


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.

Naming and Renaming for Major Gifts

When a gift is made to the Grand Rapids parks and recreation system that is of such magnitude and generosity that naming of such a new park or recreational facility in honor of or at the request of the benefactor, consideration to naming rights will be considered in addition to the other criteria outlined herein.

As a guideline but not a limitation, the threshold for naming rights on parks and buildings would include one or preferably more of the following:

- 1) Deeding to the City of most, if not all, of the land on which the park or building to be named will be situated;
- 2) Payment of one-half or more of the capital costs of constructing a park or building to be named (depending on the availability of matching funds or grants);
- 3) Some long-term endowment for the repair and maintenance of a donated park or building; and
- 4) The provision of significant program costs for facilities that will serve parks and recreation program needs.

Likewise, as a guideline but not a limitation, the threshold for naming rights on major features would include one or preferably more of the following:

- 1) Payment of the capital costs for constructing and installing a major feature;
- 2) Some long-term endowment for the repair and maintenance of the donated major feature; and
- 3) The provision of significant program costs for any major feature giving rise to or supporting a parks and recreation program.

Naming for Persons

Benefactors seeking naming rights for major gifts shall follow the guidelines on "Persons" with respect to naming of parks and buildings after persons. An exception will be considered on its own merits. A major feature that has been donated or refurbished may be named for a living person(s) provided that said person(s) is of good reputation. Whatever contract accompanies the gift and naming rights should address all conditions applying to the naming, including time limits for naming of features. The City of Grand Rapids reserves the right to rename any park, building, or major feature if the person for whom it is named turns out to be disreputable, subsequently acts in a disreputable way, or fails to follow through with commitments made during the naming or renaming process.

Naming for Entities

A corporation, association, and other legally created entity making a major gift may request that the name of that entity be associated with the name of the park, building, or major feature which is the subject of the major gift. Each request is evaluated on its own merits and requires public input. No corporate logos, brands, insignias, or direct advertising text may be used as part of any name association or naming. Renaming of any existing park or building is discouraged when associated with a major enhancement gift. The City of Grand Rapids reserves the right to remove an entity name association on a park or building or to rename a major feature if the entity turns out to be disreputable, subsequently acts in a disreputable way, or fails to follow through with commitments made during the naming or renaming process.

Other Considerations

Typically, a park should not be subdivided for the purposes of naming. This limitation should not prevent giving a different name for a trail, building, or major feature located

in or near the park.

Facilities that are held by the department through a short-term lease or use agreement or improvements that have a limited life span or occupancy should not be named.

All signs on parks and recreational facilities must meet and not depart from the department's graphic and signage standards. No specialized signage will be displayed.

If a new park or building is completed and no suggestion for a name has come from the community or in association with a gift, the Parks and Recreation Department will take advisement from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board on names using an organized public process.

Procedures for Community or Citizen Requests to Name or Rename a Park or Building

Applicant Process: An applicant must compile a petition and make a presentation to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to recommend naming or renaming a park or recreational facility. Applicants should refer to sections of this policy that ensure the request meets the criteria for proposed names. Details of the process include:

1. Written notification to the Department of Parks and Recreation to start the process. It shall include reasons for the request. The condensed version will be included in the petition language and template prepared by the department. The petitions can be picked up, mailed, or emailed to:

Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation
c/o Director of Parks and Recreation
201 Market Avenue SW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
616-456-3696
2. A formal filing of the petitions with the department at the above address as soon as necessary signatures have been gathered. The following criteria for the petition must be met:
 - a. The petition shall state the reasons for the proposed name.
 - b. The petition shall show community support for the proposed name.
 - c. The petition shall contain a description and/or map depiction of the boundaries of the park or building to be named or renamed.
 - d. If renaming a park or facility, the petition shall state the impact of dropping the current name.
 - e. The petition may only be signed by individuals living in the City of Grand Rapids.
 - f. The petition should show the name, address and telephone number of each signer.
 - g. The number of signatures required should be a minimum of 150 for small neighborhood parks and their major features; 250 for community parks and their major features; and 500 for regional parks and their major features. Major buildings must also have a minimum of 500 signatures.
3. A formal request shall be placed on the agenda for the next possible Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meeting. Notice of the agenda item and meeting date shall be given to all applicable neighborhood associations and residents within 300 feet of the affected park using the same process for public notification of park projects.
4. A formal presentation to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board of the naming or renaming proposal, which shall include a public hearing at a subsequent commission meeting and prior to adopting the name.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Action

Within three subsequent meetings of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (board), after the completed petitions are filed, the board will determine whether or not to recommend the proposed new name to the City of Grand Rapids. This will include departmental review to examine and validate the signatures collected.

The board will not recommend a proposed name unless the criteria set forth in this policy are met. An affirmative vote of a majority of a quorum of the board is necessary to recommend approval of a new name.

City Commission Approval

After the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board takes action (if the vote is favorable) and the City of Grand Rapids approves the action, the department will file for City Commission consideration and associated public hearing. The applicant will be made aware of scheduled meetings and should attend and be prepared to speak about the request.

Procedures for the Naming and Renaming of Parks, Buildings, and Major Features Associated with Major Gifts

The department will submit a proposal to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for the naming or renaming of any park, building, or major feature that is associated with a major gift to the City of Grand Rapids. Neighborhood associations and residents within 300 feet of the Park to be named or renamed will be notified of the proposed action and board meetings.

For naming or renaming a park or a building, City Commission approval is required following favorable recommendations by the board and department. A public hearing is required.