

Red Lodge Parks, Trees and Recreation Board

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2020 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

Title 8, Chapter 7 of the Red Lodge City Code defines composition, duties and responsibilities of the Red Lodge Parks, Trees and Recreation Board. The purpose of this code is to establish, improve, care for, regulate and manage a system of public recreation and public trees. The Board Mission is to protect, enhance, and maintain parks, facilities, natural resources, open space, trails, trees and plants by developing and executing the Comprehensive Parks Plan, Trails Plan, Active Transportation Plan and Urban Forestry Management Plan. The Board is advisory to the City Council and the Mayor and consists of seven members, six area residents of which up to two may reside outside of the City limits but within five miles of the City limits, and a member of the City Council. Current Board members include:

Rue Freeman, Acting Chair, term expires December 2021

Courtney Long, Secretary, term expires December 2022

Kevin Bonk, term expires December 2020

Bryan Romeijn, term expires December 2022

Tootsie Schrowe, term expires December 2021

Rob Weamer, City Council Representative, term expires December 2020

*There is one vacant board position

The Board receives support from members of the City staff designated by the Mayor: James Caniglia, Community Development Director, Neil Matthews-Pennanen, Assistant Planner and Jim Bushnell, Public Works Director.

Board functions are outlined in:

- Ordinance 918, Composition and Responsibilities of the Red Lodge, Parks, Trees and Recreation Board
- Ordinance 919, Regulations of Trees on City Owned Land and Public Rights-of-Way



Urban Forestry Tree Programs

Decisions concerning City trees continue to be guided by the **Urban Forestry Management Plan** (UFMP), which was approved in March 2018. Although there was a very little 2019/2020 budget available for Parks, Trails, Recreation (and Urban Forestry), there were several efforts to support public trees and forestry in Red Lodge.

The **Arbor Day** planting in 2019 was completed in September due to cold, snowy weather in April when celebrations typically take place in other parts of the country. Mayor Bill Larson declared this Red Lodge's Arbor Day as he is authorized to do according to the National Arbor Day Foundation. A spruce tree was planted behind the Red Lodge Carnegie Library. The library has long decorated an evergreen close to its walls (in the background in the photo) with lights for the holiday season. It is the hope that by the time that mature evergreen comes down, this newly planted tree can be decorated so the tradition can be continued.



Applications for Grants: As is normally done, the Assistant Planner and Parks Board Tree Committee worked together on Grant applications to DNRC for both Arbor Day and Forestry Program Development. A grant of \$750 for Arbor Day was awarded to the City and a grant of \$9600 was awarded for Urban Forestry Program Development. The halt to the Cost-share program in 2019 made clear that the City of Red Lodge has come to rely on the DNRC grant funds to manage City forestry. The lower budget for urban forestry has made it more difficult to compete for DNRC grant funds. In 2019, it is likely that the City missed out on grant funding because we did not have the local funds dedicated to match potential funds. As a result of urban forestry funding cuts, the City experiences a double loss: there is the initial loss of City funding being reduced and the grant funds being out of reach due to those budget cuts.

The Application to **DNRC's Program Development Grant** was proposed to support continued Cost-share Trees (110 cost share trees have been planted to date), to trim and otherwise care for trees throughout the City, and to address hazardous City trees in Finn Park.

Some of the aging cottonwood trees in Finn Park were identified as a public safety hazard. The Parks Board used the Urban Forestry Program Development funds to address this safety hazard. This was completed as a collaborative effort with a professional arborist, forestry professionals at the DNRC, a crew of sawyers from Red Lodge Fire Rescue, and the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation to move and utilize the trees for their firewood program.



The Urban Forestry Program Development grant also included funds to revitalize the park with stump removal and planting of new trees. This will occur in FY 2021.

Cost-share Tree Program: The cost-share tree program was restarted in Spring 2020 after a hiatus in 2019. This

was the seventh year of the cost-share program, having originally become part of the Urban Forestry program in 2013. The program is still popular and expected by the public each spring. Ten trees were planted in the boulevard areas at the request and shared cost of the adjacent private property owners.



To celebrate **Arbor Day and Earth Day** in 2020, the Parks Board conducted a virtual event. It was not possible to gather for a tree planting

in the spring due to Covid-19 so the Sustainability Coordinator, Robin Adams, and Parks Board Member Courtney Long coordinated numerous events throughout Earth Week that participants could carry out in their homes or in their backyards. This included surveys of plant and animal life through the iNaturalist program and web-based events over the course of a few days. Numerous local families reported taking advantage of this curriculum to celebrate Earth Day.

Due to the public health crisis making in-person events difficult, the Arbor Day Foundation suspended the requirements for Tree Cities to maintain their statuses in 2020. Consequently, Red Lodge will again be certified as a **Tree City USA**. The Parks Board aims to have a tree planting in the fall so that the standards will be met regardless of the suspension for 2020. Maintaining a Tree City USA status typically requires the City to spend a minimum of \$2 per resident towards tree related projects every year and hold an Arbor Day Celebration tree planting. Red Lodge has been a Tree City USA for 20 years!

Public Trees Watering in the Parks and downtown business area was restarted this past growing season since forecasts indicated a hotter and drier summer than that of 2019. Our urban forest did not suffer greatly from the lack of watering in 2019 but going two growing seasons with no watering would likely lead to some tree mortality. Funds available through a RLACF grant to the City for watering City trees will be used in FY 2021 (starting in July 2020).

Recreational Facilities, Ongoing Projects & Accomplishments

Moose Trails Playground: @ Lion's Park: Some of the structural issues that presented hazards to playground users were addressed in August 2019. This was part of a larger effort to address maintenance at Moose Trails Park. Staining occurred over two days in August 2019. Much of the volunteer work was done, putting the fencing and lower structures of the playground into better condition to withstand the elements for the next few years. However, there is still contract work to be done to stain the sections of the playground that are higher off the ground. This is work deemed too hazardous to assign to volunteers.



Skate Park: The Red Lodge Skate Board was reconstituted with the purpose of raising money for an all concrete skatepark. The group renamed the park Hellroaring Skatepark and developed new branding to go along with this renaming. They then sold t-shirts and gave away stickers as part of their fundraising push. They solicited donations, both small and large, from locals, as well as larger skatepark funding foundations –



particularly the Montana Skatepark Association, Montana Pool Service, and the First Try Foundation. There were some individuals who made generous personal donations and spurred the foundations they are associated with to donate to this project as well. Montana native Jeff Ament was a great supporter and a big reason Montana Pool Service was so generous to this project. Red Lodge native Aaron Kyro brought the attention of the Braille Army to the project and worked through the First Try Foundation to help make this project a success.



The wooden ramps that have required so much attention over the years have been removed from the site of the park. It is expected the \$200,000 raised by this group will result in a new concrete skatepark being completed by Evergreen Skateparks in FY 2021. The design is superimposed over the project site in the image on the right.



Sports Field Leveling Project: @ Lions Park: **Red Lodge Ice** approached the Parks Board in the spring of 2020 with a proposal to level the playing surface used for multiple sports in Lions Park. This would enable more efficient rink production in the winter and summer users would benefit from a more even field as well. The Parks Board has approved and the project is expected to move forward in the coming months. The leveling will occur in October with grass seeding following in April when there is no ice rink and spring is here for planting. The same use that is typical on this field will not be possible in the summer of 2021, but the leveling project will result in long-term improvements.



The **Comprehensive Parks Plan** was adopted in 2015. That original parks plan was developed by Great West Engineering, with input from the Parks Board and City staff. An update is now needed since the plan is five years old. This update will be completed without the assistance of outside professionals. Instead volunteers from the Parks Board and the staff support for the Board will update the information and execute a new analysis of the City's parks. This update began in the spring of 2020 and will be completed during FY 2021.



Bee City USA Grant Application: Courtney Long, a big advocate for Red Lodge to become a Bee City, joined the Parks Board. The Tree Committee has now become the Tree and Bee Committee with one of their short-term goals being to make Red Lodge a Bee City. The proposal has been submitted to City Council and should be approved or denied in FY 2021.

The City updated its **Capital Improvements Plan** in 2019. As part of this update, the Parks Board reviewed the parks-related projects and submitted their suggestions for what the priorities should be. Great West Engineering did not have the experience with parks within Red Lodge to determine these priorities without public input. This volunteer board taking the time to review the plan and make their suggestions greatly improved the final product.

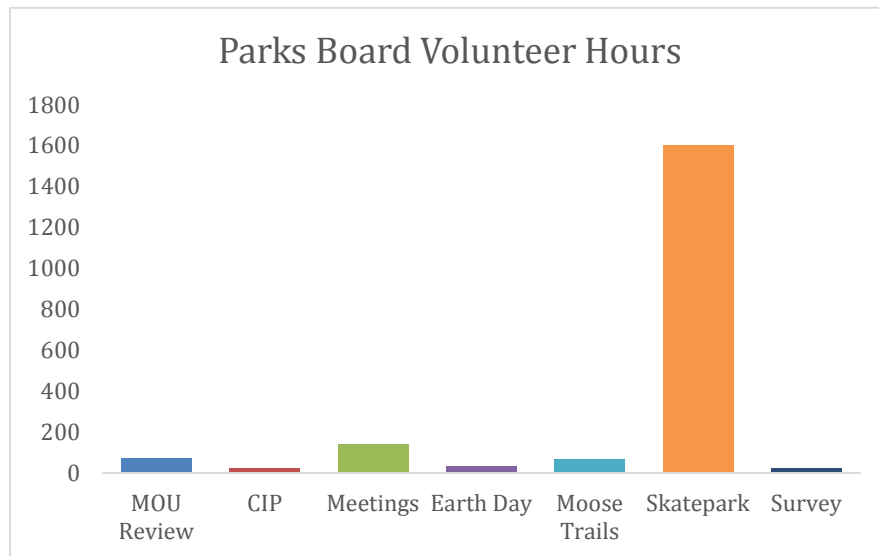
Our Annual **Earth Day** clean up and block party was cancelled this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We hope to bring it back next year as many new connections and ideas were generated during the planning of this cancelled event.

Parks Board members are invaluable contributors to keeping the City’s parks in shape. Sometimes members are asked to help with the less exciting aspects of parks management. The City of Red Lodge depends heavily on volunteers to maintain its parks. To rely on non-paid volunteers with various clubs and groups in town means the City needs to regularly review its memoranda of understanding with these groups. **MOU Review:** Members of the parks board split up the task of reviewing these MOUs among themselves. This required time and effort on the part of all members to track down, interview group members, and then report back their findings to the City with any changes that need to be made to any MOUs. This work keeps a healthy dialog between the City and user groups and ensures all parties are benefitting from these relationships.

Park/Facility	User Group MOU	Active Date	Term	Notes
City Pool	None		None	
Coal Miners Park	Adult Co-Ed Softball	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Baseball/little League	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Youth Soccer	7/12/16	5 years	
	Disc Golf	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Mountain Biking	7/12/16	5 years	
Upper Coal Miners Park	RL Youth Soccer	1/25/18	Development	
Skate Park	Skate Park Users	7/12/16	5 years	Dissolution Recommended
Lions Park	Lions Club	4/26/16	4 years	
	Red Lodge Ice	4/26/16	5 years	
Field School Park	None			
Pride Park	None			
Rotary Park	RL Rotary Club	4/26/16	5 years	
Finn Park	None			
Creekside Park	None			

Van Dyke Park	None			
Double Ditch Dog Park	Dog Owners	7/12/16	5 years	Dissolution Recommended
Phillips Park (Mtn Springs Villa)	None			
Trails	BRTA	4/26/16	5 years	

Volunteer Contributions are vital to the maintenance of Red Lodge’s City parks. This bar chart shows a conservative estimate of the number of volunteer hours contributed by Parks Board members. The estimate is conservative because there are numerous times members volunteer in some manner but do not record or underreport their contributions. A total of 1,955 hours were accounted for by Parks Board members. This is the equivalent of 0.98 full-time



equivalent employees (FTEs). Another way to think about it is since the standard value of a volunteer hour is \$25.43, the amount of volunteering from the Parks Board should be valued at \$49,715.65. Again, this is a conservative estimate so the actual value is higher. This does not include the work done in parks outside of the Parks Board contributions, *e.g.* mowing by Lions Club in Lions Park, regular clean-ups of Rotary Park by Rotary Club, development of the outdoor rink by Red Lodge Ice, trail work by BRTA, among others.

Rotary Youth Leadership Awardees (RYLA) Proposal to Parks Board: Sophomore students awarded \$50 each through the Rotary Leadership program merged their awards for a project to install a single water bottle filling station in Pride Park. After working with Public Works to ensure all design specs and requirements for the design were met, estimates for excavation and splitting water metering came back too high to move ahead (in excess of \$20,000). Parks Board approved their project because they met Public Works approval, but had no money to contribute to the project. The RYLA project team continued fundraising efforts and found an affordable location next to the ATM in front of Pollard parking (~\$6,000) to install the filling station. Installation occurred in spring of 2020, providing a place for anyone walking around downtown Red Lodge to quench their thirst without generating plastic waste.

Challenges & Future Goals

The Red Lodge park infrastructure relies heavily on volunteers not only to keep the parks beautiful but to carry out routine maintenance. The MOUs, the update of which was referred to earlier, outline shared responsibilities for maintenance between the City and the User Group. Keeping

these agreements current and working with user groups so that expectations are realistic are key factors to ensure the City's parks are well maintained.

Because the Parks budget was still quite small this fiscal year (2019/20), the Parks Board determined it would be useful to understand how these MOUs are holding up and what impacts the City may face in maintaining Parks without a budget to do so. Not all user groups remain active and inactive user groups MOUs should be dissolved. The City should not count on active participation maintaining parks or facilities under outdated MOUs. Although a review of the MOUs was conducted in 2019, there are several that will expire in spring of 2021 so they will need to be reauthorized. Public works is ultimately responsible for all Parks and Forestry in the City although they do not have the budget, time or staff to manage alone – especially in light of their on-going efforts to address water, storm-water and street CIPs.

Lions: The City has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Lions organization representing the share of work and costs for maintenance between the City and Red Lodge Lions. Costs above and beyond \$500/year are the responsibility of the City.

Work on the Lions Park gazebo was contracted and carried out during the summer of 2018 with the help of a matching grant from the Lions Club. The hardier materials used should allow the gazebo to withstand the elements in Red Lodge for years to come, but the complexities of electronics within the structure added to cost and time of the project. The gazebo is not finished and the Parks Board is seeking a way to fund the completion of this project.



City Pool: After utilizing the City Pool long past its expected lifespan of 30 years, the City Pool did not reopen for the summer of 2019. The perennial



cost of repairing the aging pool, public works man-hours and continuous water leakage was finally too high to overcome. The closing of the pool has spurred the community to action to ensure it can be reopened before too long. The parks board has heard numerous proposals from community members for how to fundraise to rebuild the pool. With this much community interest, the board feels it is only a matter of time before the community finds a way to get the pool open again. Although the parks board heard numerous fundraising proposals early on, the activity

in getting the pool back up and running has been taken on by City staff and other community volunteers and not taken place within the Parks Board. A pool committee will be formed in FY 2021 to review construction plans for a new pool and to review funding options to pay for construction.

It has been known the pool would need to be rehabilitated or replaced for a few years at this point. The start of figuring out the best way to do this began with the 2018 Aquatic Facilities Study. It was determined after this study and numerous forms of public input that the best option would be to rebuild the pool in its current location. The cost of rebuilding the pool in the same location will be approximately \$1.7 million (Plans and Specifications for Swimming Pool Renovations, August 2020).

Trails

A plan for BRTA to extend the Wellness Trail south along the west bench was presented to the Parks Board in the spring of 2019. It was later proposed they move ahead with the Diamond-C trail due to details prohibiting action on the Wellness trail. Work began on the Diamond-C trail and will be close to completion at the end of the summer of 2020.

Work was completed in June 2020 by volunteers with BRTA, a crew of Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) members, employees of Red Lodge Mountain, and members of the Red Lodge High School Student Council to maintain trails in Coal Miners Park. BRTA provided all materials for the project, including trail/gravel mix, posts, and new dirt.

Work completed by Red Lodge Mountain included mowing, weed wacking, removal of fallen trees, and re-graveling of disc golf boxes. They removed weeds from the walking trail and replaced with new trail material. They also removed old material from the stairs and replaced with new material.

The MCC members worked on the bike trails and the walking path, adding material and improving drainage. They also removed weeds from the walking path. Red Lodge High School Student Council members removed weeds, weed wacked, and trimmed trees next to the walking path.

In total, BRTA hosted 3 volunteer days in Coal Miners Park. They removed weeds on the walking and biking paths, added new material to these trails, installed posts for new directional arrows, and improved the pump track area. The bike committee is doing ongoing work with the pump track connected to the bike trails.

Although the Parks Board did not have funds to contribute to any of these efforts, The Board supported this work in the parks and on the trails and worked with BRTA to make this happen. This is an example of volunteers and non-profits continuing to promote development of parks and recreation amenities despite a lack of funding from the City government.

Weed Control



Each year spraying of noxious weeds in Coal Miners Park, Double Ditch Dog Park, Hellroaring Skate Park, Rotary Park and Lions Park is included in the Parks budget. In addition to these efforts, there are areas of Van Dyke Park and other City trails that would benefit from backpack spraying.

Noxious weeds are a constant struggle and just when one piece of public land seems to be getting into good shape, a new weed problem pops up elsewhere. The Parks Board appreciates any

reporting of weed issues on City lands to help the City keep tabs on where emerging (or persisting) weed problems exist.

It is the hope of the Parks Board (and Tree and Bee Committee in particular) that a Bee City initiative will include planting of robust native species in areas that are currently prone to weed infestations. This could lead to lower costs of spraying for weeds each year while providing valuable pollinator habitat.

The City has benefitted from the efforts of Red Lodge High School students mapping and assessing weed infestations in Coal Miners Park and the areas surrounding the High School. Each year more weeds are surveyed and identified on this land. The continued efforts to map the problem weeds in this area will help the City to determine the level of spraying needed to control weeds going into the future.