

FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES - CITY OF FERRYSBURG

PROJECT: **miOTTAWA
SANDS PARK**

MEETING DATE: March 11, 2020

A meeting was held at Ferrysburg City Hall to discuss the Ottawa Sands County Park project. The following summarizes items discussed at the meeting.

1. Curt TerHaar with Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) gave an introduction about Ottawa Sands County Park:
 - a) First property purchase was in 2018, and the second was in July of 2019.
 - b) OCPRC opened a trail system in the park which is currently open to the public, and now are deciding what to do with the land through a Master Plan process. This will be a year-long process and they are excited for this great opportunity.
 - c) This is the start of the process, where we talk with important stakeholders to identify what we need to talk about with the public.

2. VIRIDIS Design Group (VIRIDIS) is the design consultant that OCPRC has retained for the master plan process, through a Coastal Management Program grant. They communicated that in these focus group sessions, we will develop a framework of your thoughts such as concerns about development and connectivity. We will be gathering information and listening, and will use this to inform the master plan. Input is the most important thing for the master plan.
 - a) We will engage participants in an inclusive and open process; we need to know your points of view and what's important to you, since this is your community.
 - b) We will consider all points of view to create a plan that addresses environmental, cultural, and recreation resource needs to reclaim this former industrial site. This is a unique opportunity due to the park's location within the context of the coastal corridor.
 - c) We will incorporate low-impact, sustainable site development principles that will support proposed improvements and programming.
 - d) Proposed development shall be considered within the context of the entire coastal corridor and encourage long-term collaborative planning and land management.
 - e) We will research the City of Ferrysburg and other local jurisdictions' plans and services, including the Tri-Cities Rec Plan, to ensure that we are not duplicating efforts.

3. Phase 1 of the Master Plan process begins with Analysis and Programming. VIRIDIS has a campground expert on their team to conduct a feasibility study if camping is desired at Ottawa Sands. OCPRC is also having natural features, herpetology and wetlands inventories completed.

- a) This phase also includes the first public community input session, which will be held on site. The event is scheduled for June 13, 2020.
 - b) A photo vision challenge will also take place. This is a way to engage a larger group of people; potentially a younger demographic. Submitted photos will be displayed in Instagram, a photo sharing app. The photos may be of ways that the user enjoys using the park currently, ideas of things they'd like to do in the park, or examples of great parks/recreation that they've seen someplace else. The photos will be used throughout the design process, and printouts of the images will be used at the community input sessions. This will also help to give the community a sense of ownership in the process.
4. Phase 2 is for plan development. VIRIDIS will take the input received from phase 1 and begin to craft several design concepts.
 - a) A second community input session will be held at a location off-site, to be determined, to display the concepts and get feedback. Input from each concept option will be recorded and used as a guide to help shape the preferred option that will be developed in phase 3.
 5. Phase 3 will be plan finalization. VIRIDIS will prepare cost estimates and a phasing plan. The final plan will be revealed at an open house at the end of November and go to the Parks Commission for approval at the end of December.
 6. Any ideas are welcome; we don't want to discourage ideas at this point based on cost. VIRIDIS will take the input and identify what is the best fit with the land and principles identified for this project. OCPRC does not currently have funds allocated to implement phases of the master plan; once complete, they will look at the phasing to determine what projects they may be able to implement. This master plan will be a flexible document that is a road map for the County.
 7. Curt said OCPRC is working on a planning process for their entire park system to identify priorities. They are also updating their five year master plan, which is a longer term process, planned out carefully. There are already a lot of people using Ottawa Sands County Park for passive recreation; components of this park can be inserted into the OCPRC's five year master plan.
 8. This project offers an amazing opportunity with the coastal corridor. Ottawa Sands property is now 345 acres. The dune was interrupted by mining activities.
 - a) We will document the evolution of land use on site to tell the story. There are some remnant dunes on the west side of the lake with ecological complexities that are only achieved over 500-800 years. This same ecosystem can be found along the entire lakeshore. Flora, fauna and insects are the best indication of overall ecology; they don't respect boundaries.
 - b) With a long-term management plan in place that is stewarded and sustained, we can achieve improvement on the park's ecology over time.
 - c) Left alone, the shore/dune ecology will decline. It is not currently on a positive trajectory as there is some erosion. One dune was created from spoil sands from mining activities. There was some restoration after the mining retreat, but the site is currently in a holding pattern. Approximately 85-90 acres of the park was disturbed by mining. This would be the first place to

- look to incorporate development. A building with a well, septic field and power still remains on site by the sag.
- d) The lake was created through the removal of minerals. This is an opportunity to restore wetland and water edges, create safer edges and more biodiversity through things like a wetland shelf, as the mining permit is still open for the lake. There is a shelf and some very deep areas (60') in addition to aquatic organisms. Looking at the site through a restoration lens can help us to locate recreation sites. This lake is 'perched' - it is contained by clay and sits higher than Lake Michigan.
 - e) The southern parcel of the site is in the City of Grand Haven, and is relatively undisturbed.
9. Development of any paths/surfaces would need to be done in a way that's restorative. VIRIDIS will come up with a design that bridges gaps while protecting and enhancing habitat.
 10. The park has 3-phase power to the existing building. There are public utilities in North Shore Drive.
 - a) Sanitary sewer from the east ends at the North Shore MHC & RV Resort.
 - b) There is no sanitary in North Shore Drive; all properties here have septic systems.
 - c) Watermain is continuous along North Shore Drive.
 11. Craig said camping at Ottawa Sands could put a lot of strain on the sanitary system if connected. He expressed concern about people disturbing ecologically sensitive areas. David said it would be important to provide access so people won't stray from the paths.
 12. Richard expressed concern that anything along the lakeshore gets destroyed by kids and the increased traffic/parking issues a campground could bring.
 13. VIRIDIS said this is a good opportunity for education, especially with the retreating shoreline. People can be respectful when they understand why. VIRIDIS will study the traffic/parking needs as well as pedestrian and vehicular interaction. They will also think about viewsheds, as there are some valuable, inspirational view corridors through Ottawa Sands. And they will study access, parking areas deeper in the site, and planned queuing and parking.
 14. Erosion also comes into play when considering access to the park. Would adjacent residents walk right in, or people walk through the properties to get to North Shore Rd.? A unified route connectivity plan would help, to inform the public where people should be.
 15. Debbie said there are already traffic issues on North Shore Drive in the summer. She also mentioned the overflow parking for Ottawa Sands is in Coast Guard Park, which is paid for by Ferrysburg residents.
 16. Curt said that OCPRC would ensure that adequate parking was on site. They will also study what number of people the site and infrastructure can handle and staffing levels required.
 17. The City of Ferrysburg had a population of 2,892 as of the 2010 census.

18. Ideas for Ottawa Sands County Park:

- a) Debbie asked about whether there would be a state or county park sticker for access to the park? Curt said if there was a beach at Ottawa Sands, they would use the sticker system, but we don't know what the final program elements will be.
- b) Richard suggested this could be an opportunity for composting toilets. VIRIDIS will study the capacity of future uses and can look for natural decomposition systems. He mentioned a public forum that was held a couple of years ago where mountain bikers wanted a trail from PJ Hoffmaster south through the Grand Haven open space property. Neither PJ Hoffmaster nor Grand Haven allows mountain biking. He wants to see pedestrians only on footpaths in the site, not people tearing the site up and removing wood for fires.
- c) David said we work through some of these key issues through our process. An ecological framework gives an unbiased understanding of what's working or not. We use this lens to determine what level of activity or intensity is appropriate as well as understanding the best locations for circulation and access. He did note that the deer population is overgrazing.
- d) VIRIDIS said connectivity is important, but doesn't mean that the surface type or width must be uniform. Topographical challenges will help us to determine best routes as is appropriate.
- e) The City has ecological studies they will share with the team, as well as KLH Dunes Preserve.
- f) Gene asked about whether a wildlife study was being conducted as part of the master plan. OCPRC is conducting floristic and herpetology studies. They are also trying to engage the Audubon Great Lakes staffer.
- g) Curt said OCPRC has programmed bird hikes through Ottawa Sands, and they have seen up to 60 species. He also mentioned that some plants need a little disturbance for long term health and propagation, which is an interesting issue. It is OCPRC's hope that through this process, they will develop partners with the focus groups that will manage the ecology together.
- h) Craig offered ideas to have a lodge, kayaking, meetings/weddings like Grand Ravines and a satellite for nature programs. He said he understood there were critical dunes to protect as well as beautiful views that needed to be maintained.
- i) Debbie suggested a kayak launch on the river. She mentioned a kayak trail in Ludington and asked about having something similar on the inner lake. Curt said OCPRC has four kayak launches, and the City of Grand Haven also has one. There is concern about introducing invasive species from small boats.
- j) Jason talked about the idea of being able to have a kayak trip from Grand Rapids with camping spots along the way. VIRIDIS also mentioned a recreational opportunity with the existing breasting dolphins as a final destination for small craft.
- k) Debbie asked about OCPRC using goats in Ottawa Sands, as they are not permitted within the City. Jason said they use them for invasive species control, especially in locations they can't get mechanical equipment or workers into, but they don't anticipate using goats at Ottawa Sands. They are generally needed with underbrush, which isn't present here.
- l) Debbie asked about whether movement of the dunes would affect the west side of the lake. David said that would be an important reason to get vegetation established.

- m) There is an opportunity for historic interpretive education, reflecting the culture and history of the community. This could include lumbering, fishing, the Sag, and being a vibrant pass-through port.

19. Things at Ottawa Sands County Park that are not desired:

- a) Richard said the park doesn't fit their master plan and has been taken off the tax roll. Increased vehicular traffic to the park and traffic through KLH Dunes Preserve make him concerned.
- b) Debbie said her concern would be about traffic. Also Dogwood Drive has traffic issues. With the additional traffic comes maintenance of roads and utilities. She asked whether the system could handle it, and also whether emergency services could access the required areas within Ottawa Sands County Park. Curt said that we will look at traffic through the master plan process. OCPRC would also develop a plan for emergency access, working with local agencies.
- c) Craig asked if there is an RV park at Ottawa Sands, how is it going to be managed, and would there be a need for increased police presence? Curt said that County resident surveys have identified a desire for camping facilities, but they hadn't found the right site until now.
- d) Richard said the only camping competition would be Grand Haven State Park, but there is demand for camping.
- e) Rebecca said it is important to keep the ecological integrity at all costs, keeping invasive species out of the lake and dealing with disturbance from dogs.
- f) Gene said park users leaving Ottawa Sands have been walking through adjacent neighbors' backyards.
- g) Matt said the fire department has expressed concern about access if there are buildings in the back of the park, and said a dry barrel fire hydrant would be important to have.

20. Community Engagement

- a) Beginning today, the team is holding a series of focus group meetings with local stakeholders.
- b) Photovision Challenge: on Instagram, park users can submit pictures of their use of Ottawa Sands County Park, things/recreation they'd like to see, or examples of other places/ideas that they like. This will be promoted with a sign at the park as well as on the OCPRC website. #miOttawaSands This is not framed as a contest at this time, but there may be some small incentives such as a park pass or small local coffee shop gift card.
- c) An online survey for the regional community to give input will be available.
- d) A series of community meetings will be held to gain input for the project:
 - i. Community Input #1 will be held on site with activities and food. The goal will be to understand what types of recreation the community wants to see at this park. 3-4 concepts will be developed based on the input collected.
 - ii. Community Input #2 will be held later in the summer to share the concepts and to get votes on the different ideas in them to be able to compile the input into a preferred concept. This will be held off-site and is anticipated to be open-house style.
 - iii. Community Input #3 will be held at the end of November off-site to present the preferred concept.
 - iv. Child care will be available at the open houses.

- v. VIRIDIS asked if the City had any ideas for venues for the second and third input sessions. Ferrysburg gym was a possibility.
 - e) City events that can advertise for the input sessions or have boards available for additional input include the Spring Lake Farmer's Market and 4th of July. The mayor has a breakfast on the 4th at William Ferry Park.
 - f) Ferrysburg will host their annual Cops and Cones event on June 13 from 1-3 pm at Ala mode Ice Cream Shop; VIRIDIS will ensure there is minimal overlap for the Park Community Input session. Ferrysburg can incorporate the Ottawa Sands event into their Cops and Cones flyer.
 - g) VIRIDIS will coordinate with Craig to advertise for the Park Community Input session in the City's spring newsletter. The next newsletter will be in the fall, and Community Input #3 can be advertised in that edition.
 - h) The City also has reader boards and website that they can share information about this project.
21. The VIRIDIS team asked the participants to fill out the comment cards provided. Any other thoughts can be e-mailed to Curt TerHaar with OCPRC; the input received will help inform how we ask questions of the public.

Respectfully submitted,
VIRIDIS Design Group

Enclosures: Hand-out packet
Sign-In Sheet

OTTAWA SANDS COUNTY PARK
CITY OF FERRYSBURG FOCUS GROUP
03.11.2020

SIGN IN SHEET

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