

Regular Meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission

Proposed Minutes

- Date:** February 7, 2007
- Time:** 4:00 p.m.
- Place:** Conference Room D, Fillmore St. Complex
- Present:** Ted Bosgraaf, Russell V. Brown, Jr., Paul Geerlings, Bobbi Jones Sabine, Roger E. Jonas, Crystal Unema, Joyce Kortman, Mark Oppenhuizen and Phil Kuyers
- Absent:** Betty Gajewski
- Staff:** John A. Scholtz, Director; Curt TerHaar, Coordinator of Park Planning & Development; Dave Mazurek, Park Operations Superintendent; Chip Francke, Naturalist/Information Specialist and Diane L. Huhn, Parks Secretary
- Guests:** Jeffrey Larabel; Ray Statema; Shelly, Cara & Spencer Hansen; Dan & Joy Seeley

Subject: Approval of Minutes

- PR 07-009 Motion: To approve the minutes of the Commission's January 3, 2007 annual meeting.
Moved by: Brown Supported by: Unema Unanimous

Subject: Deer Management Study

- PR 07-010 Motion: To authorize expenditure of up to \$2,000 toward cost of assessing deer populations along the lakeshore.
Moved by: Jonas Supported by: Bosgraaf Unanimous

Subject: Restoration of Antique Bookcase

- PR 07-011 Motion: To approve expenditure of \$2,900 for restoration of the antique bookcase for use in the Weaver House.
Moved by: Bosgraaf Supported by: Sabine Unanimous

Subject: Increase Community Haven Budget

PR 07-012 Motion: To approve a budget adjustment to transfer \$150,000 from the fund balance to the Community Haven project in the 2007 budget as designated in the long-range parks budget.
Moved by: Kuyers Supported by: Geerlings Unanimous

Subject: Upper Macatawa Master Plan

PR 07-013 Motion: To approve the recommendation by parks staff to deny the request to revise the Upper Macatawa Conservation Area Master Plan to add equestrian trails.
Moved by: Bosgraaf Supported by: Unema Unanimous

Subject: Go into Closed Session

PR 07-014 Motion: To go into closed session to discuss property matters.
Moved by: Kuyers Supported by: Geerlings
Motion passed by the following votes: Yeas: Kortman, Unema, Kuyers, Bosgraaf, Sabine, Geerlings, Oppenhuizen, Brown and Jonas (9) Nays: None (0)

Subject: To Rise From Closed Session

PR 07-015 Motion: To rise from Closed Session.
Moved by: Geerlings Supported by: Unema Unanimous

Other Items Discussed:

Commission members received letters and e-mails concerning the potential revision of the master plan at the Upper Macatawa Conservation Area to allow equestrian use:

Equestrian e-mails:

- January 3 e-mail from Doug and Liz Notman
- January 4 e-mail from Christine and Bob Gamble
- January 8 letter from Doug and Liz Notman
- January 10 letter from Thomas Hendrickson
- January 22 e-mail from Judi Manning.
- January 22 e-mail from Carl Manning

Commission members received the January 12, 2007 letter from Robert VanderKamp relative to Hemlock Crossing Park.

Commission members received the January 18, 2007 from Joyce D. Rhodes, Supervisor of Holland State Park, relative to a use permit for state land in conjunction with the Mt. Pisgah Dune Protection Project .

Commission members received the January 21, 2007 e-mail from Randy Sawyer relative to Pigeon Creek Park sledding hills.

Commission members received the January 24, 2007 e-mail from Rebecca Harkness relative to Riley Trails and also the Director's response to Ms. Harkness.

Commission members received the January 29, 2007 letter from Greg DeWeerd relative to the North Ottawa Dunes master planning project.

Commission members received a variety of communications relative to the possible establishment of a dog park at the Fillmore at the Bend Open Space property in Georgetown Township:

- Letter from Jeff Larabel summarizing the dog park request and attached Mission Statement and Goals for the Georgetown Off Leash Dog Park Supporters.
- December 5 letter from Nancy Pardo of Hudsonville supporting the proposed dog park.
- December 18 letter from Mark Vanderploeg of Holland supporting the proposed dog park.
- December 28 letter from Rebecca and Eric Rayl supporting the proposed dog park.
- Signed form letters supporting the proposed dog park from Phil Helms of Hudsonville, Millie Irwin of Vestaburg, Natasha Marzette of Grandville, Alicia Kooistra of Holland, Thomas Brown of West Olive, Christopher Bingham of Grand Rapids, Kimberly Vande Zande of Holland, Becky Stevens of Zeeland, Kris Tarrugia of Pulman, Susan Hertel of Whitehall, Wendy Tarrant of Walker, Sandy Bierby of Holland, Patty Arrzola of Walker, Dense Dahl of Hudsonville, Joyce Smith of Zeeland, Cal Rabbers of Hamilton and Dan Ladma of Grand Rapids.
- December 19 letter from Joy Seeley of Allendale supporting the proposed dog park.

- E-mails of support for the proposed dog park from the following individuals: Dan Young, Tim Klein, Carrie Christian, Mike Schotenboer, Deborah Barko-Ledesma, Garry Sanders, Sue Kuzee, Shannon Key, Vicki VanderSloot, Brandie Tenney, Lynn Kamp, Deb Cambell, Alex Patterson, Nikki Gaines and Jennifer verhelst.
- January 20 e-mail from Kathy Kensil of Allendale *opposed* to the proposed dog park at Fillmore at the Bend Open Space.

Commission members reviewed comment cards received since the previous meeting.

Commission members reviewed the report of Parks and Recreation Commission expenditures through December 31, 2006. Scholtz indicated he would have a long-range budget update ready for the next Commission meeting.

Oppenhuizen called for comment from the public present. Jeff Larabel addressed the Parks Commission relative to his proposal to establish a dog park at the Georgetown Township property owned by the Parks and Recreation Commission known as Fillmore at the Bend Open Space. Larabel provided some background on dog parks and noted that there are many successful dog parks located on the east side of the state. He indicated there are 3,000 registered dog owners in Georgetown Township and many people are looking for fenced in areas to take their dogs. He indicated many people desire to give their dogs opportunities to run off leash to exercise their dogs in a safe and secure environment. Larabel indicated he has studied the Parks Commission's plans and feels a dog park would be a good fit at the Fillmore at the Bend property.

Ray Statema next addressed the Parks Commission and indicated he is a neighboring landowner who is not opposed to the concept but has concerns. He asked how high the fence would be and whether or not it would impact wildlife movement.

Shelly, Cara and Spencer Hansen next addressed the Parks Commission on the proposed dog park. Shelly Hansen noted that many of the people speaking out and writing letters in favor of the dog park are not from Ottawa County. She indicated she would not like to see much development at Fillmore at the Bend Open Space because it is a nice natural area. She noted there is already a dog park in Holland and expressed concerns about how much traffic would be generated by a dog park on Fillmore Street.

Dan Seeley addressed the Commission indicating he has twenty-five years experience as a staff person at GVSU and feels a dog park would be a great asset for the university and people who work there.

Oppenhuizen indicated that the issue of a dog park has just arisen within the last 30-60 days and the Parks Commission has not had time to fully study and evaluate the issue. Oppenhuizen indicated it will take some time for the Commission and staff to study the issue and make a recommendation. Francke indicated the Parks Commission has over 1,000 acres within its parks system currently open for dogs off-leash through its open space properties. Francke asked why these areas are not adequate for dog owners.

Larabel indicated there is a social aspect to dog parks which is not addressed at the open space properties. Larabel provided examples of several dog parks in the area and the opportunities provided at these facilities. Larabel provided detailed information on the Shaggy Pines Dog Park, a privately owned dog park located in the Ada area.

Bosgraaf asked whether staff had done research into this issue in conjunction with the master plan developed a few years ago. Oppenhuizen indicated that the Parks Commission currently does allow dogs on all of its open space properties and they are allowed off-leash. Oppenhuizen suggested staff put together a summary of where dogs are currently allowed in the park system and assess whether it would be compatible with the long-range parks plan to pursue implementation of a dog park.

Scholtz indicated the long-range parks plan discusses dog parks but specifically states the Parks Commission has not yet determined whether or not it has a role to play in provision of dog parks. Scholtz explained the Fillmore at the Bend Open Space does not yet have a master plan developed for the property. He explained that the land was acquired with hopes it would be connected in the future through additional acquisitions to Grand River property. Scholtz further stated the Fillmore at the Bend property has heavy clay soils and questioned whether this would be a suitable soil type of development of a dog park since dog parks have difficulty retaining turf even with better soils.

Spencer Hansen stated that the hikes his family takes at the Fillmore at the Bend Open Space are about adventure and hikes in the woods and the land should remain natural and undeveloped.

Kortman asked who runs and operates the dog parks that Larabel is describing at various locations in the state. Larabel indicated the Friends of Lansing Parks is helping with a new facility being developed in the Lansing area. Scholtz asked how big a service area a dog park has. Larabel indicated he would like it to be close to home in Georgetown Township, however, people are willing to drive fairly long distances as evidenced by the Shaggy Pines facility in Ada.

Dan Seeley commented that an off-leash dog park is fenced for safety purposes for dog owners and running one's dog on unfenced land such as the County's open spaces could result in the loss of the dog.

Brown asked whether GVSU has been approached to construct a dog park since they own 500 acres and have many potential users.

Scholtz next commented on items in his Director's report. Scholtz commented on the Red Pine logging which is currently underway and acknowledged Francke's photos which were distributed to Commission members providing a good overview of the logging process. Francke indicated no negative comments have been received in the parks office from the public relative to the Red Pine removal. Scholtz reported the revenue estimate for the Robinson and Hiawatha Forest properties has risen from the \$200,000 initial to \$350,000 based on the very high bid prices received from loggers.

Kuyers noted the Board of Commissioners has approved a 50 - 50 split of funds between Parks and the County General Fund which will establish a new environmental fund.

Scholtz directed the Commission's attention to the section of his report addressing the Greenprint Group that has been meeting in the Holland area. He asked for the Commission's opinion as to his continued involvement and Bosgraaf commented it is good to stay connected with groups of this type and Scholtz should participate as his time allows.

Scholtz next reported on attendance at the deer management meeting in Grand Haven. The group is chartering a helicopter to do an aerial count of deer in the Grand Haven area. The initial flight is being funded through Whitetails Unlimited and local government contributions. The question arose as to whether Ottawa County Parks would be willing to help fund an additional flight in the future with the understanding the flight would include the North Ottawa Dunes property and Rosy Mound. Scholtz noted the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Department does aerial surveys in the same manner using a helicopter and this forms the basis for establishing their goals for deer removal through special hunts and use of sharp shooters. Following discussion, Commission members expressed their strong support for funding up to \$2,000 toward the cost of future aerial surveys to establish deer numbers.

Mazurek reported on operational activities for the month of January. Mazurek reported the perpetrator who damaged the trees at Hemlock Crossing Park has been caught and full restitution has been received in the amount of over \$6,000. Mazurek reported the Pigeon Creek Lodge sledding and skiing operations are open but use over the past weekend was somewhat low due to extremely cold temperatures. Mazurek reported the open house held by the Friends Group held at the Weaver House on January 13, 2007 was a big success with over 100 people attending. Unema added the next open house is scheduled for Sunday, February 11, 2007 by the Friends. Mazurek noted two reservations have now been held at the Weaver House and it has functioned very well. He is doing some work to make sure the three season room has adequate heat since that was reported as a problem by one of the groups. Sabine suggested staff inquire of people making reservations for the Weaver House as to how they learned about the facility in order to help us understand how to best promote the rental facility.

Bosgraaf reported on the Planning Committee meeting of January 10, 2007. Bosgraaf briefly summarized issues discussed at the meeting including the Riley Trails Project, the efforts to work with Consumers Energy on the Pigeon River Greenway Project and updates on various development projects planned throughout the park system. One of the development projects discussed was the Community Haven property and Scholtz noted that the \$150,000 proposed project is included in the Parks Commission's long-range planning budget but was not included in the 2007 parks budget. Scholtz asked for the Commission's support in seeking a budget adjustment to establish the \$150,000 project in the current year budget. Commission members expressed their support by a motion.

Scholtz also commented on the barn at Community Haven and efforts by staff to determine the cost of upgrading the barn including repairing the roof, straightening the

structure, electrical repairs and repair of the large sliding door to the north. Scholtz indicated the initial cost estimates developed by Mazurek show a cost range from \$30,000 - \$50,000. Staff hopes to have a more firm dollar estimate available soon. Scholtz commented this is a very important feature in the park and in staff's opinion an important feature to retain for future use with the farm park and equestrian activities. The barn is in basically in good shape but has not had attention in many years.

Oppenhuizen called for discussion of old business including the status of various park projects. TerHaar indicated the question of equestrian use at the Upper Macatawa Conservation Area is addressed through a staff recommendation included in the packet. Scholtz commented on the recommendation and explained why staff felt it would be best not to provide equestrian trails at the facility due to the soil types and limited upland areas suitable for equestrian use. The Parks Commission agreed with the staff recommendation.

TerHaar reported on the North Ottawa Dunes Master Plan and noted that the goal is to have our consultant present a final proposed master plan at the March Commission meeting. An important aspect of the project as currently planned is to partner with the City of Ferrysburg to provide parking at Coast Guard Park. As proposed, the Parks Commission would invest funds to improve the parking area and trailhead at Coast Guard Park for access to the North Ottawa Dunes property. Use of Coast Guard Park limits the disturbance to natural land at North Ottawa Dunes and also limits the number of curb cuts off of North Shore Drive which has been a priority expressed by many people throughout the master planning process. TerHaar explained the master plan in detail and answered questions from the Commission.

TerHaar also explained the proposed project to stabilize the large dune behind North Beach Park. Staff emphasized the project may be somewhat controversial with the public since the re-vegetation and stabilization of the dune will require us to limit public access to the top section of the dune for the next several years. The public would, however, have access via the new boardwalk and overlook at the top of the dune which is planned for construction in the fall. Jonas asked how the area would be fenced and asked whether regular snow fence would be used. TerHaar indicated staff is researching various types of fence to control foot traffic and control sand. Kortman indicated she would prefer some other type of fence that would be more attractive. Jonas suggested interpretive signs be placed at the base of the hill to educate people as to the need to limit foot traffic in the dunes.

Oppenhuizen presented his preliminary nature center concept plans to the Commission. He revealed the site of the proposed facility at Hemlock Crossing in the location shown on the long-range park master plan. He then reviewed a floor plan and various elevation drawings showing the facility from all angles. Commission members expressed their support for the drawings and concept as presented.

Scholtz indicated the original approach as reflected in the long-range parks plan for funding the nature center included a combination of park millage funds, grant funds and donated funds. Scholtz noted the Parks Commission currently has tentative plans to

submit a large grant request for a lakeshore property acquisition this spring which, given our success last year in receiving two grants, would probably be the best and only grant application to submit in 2007 to the Trust Fund. To keep the nature center project on track, Scholtz suggested it would be advisable in his opinion to dedicate all of the Parks Commission's Red Pine revenue to the nature center. This would effectively replace the grant funds as shown in the long-range budget. Geerlings indicated this would result in 50% of \$350,000 in estimated Red Pine revenues going toward the nature center. Francke indicated this \$350,000 revenue from the Robinson and Hiawatha Forest is only the first cutting of several planned over the next two to three years. In total, Parks Commission revenues should range somewhere between \$300,000 - \$400,000.

Kortman indicated she had made previous comments that the Parks Commission should not refer to the nature center in Board discussions concerning the future use of Red Pine revenues. However, she indicated that she did not want those comments to be construed as lack of support for the nature center. She feels it would be a good use for the money but not the best example for the Board to consider since they are not as familiar with this proposal as the Parks Commission. Other Commission members expressed their support for use of Red Pine revenue for the nature center and staff will structure the future funding plan based on this approach. Francke indicated the next step will be to approve a final floor plan and design through Oppenhuizen and then get a detailed cost estimate for the project. Once this is done, it will be possible to begin fundraising, likely with a target in the range of \$500,000. Bosgraaf concluded the discussion by stating that he supports earmarking Red Pine revenues for the future nature center.

Jeff Larabel addressed the Commission in the public session at the end of the meeting stating he has reviewed surveys by Ottawa County Parks which show that dog parks are actually ranked higher than some projects it is currently funding. Larabel also suggested he has a vision to restore the barn at the Fillmore at the Bend Open Space property for use as a museum focused on dogs.

The Commission went into Closed Session to discuss property matters.

Meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.