


CITY COMMISSION POLICY

GRAND RAPIDS  MICHIGAN	NUMBER: 1100-11	HISTORY	
	DATE: March 23, 2021	FILE #	DATE
	FILE NUMBER: 12807	12807	March 23, 2021
	DEPARTMENT: Parks and Recreation		

SUBJECT:

NAMING AND RENAMING OF PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

PURPOSE: These policies and procedures are intended to guide a) any individual or community group that is interested in having a park, building, or major feature named for a significant person, event, or place, b) any individual, group, or business that is interested in having their significant donation (park, building, major feature) named, c) the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board that will be making a recommendation to the department in regard to these requests, d) City Commission members that will be holding public hearings and approving the names of parks and buildings, and e) the Parks and Recreation Department Director and their staff.

POLICY:

It is the policy of the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department (department) that the naming of new and renaming of existing parks and recreational facilities be reserved for exceptional circumstances and that the naming process comply with the guidelines and procedures set forth in this policy.

Definitions

“Parks and Recreation Facilities” will include the following:

Parks – all traditional parks, natural open spaces, historic sites, golf courses, specialized parks (e.g. Monument Park), and trails under the department’s jurisdiction or management.

Buildings – all significant park and recreation structures that house parks and recreational programs (e.g. pavilions and lodges).

Major Features – Major, permanent components of park and recreational facilities (e.g. ball fields, swimming pools, tennis courts, playgrounds, fountains, artwork). Rooms within buildings are considered to be Major Features.

Amenities: Smaller furnishings and facilities in the parks and recreation system (e.g. benches, small fountains, tables, benches, etc.) Amenities are not formally named.

Authority

The management, operation and control of all facilities owned by the City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department for park and recreational purposes are under the exclusive control of the department. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board reviews and advises the department with respect to the policy.

Background

Naming or renaming parks and recreational facilities in the City of Grand Rapids is often complex and emotionally evocative since naming is a powerful and permanent identity for a public place. The names of parks, buildings and major features often tell the important stories of Grand Rapids history. In addition, Grand Rapids has limited public resources for changing names on signs, maps, and literature, and excessive naming of individual features in parks and recreational facilities can be confusing to the public. Approval of naming requests is a prestigious, cautious process that involves the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the department, the City Manager, and ultimately the City Commission. Consequently, the process for naming or renaming these public places needs to be carefully and thoughtfully undertaken and only when appropriate.

The policy of the department is to reserve the naming or renaming of parks and recreational facilities to those circumstances which tradition and practice have shown to best serve the interests of the City and assure a worthy and enduring legacy for the City's parks and recreation system. To this end, the department will support consideration of naming requests in the following three broad categories:

- a) Exceptional individuals. Sometimes recognition of an exceptional City leader or a dedicated supporter of the City parks and recreation system can result in a community supported renaming of an existing or naming of a new park or recreational facility.
- b) Historic Events, Places, and Persons. The history of a major event or place or historic persons can play an important role in the naming or renaming of parks and recreational facilities. The public often expresses a strong desire to preserve and honor the history of the City, its founders, pioneers, and other historical figures, heritage, and its local landmarks and prominent geographical locations by giving certain parks and recreational facilities names of historic, social and cultural significance. Grand Rapids has also established ties to a number of international cities through its Sister Cities program.
- c) Major Gifts. The City and the department have benefited from a legacy of community generosity. Families, residents, and businesses have given gifts of their time and skills, resources and products, and financial contributions. Public and private foundations have also invested deeply in our city and the parks and recreation system.

General Principles

In considering any proposal to name or rename a park, building, or major feature, the following questions shall be considered individually and collectively:

- a) Will the name have historical, cultural and social significance for generations to come?
- b) Will the name engender a strong and positive image for the community?
- c) Will the name memorialize or commemorate people, places or events that are of enduring importance to the community or the nation?
- d) Will the name engender significant ties of friendship and mutual recognition and support within the community or with those outside of the community?
- e) Will the name be identified with some major achievement or the advancement of the public good within the community or the nation?

- f) Will the name be particularly suitable for the park or recreational facility based on the location or history of the park, recreational facility or the surrounding neighborhood?
- g) Will the name have symbolic value that transcends its ordinary meaning or use and enhance the character and identity of the park or recreational facility?
- h) Will the naming request that accompanies a corporate gift result in the undue commercialization or politicization of the park or recreational facility?

Renaming Parks and Recreational Facilities

Proposals to rename parks and recreational facilities (whether for a major gift or in response to a community request) are not encouraged and should be entertained only after fully investigating and considering the potential impact of dropping the current name, of which will be included as part of the formal petition submitted. Names that have become ingrained or widely accepted in the community should not be abandoned unless there are compelling reasons and strong public sentiment for such a change. Historical or commonly-used place names should be preserved wherever possible.

Naming or Renaming for Exceptional Individuals

The following guidelines apply to naming requests that result from either a community process or major gift.

- a) Naming of parks and recreational facilities is reserved only for persons who are deceased. Such naming after a person shall not occur until the person has been deceased for at least (5) years and that person's historical significance and good reputation have been secured in the history of the community or nation.
- b) Priority for naming parks and recreational facilities after deceased persons should be given in the following order to those who have significant and lasting contributions 1) to Grand Rapids' system of parks and open spaces, 2) to the City of Grand Rapids, or 3) to the nation. Naming parks and buildings after national or international figures should be rare and only upon a substantial demonstration of the figure's connection to or special importance in the Grand Rapids community or the State of Michigan.
- c) Naming of parks and recreational facilities after people or a group of people who perish in or survive a tragic event or war should be considered only well after the public shock generated by the tragic event or war has lessened. Potential sites for such memorials should be focused on parks or recreational facilities that are more known for their serene and contemplative nature rather than active recreational locations, such as playing fields. Emphasis should be placed on the contributions or heroic actions of these people during their lifetime, rather than the circumstances of their death or survivorship.
- d) Exceptions for naming of major features for living persons may occur as described in sections pertaining to major gifts.

Naming and Renaming for Historic Events, Places, and Persons

When a park or recreational facility is located near or otherwise associated with events, places, and people of historic, cultural, or social significance, it is appropriate to consider naming such park or recreational facility after such events, places, and people. The relationship of the park or recreational facility to the events, places, and people of historic, cultural, or social significance should be demonstrated through research and documentation. The appropriateness of naming the park or recreational facility after such an event, place, or people is further supported if the residents of Grand Rapids or the surrounding neighborhood have already identified the park or recreational facility with the name of the event, place, or people.

