

Board of Directors  
and Recreational Sports Commission  
**Nominee Information Form**



Nominee's Name: Eric Carlson

Current Employer/Organization: City of Apple Valley

Current Title/Position: Parks & Recreation Director

Nominated For: President-Elect

**1. How has MRPA helped you to grow professionally?**

The MRPA has played a significant role in promoting my professional development by connecting me with other professionals in the field. At the beginning of my career as a young professional, I worked in park maintenance—cutting grass, installing playgrounds, dragging ballfields, plowing snow, and making ice rinks—and then I transitioned into a recreation programmer position, where I supervised the warming house program and park service officers, ran adult athletic leagues, and acted as a liaison to the local youth athletic association. Over the years MRPA has provided invaluable opportunities to network, share knowledge, and stay updated on the latest trends and advancements in the field of parks and recreation. I have attended many workshops, seminars, and conferences that have provided me with “tools” for my “toolbox,” helping me be a better teammate, leader, professional, and person. In turn, the knowledge I have gained has helped me implement the best practices in the communities that I’ve worked in.

**2. What do you believe are the strategic plan priorities and how would you help to implement those priorities?**

Over the last year, the MRPA Board has worked closely with the consulting firm Association Management Center (AMC). The report authored by AMC includes a recommended list of strategic priorities, an updated staffing plan, recommendations on how to make MRPA funding more sustainable, and suggested changes to the MRPA governance structure and bylaws. The MRPA Board has invested both time and money into this deep dive in how the MRPA serves its membership.

I believe the MRPA Board of Directors will need to spend time reviewing the report and then consider implementing many of its recommendations. With any report developed by a consultant there will be some recommendations that need to be reviewed and implemented, some recommendations that need to be reviewed and modified before implementation, and some recommendations that will likely not be appropriate for the MRPA.

The report provides a phased plan in which to implement the recommendations. If elected, I would serve the MRPA over the course of the next three years (year one as President-Elect, year two as President, year three as Past-President) and work with the MRPA staff, MRPA Board of Directors, and the MRPA membership to support the transition of the organization when and where appropriate for a strong, sustainable future.

**3. What are the opportunities and challenges to be addressed by the Board of Directors and the MRPA membership during your term of office, if elected, as well as in the long-term? How do these areas relate to the Association's core values?**

Since 1937, the MRPA has advocated for and advanced our profession and there is a tremendous amount of talent across the MRPA membership. As we continue to work in our communities to provide exceptional parks and recreational services, the MRPA will need to continue to be the go-to source for our professional development and statewide advocacy. Incorporating our core values of Leadership, Stewardship, Wellness, Inclusion, Engagement, Integrity is important in the following ways:

**Professional Development**

Continue to support opportunities such as the Facility Management Academy, Athletic Management Institute, Emerging Recreation Leaders Institute, the Leadership Development Network, Race and Equity Committee, and the Young Professionals Network. Explore other opportunities that could support the development of our members and the MRPA staff to help enhance our emotional, physical, social, intellectual, environmental, cultural, and economic understanding.

**Statewide Advocacy**

Engage with our designated and elected representatives, including the Park Commission, City Council, State, and Federal officials, to advocate for the importance of parks and recreation. As we progress in our field, let's rally behind initiatives that hold the potential to enhance the well-being of the individuals we serve, all while efficiently overseeing our current (and additional) physical spaces and preserving them for future generations. We must consistently highlight the positive contributions we make within our communities, seizing every opportunity to showcase our impact.

### **Miscellaneous**

Continue to manage the organization's finances in a responsible manner. Look at adding a level of transparency to the work of the MRPA Board of Directors by providing agendas and minutes to all MRPA members.

#### **4. Professional Work Experience in Park and Recreation Profession**

<b>City</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Burnsville	Full-Time Park Maintenance	December 1990 – March 1994
Burnsville	Recreation Programmer	March 1994 – December 1994
Burnsville	Recreation Supervisor	January 1995 – May 1997
Burnsville	Recreation Facilities Manager	May 1997 – May 1999
Champlin	Parks & Public Works Director	May 1999 – December 2006
Inver Grove Heights	Parks & Recreation Director	January 2007 – January 2021
Apple Valley	Parks & Recreation Director	January 2021 – present

#### **5. Education and Training**

BS in Recreation – University of North Dakota - 1990

MA in Public Administration – Hamline University - 1999

#### **6. MRPA Positions Held (Sections, Committees, Offices, etc.):**

<b>MRPA</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Conference Committee	Exhibit Hall – Duluth	1996
Recreational Sports Commission	South Metro Representative	1997 – 1999
Conference Committee	Exhibit Hall – St. Paul	1998
Board of Directors	East Metro Representative	2008 – 2009
Conference Committee	Off-Site Tours – Eagan	2016

#### **7. Other Volunteer Professional Association/Community Involvement**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Champlin Dayton Athletic Association	Baseball In-House Coordinator	2006 – 2010
National Recreation and Park Association	Local Host Conference Committee	2010
Champlin Dayton Athletic Association	Baseball Director	2011 – 2012
Champlin Park High School Boys Swim Team	Treasurer	2012 – 2018
Champlin Park High School Dugout Club	Treasurer	2013 – 2018
MRPA Conference	Presentation – Project Planning	2016
MIAMA Conference	Presentation – Project Planning	2017
MRPA – Facility Management School	Presentation – Preventative Maintenance	2017
Servant of Christ Lutheran Church	President – Elect	2019
Servant of Christ Lutheran Church	President	2020
Minnesota Recreation and Park Foundation	Professional Member	
Minnesota Recreation and Park Association	Professional Member	
National Recreation and Park Association	Professional Member	
National Recreation and Park Association	Certified Park and Recreation Executive	

Board of Directors  
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**Nominee Information Form**



Nominee's Name: Jennifer Fink

Current Employer/Organization: City of New Brighton

Current Title/Position: Director of Parks and Recreation

Nominated For: President

**8. How has MRPA helped you to grow professionally?**

My connection with the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) has been instrumental in my professional growth. My journey in the field of parks and recreation began without direct experience in this vibrant and essential profession. Through MRPA, I gained exposure to diverse organizations and seasoned professionals, expanding my knowledge. This exposure not only provided me with a wealth of information but also allowed me to establish meaningful connections within the industry.

One of the advantages of my MRPA membership has been access to a network of experienced individuals whom I could readily approach with questions. These connections have enabled me to navigate challenges and make informed decisions. Moreover, my involvement with MRPA empowered me to hone my leadership skills by participating in committees, assuming chair positions, and previously serving on the board. These roles have allowed me to contribute to the association while enhancing my own leadership abilities.

MRPA has allowed me to engage with the next generation of professionals, and through my involvement with local universities I have been able to bridge the gap, fostering a collaborative environment where theoretical knowledge meets practical application.

MRPA has been a source of learning and growth. The association's opportunities and supportive community have not only helped me adapt to the landscape of parks and recreation but have also empowered me to play a role in shaping its future. I am grateful for the experiences MRPA has offered me and am eager to leverage these experiences to contribute effectively as the President of the Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association.

**9. What do you believe are the strategic plan priorities and how would you help to implement those priorities?**

The Strategic Priorities are Optimize, Educate, Innovate and Advocate.

I firmly believe that the strategic plan priorities outlined by MRPA are crucial cornerstones for the growth and advancement of our profession. To **optimize** our organization, my approach would be to ensure that MRPA remains a vibrant and indispensable hub for our members. This would involve not only meeting but surpassing the evolving needs of our members and the profession. Addressing the concerns highlighted in our recent membership survey is paramount. We must diligently work towards enhancing the value provided by your membership, ensuring that our offerings align with the changing landscape of recreation and parks.

In terms of **education**, MRPA needs to be the definitive source of knowledge in our field. This means fostering a culture of continuous learning, for our members, the communities we serve, and the staff of the organization. Collaborating closely with educational institutions (both at the high school and higher-ed level), we can develop opportunities to engage future professionals and shape the curriculum so that they are well-equipped to meet the challenges of our industry. MRPA needs to be proactive to anticipate changes in the profession, allowing us as professionals to stay ahead of the curve.

**Innovation** is the key to the association's future success. I would advocate for embracing change and transforming upcoming challenges into opportunities. The consultant currently on board provides a unique opportunity to make change, and we must be open to considering new paths forward for our profession. This will allow for fresh approaches to meet the needs of our members and the communities they serve.

Furthermore, MRPA must take a leadership role in **advocating** for our profession. This involves being the credible voice that represents recreation and parks in Minnesota both in communication and legislatively. By actively engaging with legislators and staying abreast of policy changes, we can proactively address issues that affect our industry. By enhancing our advocacy efforts, we can ensure that the interests of our profession are well-represented at all levels of government.

The membership survey highlighted the need for us to create a broader sense of openness and belonging. We need to look for ways to provide networking opportunities that are diverse, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included. By organizing events and initiatives that promote collaboration and camaraderie, we can create a strong sense of community within our organization.

**10. What are the opportunities and challenges to be addressed by the Board of Directors and the MRPA membership during your term of office, if elected, as well as in the long-term? How do these areas relate to the Association's core values?**

I see several opportunities and challenges that the Board of Directors and MRPA membership must address to ensure our association's continued growth and alignment with our core values. The information derived from the membership survey and the proposed strategic plan present a valuable roadmap for our future endeavors. It is imperative that we, as elected board members, work diligently to disseminate this information widely, ensuring transparency and fostering a sense of ownership among our members.

**Opportunities:**

- **Enhancing Member Engagement:** Our members are our greatest asset. By actively involving them in the decision-making process, seeking their input, and valuing their feedback, we can strengthen member engagement. Regular check-ins and communication channels will facilitate this interaction, aligning with our core value of integrity.
- **Implementing Strategic Initiatives:** The proposed strategic plan should offer a clear path to improvement. Embracing the initiatives, particularly those that align with both the membership survey and the listening sessions, will not only enhance value for our members but also contribute to the growth of our association. By aligning our actions with the expressed needs of our members, we uphold our core values of engagement and inclusivity.
- **Advocacy and Industry Impact:** MRPA has the potential to be a powerful voice in both the legislative arena and within our industry. By actively engaging with policymakers and industry stakeholders, we can advocate for policies that support our profession.

**Challenges:**

- **Managing Change:** Embracing change can be challenging. It requires a shift in mindset and organizational culture. We must navigate this transition sensitively, ensuring that our members understand the reasons behind these changes and how they align with our shared goals and values. By highlighting the changes and expressing how they align with our core values and strategic priorities, we can overcome resistance to become a more vibrant and responsive organization.

2. Maintaining Open Communication: Continuous communication with our members is vital. We must establish effective communication channels to keep our members informed about the progress of the strategic initiatives, seeking their input frequently.

Long-term Focus:

In the long term, sustaining the momentum generated by these initiatives is essential. We must institutionalize the practices of member engagement and transparent communication, making them integral parts of our association's culture. Creating stability in the decision-making processes is important. Additionally, fostering partnerships with our educational institutions and industry organizations can create a broader network of members, enhancing our reach and impact of the profession. We can build a resilient and impactful association that serves the needs of our members and the community at large.

As an advocate for change and improvement, I am committed to leveraging these opportunities and addressing these challenges. With a member-driven approach and a focus on our core values, I am confident that MRPA can indeed become a bigger voice for our community, both at the capital and within the industry. Together, we can shape a vibrant future for our association and the profession we represent.

### **11. Professional Work Experience in Park and Recreation Profession**

New Brighton Parks and Recreation

Director of Parks and Recreation

2017-Present

- Responsible for all activities within the parks and recreation system for the City of New Brighton.

Ramsey County

Recreation Services Supervisor

2013-2017

- Supervision of the aquatics program, including nine beaches and waterpark. Oversight of the off-leash dog areas, volunteer program front office staff, park reservations, special use permits and special events

Anoka County Parks

Marketing and Visitor Services Manager

2007-2013

- Oversee the customer service, office staff, and communications/marketing program. Responsible for the direct supervision of the customer service, human resources, and accounting staff. Oversight of website redesign, launch of social media, and oversight of special events

Anoka County Parks

Customer Service Coordinator

2005-2007

- Design and publication of all marketing materials, special permits, oversee parks count program.

### **12. Education and Training**

Certified Park and Recreation Professional, 2019-Present

University of South Florida, Muma College of Business, 2021

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace Certificate

Certified Pool/Spa Operator (CPO) 2014-2017

University of Wisconsin-Stout, B.S. General Business

### **13. MRPA Positions Held (Sections, Committees, Offices, etc.):**

MRPA Leadership Section Member 2021-Present

Editorial Board for the MRPA Magazine 2006-Present

- Help create articles and find innovative ideas for the magazine.

MRPA Conference Presenter on many topics, 2023, 2022, 2021, 2019

MRPA Annual State Conference Committee, Co-Chair 2012, 2009

MRPA Board of Director, East Metro Representative, 2011- 2012

MRPA Annual State Conference Committee, Program Committee, 2017

MRPA Annual State Conference Committee, Member of Marketing/Delegate Activities 2008

MRPA Annual State Conference Committee, Chair of Social Activities 2007

MRPA Administrative Section Member 2005-2011

### **14. Other Volunteer Professional Association/Community Involvement**

MRPF President, 2022-2023

MRPF Vice-President, 2021

MRPF Board of Trustees, 2016 – President

Executive Board Member of Twin Cities Gateway Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2019-Present

Board Member of Northeast Youth and Family Services, 2022-Present

Coalition 624 (Legislative and Advocacy organization), 2021-Present

Sports ETA, 2019-Present

Minnesota Sports Alliance, 2022-present

Member of Rotary International, 2019-Present

Foster for Wags and Whiskers Animal Rescue, 2016-present

Volunteer Coach, Moms on the Run, 2012-2021

Cookie Mom for Girl Scouts, 2010-2015