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MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Brent Walker, Parks and Recreation Manager
Date: June 22, 2015
Subject: Discussion of Weather Alert Policy

ITEM DESCRIPTION

Discussion of a Weather Alert Policy to determine the parameters for the weather alert systems located at Dunwoody Park and Brook Run Park

BACKGROUND

In April 2014 The City solicited quotes from qualified vendors for the design and installation of inclement weather alert systems at Dunwoody Park and Brook Run Park. Federal Signal was selected to install a tornado alert system and Earth Networks was selected to install a lightning alert system. The tornado alert system has only recently come on-line and has yet to sound an alert. The lightning alert system, however, has been in operation at Dunwoody Park since the end of March.

The lightning detection system consist of an air horn that sounds one long blast in the event of an alert and three consecutive blasts once the alert duration time period has been met. A strobe light flashes between the initial alert blast and the "all-clear" blasts. During the installation of the tornado siren, Federal Signal informed the City that they could also integrate a verbal command into the lightning detection system that would trigger when the horn sounded. The verbal command informs park users that there is lightning in the area and to seek cover immediately.

The settings for the lightning alert system include:

- Lightning Strike Distance: The distance of a lightning strike from the location point that should trigger an alert. The system will allow the user to set the distance between 6 and 50 miles.
- Alert Duration: The length of time an alert will be active. The system will allow the user to set the duration from 15 to 60 minutes from the last alert.
- Time of Day: The system allows the user to set the time frame in which the horns will sound in the event of an alert.

Our system is currently set to National Weather Service (NWS) recommendations which are a lightning strike radius of 10 miles and a 30 minute alert duration. The hours when the system is operable are 7:00 AM-10:30 PM for Dunwoody Park and 7 AM-10 PM for Brook Run Park which generally coincide with the hours of park usage.

Based on the frequency of the storms in the past months we have received several complaints from neighbors primarily at Dunwoody Park about the noise from the alert horns and the verbal command. Since the beginning operational date of March 30th until June 11th the lightning alert system, at



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Dunwoody Park, has been activated 43 times. Seven of these alarms were for lightning strikes within 6 miles of the park. The other 37 were within 6 and 10 miles.

RECOMMENDATION

The NWS guidelines take into account the time needed to seek shelter from the path of a fast moving storm providing a high level of safety for park users. Under the current settings, someone should be able to get from the back area of Dunwoody Park to shelter before even the fastest moving storms arrive. Considering the concern of the neighbors, one option would be to turn off the verbal command to minimize the length of the alert. Another option would be to incrementally decrease the lightning strike radius setting below the NWS thresholds. This would reduce the frequency of alerts but also would not provide as much time for people to seek shelter from storms moving towards the park. A third option would be to remove the lightening detection from the park and place the responsibility to monitor the weather on the park users.

Staff respectfully requests that Council discuss the options provided and give guidance to staff to implement a Weather Alert Policy.



LIGHTNING SAFETY

This facility is equipped with a WeatherBug Lightning Alerting System

What the Sounds and Strobe Light Mean

One Long 15-Second Horn Blast

Lightning Detected - SEEK SHELTER NOW

Strobe Flashing

Lightning in Area - Under Alert - SEEK SHELTER NOW

Three Short 5-Second Horn Blasts

All Clear - Safe to Resume Outdoor Activities

SEEK

- Enclosed & Grounded Building
- Enclosed Automobile/Truck
- Approved Lightning Shelter

AVOID

- The Outdoors
- Open Areas
- Water
- Tall Trees
- Metal Fences
- Overhead Wires & Power Lines
- Elevated Ground
- Golf Carts
- Mowers
- Rain Shelters

