

Item 25-0979: Approve Veterans Park Renaming Process

Common Council

Wed, Sep 03, 2025 7:00PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 04:12

I have no other business to present to you, so we'll move on now to public participation. One member signed up. One member of the public signed up to speak. Again, these are items that appear on the agenda. We ask that members of the public limit their time to five minutes or less, and we will help you keep track of time. Again, we have one member of the public signed up to speak, and so we'll welcome Sarah Leet, who has two items she wishes to speak on. Welcome Sarah.

Sarah Leet (Resident) 04:43

Thank you, Mayor Woodford. My name is Sarah Lee, and I live at [XXXXX] West Oklahoma Street. My comments tonight are related to the World Peace event and the park naming policy. I begin my statements tonight talking again about the themes of communication, particular in situations where there is an artificially compressed timeline. Again, I find this unacceptable. One of the first lessons I learned at Lawrence was not in the classroom. A lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine. I ask you to think about this.

Sarah Leet (Resident) 05:13

While, I did not agree with the decisions made at the last Council meeting. I can understand and respect the argument that policies are not made willy nilly. Staff do have experience, and there does need to be some need for consistency. With that context, I am frustrated by the need to appear to hear tonight to point out the obvious: it is one thing to offer a sacrificial lamb following policy; it is another thing to enforce some policies and not others, especially in a two-week time frame. One may argue that the policies on the agenda tonight are not as important as prior policies that have come to the table. However, according to a number of you, policy is policy.

Sarah Leet (Resident) 05:53

I am paraphrasing here, however. Alder Smith mentioned that policies are carefully thought through. Alder Fenton echoed that that policies are not adopted without thought. Alder Meltzer mentioned that we must respect the experts. Alder Hayden indicated that he tries to be consistent in voting. The special event policy was revised in February of 2024. It updated the application deadline to 45 days. The application asked the applicant to sign, indicating that they have read the policy. I do not know if they did in this case, and we're just hoping an exception would be made, or if they signed without reading, as is common in today's society of accepting Terms and Conditions multiple times per day. I have nothing against the World Peace event. I wish the organizers well in a future event, but I do not believe that an exception should be granted in this case.

Sarah Leet (Resident) 06:50

On to Parks and Rec, the discussion at Parks and Rec greatly deviated from the agenda, in my opinion. While there were concerns voiced about the time frame and changing the policy, ultimately, the committee decided that, since there was no time, even though there has been 28 years to update the policy, instead, the process could be amended to essentially say, "It's okay if you deviate from this policy." It is one thing to update the process to recommend such a change if it is done in conjunction with a plan or a proposal or a recommendation to update that policy within a short amount of time to mirror the desired changes, but to just try to slip something through is unacceptable, no matter the impact or lack thereof. This should have been thought of

when the change was—changed to the name of Memorial Park to Veterans Memorial Park was done. As it is, I do not see how in good conscience you can approve this process change.

Sarah Leet (Resident) 07:48

The mayor commented that sometimes timelines are driven by factors that don't allow much—much more time. Time in neither of these situations was constrained. These are not decisions that need to be made under duress. You've already lost a lot of confidence from citizens. I ask you to take time to reflect on your votes tonight. As Alder Wolff said, "Sometimes we have to say no, and it's okay to do that." As in the past, your votes tonight, will have consequences passed the items on tonight's agenda. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mayor Jake Woodford 08:28

Are there any other members of the public who wish to speak on an item that appears on the agenda but did not have the opportunity to sign up ahead of time? Hearing none, we'll close public participation.

[Cut]

Mayor Jake Woodford 18:42

Moving on to the item from Parks and Recreation, this is 25-10—excuse me. This is 25-0979, approve Veterans Park naming—renaming process. We have a motion and a second to approve. Open the floor for discussion. Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 19:06

Thank you, Chair. I watched this committee meeting and the committee discussion in this regard, and it was disconcerting to me, in the same way that the public speaker—or that—the constituent came and spoke to us about policy changes. You know, why have a policy if you continue to make exceptions and changes? And in this particular instance, I think that that really rings true to me. We've had this process for a very, very long time. Some have said that renaming Memorial Park "Veterans Memorial Park" didn't follow the policy. But as far as I understand, veterans are considered, you know, number one on the policy list, "important people who have lost their lives" or have died for the city or for our constituency. I wish to move to re—to remove the amendment from the Parks and Rec Department, to return this to as it was recommended by city staff.

Mayor Jake Woodford 20:16

All right, we have, we have Alder Firkus in the system as having seconded, but we'll also note that you seconded Alder Croatt. But we have a motion and a second to amend. This would be restoring the item to its original recommendation as presented to committee. So, we'll open the floor for discussion on this amendment. Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 20:46

Thank you, Chair. So, on this amendment, I put some thought into what had happened at parks and recs committee. I found the conversation interesting. I also found the staff saying that they thought the policy should be updated interesting as well, as far as what we do in the future, not affiliated with this, but we should take a look at that as well, right? But back on the amendment, I think that this creates the opportunity for more discussion from the community. I know that some people were fixated on some of the suggestions for the park name, but in reality, the only suggestions that we would hear are those coming from the community. So realistically, we're just asking the community and allowing the community more leeway with how they name the park. That's what the nice thing I think about this amendment is, is that we're creating the ability for the community to have more creative ability with their park. They paid for it. It's their park, right? So, I feel as though we should keep the amendment because it allows our community to have more leeway. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 22:09

Further discussion. Director Gazza, you've got...?

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 22:17

[...]vacation.

Mayor Jake Woodford 22:17

Please do.

Director Dean Gazza (Parks, Recreation, and Facilities) 22:18

So, there is no confusion. The policy does indicate that the approval date was 1997. So that misrepresents—it gives a person an idea that policy has not been updated or looked at. We do look at the policies every two years, but the policy that date—but no change has been required. Thus, the date has never been updated. Each and every time we review it compare it to other municipalities, other policies that do the same thing, it has remained consistent. So, we have suggested no changes. So, we consider it up to date.

Mayor Jake Woodford 22:53

Thank you. Alder Firkus.

Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 22:58

Thank you, Mayor. I'm going to urge my colleagues to support the substitution amendment. The policy exists so that these type of discussions don't turn into a free for all. These are not just to put guardrails around what can and cannot be considered, but also to make sure that the process for naming this doesn't turn into basically some weird middle-aged version of Lord of the Flies where we're fighting over the conch. So, please, let's support this. Let's stick with the policy. Let's not open any back doors or loopholes. So, if somebody here doesn't like what staff brings forward, they just can inject their own and basically waste staff's time with just circumventing the process. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:37

Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 23:40

Just a quick apology to the director. That was my error. I must have misheard that. Sorry about that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 23:47

Alder Schultz.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 23:51

Thank you, Chair. I think if we use the most recently named part in reference to what this discussion is about, I think there's some room for allowing the community to suggest options that don't specifically fit into this criteria, and we can do that just as this is as we did with the Ellen Kort Peace Park. Ellen Kort Peace Park, it has a duality, or dual identity. Now this policy is in place, I can certainly see the same thing happening, and that would be, maybe the way we go.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 24:28

On the other side of that, it suggests to me that having something like a peace park in a community is not worthy of pursuing. So, had we gone down that road when we were considering the name for that incredible

waterfront park, would we have said we're not going to name this the Peace Park? That we need to find some name to attach it to? I would hope we would have come to agreement that a peace park would have been a worthy ideal and something this community could get behind. But if this policy—if we can hold it to the same standard, we're going to hold this to now, that wouldn't have happened. And so, the notion here is, why not let the community bring forth ideas? Parks and Rec will be vetting all of those suggestions by all the community members. We will get a chance at committee and then council to look at those suggestions at well. This notion that we're somehow going to be going down this strange rabbit hole of oddball park names just seems—it doesn't seem—ring true to me. I would hope that we would get to what came out of committee with the ability to listen to the community and the suggestions they might have and that between staff and between this deliberative body, we could have the wherewithal and the smarts to pick an appropriate name for that space. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 25:45
Van Zeeland.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 25:51

Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to address some of the questions about the policies for Veterans Park. I guess we would say Memorial—Veterans Memorial Park, and the current Veterans Park as not meeting the policy, because number five does say that it can—so that it says "the commonly accepted name of the surrounding neighborhood, which comprises the significant portion of the service area of the park." And when I think of the naming of those locations, I think about the service area of the park, which is Veterans Memorial, and then Veterans Park, which is actually named because of the proximity of the Veterans Bridge. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:39
Alder Hayden?

Aldersperson Patrick Hayden (District 7) 26:42
I removed myself from the queue.

Mayor Jake Woodford 26:44
All right. Not in time, evidently. Any further discussion on the amendment to strike the amendment? Hearing none, please cast your votes. All right. Motion fails six to seven.

Mayor Jake Woodford 27:13
So, we're back to the item as originally recommended out of committee. Further discussion? Hearing none, we have a motion and a second to approve. Please cast your votes. All right, that motion passes, 9 to 4.

Mayor Jake Woodford 27:53
Well, this will be very interesting. Wasn't going to comment on this, but now this will be very interesting, because effectively, what you've done is, is you've set aside the policy that exists. So, I would expect we're going to come back to committee, because I—we're going to need to have some parameters around this. And so, if you've decided to jettison the policy, I still think we're going to need some discussion at committee, just so that we have an understanding of what the committee's expectations are going to be before we move into any kind of process. Because I'm frankly not comfortable opening a process without clarity around what's actually going to happen or what the parameters are. So, we'll talk about this, and staff will bring some items for discussion back to the Parks and Recreation Committee to make sure we're all on the same page about this before anything get started. So just to manage expectations for constituents in the public, I would expect this can take a little bit more time.