

MINUTES
Goshen City Council Special Session
April 29, 2025 at 6:00PM
Goshen Community Building, 244 Clark Street

GENERAL OVERVIEW

A Special Session was called for the City of Goshen and was held on April 29, 2025 at 6:00pm at the Goshen Community Center. The issue(s) at hand were to discuss recent maintenance practices at Mill Branch Park. The meeting was assembled following public concerns about vegetation removal along Mill Branch Creek, herbicide usage, and potential non-compliance with the city's adopted Comprehensive Park Management Plan.

Call to Order: At 6:00 pm

Roll Call: PRESENT - Paula Anderson, Curtis Vaughan, John Vaillancourt, Colton Martin
Shawn Mayfield, Birch Wright. City Attorney Brian Hogue in attendance
ABSENT - Mayor Russell Stroud / Gina Swanson, Recorder/Treasurer

Approval of Agenda:

Birch Wright made a motion to approve the Agenda; Shawn Mayfield seconded;
Public Comment? None
All approved; None opposed.

Public Input - Max Poye provided historical context recounting that Mill Branch Park originated from community efforts beginning in 2020 and emphasized the city's commitment to a 2022 Comprehensive Management Plan; he objected to extensive clearing and mowing that (in his opinion) had removed critical riparian vegetation, citing native plants that support pollinators. He further pointed out that Zone 2 of the park, designated in city maps, had been cut to the waters edge leaving bare soil and erosion risk. Mr. Poye requested (via City Council) immediate suspension of mowing and spraying within 25' of the creek stating it's in violation of Ordinance 204, Section H. It was asked by Council Member, Birch Wright, when did the clearing occur to which Mr. Poye responded in the past month and his assumption is that city staff did the work (David and Ivan - City Maintenance).

Mary Smith shared concern and deep disturbance by what appeared to be the use of herbicides near the salamander pond and creek. She cited specific chemicals as 24-D and Remedy and further outlined potential health concerns for visitors to the park (specific to pets and children) and further stated her concern for what she felt was a lack of signage and proper notification/posting of intentions of the city to spray (to visitors and Goshen City residents). Mary cited and read aloud Ordinance 204 Section 2H and that the spraying was a direct contradiction to this ordinance. She further stated she understood the Mayor to state that 'there is no law against the spraying'. The Mayor was not in attendance to rebut/respond.

Ken Smith provided a detailed memo to the council and summarized the points of it noting a visit by the Arkansas State Plant Board following an anonymous complaint about herbicide use. He argued that the March

17 Maintenance Memo distributed to staff (of city hall) had not been reviewed by the public or the Parks Commission and that the approach (he felt) undermined collaborative stewardship. He recommended rescinding the memo and requiring the Parks Commission review of all future plans involving the creek. Mr. Smith also provided that when he wrote an email to the Parks Commission with his concerns the response received now leads him to believe that the parks commission has passed the duties on to City Hall, bypassing City Council.

Dot Neely, a former Beaver Water District employee, urged City Council to recommit to the long-term vision of Mill Branch Park; she also emphasized that Mill Branch Park was not intended to be developed like a traditional manicured park, but rather serve as a preserved, native greenspace for educational and ecological enrichment.

Additional Members of the Public shared concerns and frustrations about the top-down approach and lack of communication. Some of the comments were “There are people in this room who have put hundred of volunteer hours into planting and mapping native species of plants and those efforts are being erased in a single pass of a mower”. Another resident asked whether the grant received (Beaver Watershed Alliance and ANRC involvement) was still in compliance and being honored. **Park Commission member, Mike Nimmo** responded that the mowing and trimming was carried out by city staff and intended to address storm debris and safety hazards along the walking paths in the park. He said he believed their actions to be in line with instructions and that he personally did not direct spraying near the creek. He suggested the matter was being exaggerated and pointed to past examples where poison hemlock required immediate removal with no response to this degree being brought forth. He has additional concerns that Ken and Mary Smith are trying to create backroom policing because they did not approach the Mayor or City Hall directly. Mary Smith stated that she did go to the Mayor and his response is notated earlier in this document under Mary Smith/public input. Birch Wright asked the question, “do you feel that City staff have gone against the program?” to which Mike responded that he does not believe that there was any harm intended to the park and that they were trying to create access to the creek without kids getting hurt by any ticks, overgrown vegetation, etc. Ken Smith asked if City Council or the City has a license to which Council member John Vaillancourt responded that there is no license. Mike Nimmo provided that the Mayor has been using his license (that he holds personally) and that City staff is receiving training in order to receive certification/licensing.

Incoming Parks Commissioner Day Crowne, who holds a Degree in Horticulture, stressed that poison hemlock is toxic and that complete mechanical removal isn’t always feasible. She stated that poison hemlock (which her own child ingested) looks like a carrot and that’s why kids touch and try to eat it causing potentially fatal reaction(s). She confirmed that the City was attempting spot-treatment and that staff were undergoing training for property chemical handling to get this done. Day further emphasized the importance of following best practices but asked the public to trust that no harm was intended.

A letter from Mayor Russell Stroud was read aloud by City Attorney Brian Hogue. The Mayor supported the city crew’s maintenance work and defended their intentions, stating that the goal was to reduce invasive plants and create a more usable public space. He acknowledged that public feedback is important but noted disappointment that the issue was not brought directly to his attention before escalating to a public forum. He called for unity and moving forward with transparency.

Council Members John Vaillancourt and Shawn Mayfield asked about which plan the Mayor’s letter referenced. Mike Nimmo responded that he believes the Mayor is referencing the 2022 plans and that City Council has not

given the Parks Commission mandate to make policy; only an advisory capacity. Ken Smith asked do we go to the City or to the Parks and Rec Commission about issues? If not the Parks Commission, then why do we have one?

Council Members expressed appreciation for the detailed concerns brought forth. Council Member Paula Anderson recommended developing a more formal review process for park maintenance that includes the Park Commission. John Vaillancourt agreed and emphasized that transparency and environmental stewardship were not mutually exclusive. Council Member Colton Martin reiterated that public input had been crucial to the development of Mill Branch Park and should remain a central part of its maintenance planning.

City Attorney Brian Hogue restated that the city staff needs licensing requirements to be met (certification/licensing) to keep the City in compliance. He also stated that the Mayor has no power to do anything other than what the Council approves.

Take Aways/Motions of Special Session

Paula Anderson made a motion to halt all mowing and herbicide spraying within 25' of Mill Branch Creek effective immediately; seconded by Curtis Vaughan.

All in favor; None opposed

John Vaillancourt made a motion to return the March 17 Maintenance memo to the Parks Commission for revision with public input; seconded by Colton Martin

All in favor; None opposed

Colton Martin made a motion to pause all non-targeted chemical spraying and clearing within 25' of Mill Branch Creek contingent upon public meeting with Parks and Rec Committee, and Birch Wright suggested there also be public input (including Ken and Mary (Smith) if they chose to be there) and any public input that wants to be a part of that group.; Curtis Vaughan seconded

All in favor, minus Birch Wright who abstained; None opposed

City Council agreed that the Parks and Recreation Commission will begin drafting a formal maintenance protocol for sensitive park areas in coordination with the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission and the Beaver Watershed Alliance.

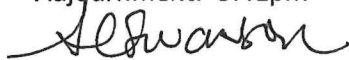
A working group will be formed to designate formal creek access points, identify native replanting opportunities, and develop signage to explain riparian buffer zones.

Comments: None

Public Comment:

There were several final public comments emphasizing the role of volunteers in creating the park's character and asked that their efforts be respected in future decisions.

Adjournment: 8:41pm



Gina Swanson
Recorder/Treasurer



Russell Stroud
Mayor

