent discussions about No mow May, I was very interested to hear from Alderperson Schultz about how his own personal lawn is not regularly having to be mowed because it is a special kind of turf or because it's a more natural turf or it's a pollinator or a flowering turf. I would much prefer to have this entire resolution, completely rewritten to include things like working with staff to manage that sort of turf. That would allow the city to be showing neighbors that that can be done and can be done sustainably and will not be a nuisance, and will not be a trouble for as far as turf management.

**Alderperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 17:01**

Because right now we are only, as a city, able to manage—the parks department is only able to manage how to mow turf the way that they know how to mow turf. If we have a different type of turf, that allows them to not have to mow as often and will encourage pollinators, such as the one that Alderperson Schultz regularly talks about at his own home, then there should be a way that we can do this as a city and make that happen without having to go to all the trouble that is brought about by this particular resolution.

**Alderperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 17:35**

So, I would much prefer to have discussions amongst the folks who have made this happen in their own lives and city staff and see whether this park in particular can be a prototype park for how low maintenance turf can be maintained to both satisfy the citizens who will be using that park and to assist the pollinators, etc. I really feel like this resolution could be stripped back, and there should be much more emphasis on working with the staff and folks who know how to do this. Thank you.

**Alderperson William Siebers (District 1) 18:17**

Alderperson Schultz.

**Alderperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 18:18**

I agree with my colleagues Alder Hartzheim on the spirit of what you're what you're saying here. Unfortunately, were a week into May. I wish we were having this conversation in March or beginning of April, because I think maybe—there may have been some time to retool this a little bit better to what we're trying to accomplish.

**Alderperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 18:42**

The end goal I think, if we could get there, would be to have some park, whether it's this park or another park, but some No Mow May or Slow Mow Summer or Slow Mow Spring, some iteration of this that the city takes some ownership of and kind of sees what they can do, and maybe that looks at different varieties of lawn seeding. It's a great opportunity right now to see this park with some low mow options. There are seven different variants. Right next to the Peace Park, we planted a whole bunch of different varieties of low mow, but unfortunately, it's not going to see what looks like. There's no way to make a decision this May, but maybe when we see what those things look like Park and Rec staff can go out and say, "Well, this is a really nice mix here. We should maybe try that." So, end goal is that.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 19:30**

Again, we're already week into May. We've got three weeks left. Half of the park is dirt. I guess I would like to—I'd like to prove this, maybe add another "be it further resolved". And I guess I can just say it ad lib here that "staff has the ability to address grass when it becomes untenable to thatch" or I don't know how you'd want to word it, but "becomes challenging for Park and Rec personnel to manage." So at least have that option if it's three weeks from now and you want to get out there and mow it, I don't want to tie your hands. That would be an amendment to the resolution I think we could live with, doesn't tie the staffs' hands, gets us to this point where we're doing it this year, but then looking forward to maybe working with staff to do something different in the future.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 20:23**

This park is a great opportunity, because it's going to remain undeveloped for the foreseeable future. It's nothing but grass, except for a trailway. If we can keep that clean and looking nice, and people can use that, I think that's fantastic. But the rest of the space will probably not get a lot of public use. So, it feels like an opportunity that the city staff can engage and maybe play around a little bit, give yourself a little bit of a No Mow May sandbox and see what we can do with this.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 20:50**

Can we, can we do that without a resolution? It seemed like you and Dean Gazza was having a good discussion. And maybe do it—my idea would be to hold the resolution. You and Dean, you know, or whoever—he, I'm sure you've heard his goals, Alderson, and work on this. And then come back and say "This is what we've thought out", you know, and then decide what to do, how to improve the resolution, and be more specific for next year. Dean?

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 21:36**

Yes, I think it'll happen. You know, because of this year being an anomaly, by, by, it'll just happen in that situation. Because when they go and plant the seed, it's going to take a while to germinate and come up. For that other area that is in the greener area, the geese have been doing a great job of keeping that pretty low. I really don't think that it'll get to a point where we will have to mow it. So kinda as we're talking, I was thinking of that. But if it were to some reason, you know, get out a hand to a point where it's going to require that cleanup that I talked about, then having the ability to go in there and take care of it would be good. But I think definitely this year, I think we're kind of talking about something that won't ever come about anyway. We wouldn't have a need to mow it.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 22:25**

The other thing is, with—just from staff starting, a lot of times you see some of these spaces lagging behind. Even this week, in our, in our weekly updates, we talked about how the grass was getting behind just a little bit, just because of some of the other activities and some of the weather that was taking place. And so, the guys are going to be out trying to get some grass cutting done, but a lot of it revolves around where a lot of the activities are in some of the major parks. And we only have the six individuals right now until the seasonals come on board. So, they'll only be able to do a limited amount anyway. So, I don't see that they would be down there, you know, right away anyway.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 23:07**

So, you know, when we talk about the future, and we talk about the future of the park, I do like the idea of looking into different seed types, like you indicated, to see you know, having our grounds manager you know, speak with individuals, talk to individuals. Because like, say for example, like in Ellen Kort, that's going to be a

passive park. It's not a park expected to get heavy use from a lot of activity, like people setting up volley—volleyball nets and kickball and baseball and frisbee and running dogs and things like that, versus the bigger—some of the other parks. So, I could see a different seed type really being utilized down there.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 23:46**

Also at Lundgaard Park coming, maybe there's an opportunity to research something also, and to do a different seed type there. So, as we do a new park, it provides a new opportunity. But in our existing parks, it'd be hard because you're not going to till the entire grass under and start from scratch again.

**Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 24:03**

But—and another other note on that, we've been making significant strides in allowing areas to go back to natural. We haven't calculated the acres. I wish we would have. I think Greg has some areas on some maps. But there's significant areas that he's allowed to go back to natural. Then it's No Mow all year long versus just one, you know, the one month. And so, our focus has really been a little bit more on that because, not only—that really a lot driven by, one, sustainability, but, two, the bigger is labor, just you know trying to keep taking on new responsibilities without adding staff so a lot of that has been done to offset that labor.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 24:53**

And yet, I hear Alderman Schultz agree with you on that. I would—I'd like to hold this and see what you guys can work out and then come back and add more meat to it or detail to it. But if you want to pass it, pass it. Alderman Doran, what—? Okay.

**Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 25:18**

Mic 13 here. Thanks. I guess I would just, I would maybe ask the question, is it necessary to hold the item when it sounds like for all intents and purposes, the resolution is not necessary? I don't know what even is being discussed is necessarily needs a resolution anyway. I guess—I mean, what we're, what it sounds like we're hearing is conversation to the effect of what I've been sharing throughout the last couple of weeks about No Mow May that letting your grass—letting grass grow isn't as beneficial as we may have thought it was. And so, if the idea is looking at planting, you know, different gardens or other things that don't need to be mowed, that's a whole nother conversation.

**Alderman Chad Doran (District 15) 26:01**

And I guess, in talking with staff, when I reached out when this resolution first came in, you know, hearing that the alders who put in the resolution didn't discuss with staff this resolution idea to begin with, maybe we wouldn't have needed to even have the discussion if that had happened at first. But it just doesn't seem like the resolution is really necessary anymore given the conversation we're having, so I'm not sure what the point of holding it necessarily would be. It's just another one of those things that's sort of sitting out there then that's someone else to track and bring back at some point in the future.

**Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 26:34**

I don't want to speak for Alderman Schultz, but my thought is that where Alderman Schultz is on this, on No Mow May, that he is looking for some guarantees in that Ellen Kort Park would support pollen area—pollinator and wildlife habitat. And so, therefore, the resolution does have some value in that sense. Did you want to speak?

**Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 27:08**

Yeah, thank you, Chair. I appreciate the discussion. I think it's been very good. And I do think we should hold it as well and come back. And, after lengthy conversation, I think that what happened in committee today has been

very useful, and we'll make our city a little bit better with that work. So, I think we should hold it as well and go from there.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 27:36**

Aldersperson Schultz, are you willing to work with Mr. Gazza in terms of meeting your goals, your ideas, and at the same time hearing the challenges he has? And then...

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 27:52**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 27:53**

...coming back. And then?

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 27:56**

Yeah, just—I would just remind everyone in the room that the pollenablers group is a committee that was formed because, in order to get Bee City certification, we needed a community group, and it could have been, it could have been part of the city, but it felt like it made more sense to be community engaged and driven by community comments. So, the group was formed because of this initiative and being Bee city, but it's a partnership with the Xerces Societies and the City of Appleton. So, the point of this is what we've been trying to do for years is to show all the good resiliency work that the city is doing but never gets credit for. There's lots of other things that we should be also bringing to the surface.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 28:40**

This case in particular is just about saying, "We have a partnership." The city and this organization, and Xerces (a national organization to preserve and protect pollinators and create habitat) have this agreement to do things together. And so far, we really haven't had like a good showcase area or spot. Acknowledging, and despite the fact that the city has been doing some great stuff, from setting aside natural areas, I know all these things, but this—because of this park being centralized and getting a lot of attention, I think putting a sign out there that says City's participating in No Mow, it's a big deal, even though it's kind of not a big deal, right? In our estimation, your estimation, it's really not doing a lot, but that's where—that's the meat and potatoes of the resolution.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 29:31**

I love that we're now going to the next step before this even happens, and that's even better. So, I'm totally fine holding it because if that's the outcome, I'd much rather that be the outcome than just having the park not mowed for May. Honestly, that's a far better outcome than what the resolution asks us to do. So totally fine holding it. I think I want to leave it because of the intent of the resolution is to keep that kind of on the books that we're moving forward, but this is the reason why.

**Aldersperson William Siebers (District 1) 30:03**

Do I hear a motion to hold?

**Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 30:05**

Motion hold.

**Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:06**

Second.

**Mon, May 8, 2023**

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 30:08**

Motion has been made and seconded to hold. Do we want to designate a period of time, or do we want to just leave it there and you come back and say, or Mr. Gazza comes back and says, "We're ready." Chris Behrens.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens 30:28**

Chair, I recommend picking a date certain.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 30:33**

Okay.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens 30:35**

Otherwise, you're holding it indefinitely and that's been equated to receiving and filing and tabling, killing an item, and I don't think that's the intent here. If you don't want that to be read into the intent with this. So, my recommendation would be pick a date certain.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 30:51**

Alderson Schultz, pick a date.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:56**

Pick a date.

**Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 30:57**

July 17?

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 30:58**

How about—when did you say?

**Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 31:00**

July 17? I don't know. What's—sometime in the summer, right?

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:04**

Sometime mid-June, I guess might be wise.

**Attorney Christopher Behrens 31:07**

Suggest the first—or the first scheduled meeting in June. That would allow flexibility in the event that you decide you don't want to have one in the first committee cycle on the second.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:17**

That sounds good. Um, let's do that.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 31:19**

Is that gonna give you enough time?

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:20**

Yep. Yeah.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 31:22**

Motion's been made and seconded to table or hold until the first meeting in June. All in favor signify by saying aye. All those opposed? Chair votes aye. Three Zero. Great discussion.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 31:36**

No information items.

**Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 31:38**

Motion to adjourn.

**Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 31:39**

Second.

**Alderson William Siebers (District 1) 31:40**

Motion has been made and seconded to adjourn. All in favor signify by saying aye. Those opposed? Chair votes aye. We're adjourned. Thank you. You know what we just did?