

FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES - CITY OF GRAND HAVEN

PROJECT: **miOTTAWA
SANDS PARK**

MEETING DATE: March 11, 2020

A meeting was held at Grand Haven Community Center to discuss 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. 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.
 - a) We will engage participants in a transparent and open process that allows significant input and multiple feedback loops.
 - b) We will consider all points of view to create a plan that addresses environmental, cultural, and recreation resource needs.
 - 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 Grand Haven and other local jurisdictions' plans and services 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.
 - 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. 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. Flora, fauna and insects are the best indication of overall ecology.
 - 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. 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 beaches or wetland shelves as the mining permit is still open for the lake. There is a shelf and some very deep areas currently. Looking at the site through a restoration lens can help us to locate recreation sites.
 - e) The southern parcel of the site is in the City of Grand Haven, and is relatively undisturbed.
7. Mike F. said the City just completed a master plan update, completed by PM Blough, Inc. VIRIDIS should review this to avoid duplication of recreational opportunities. Jason has a copy and will forward to VIRIDIS.
8. Pat was interested in the connectivity that could be achieved along the coast for pedestrians, bikes and wheelchairs. The City property south of Ottawa Sands County Park currently has no trails and minimal maintenance. Pat asked about potential for taxable value on the City open space site, citing

a need for balance. He suggested identifying a corridor that works with the topography for a trail connection between Ottawa Sands and Kitchel-Lindquist-Hartger (KLH) Dunes Preserve. There is also a DNR property at the channel that is available for City use. Residents don't have a sidewalk along North Shore Drive. He wants to see an accessible connector that is not for off-road vehicles.

9. Mike noted that we hardly have this opportunity for trail connectivity, so he would hate to close off the City open space property. The dune is always moving, so a paved trail would be difficult to maintain.
10. Jason said this is an exciting opportunity and suggested recreation opportunities like camping and a boat taxi and dock.
11. Robert said the KLH Dunes Preserve is designated to be held as a nature preserve in perpetuity. He asked how long it would take to evolve from a natural gravel trail to a paved trail, maybe 15 years?
12. Curt said he heard support for a trail connection for the Grand Haven open space, at least a hiking trail. This helps to promote a healthy lifestyle for users.
13. VIRIDIS indicated that starting off with a chips and fines trail would be helpful, then observe how the trail gets used before committing to a paved surface. For the trail surface type, it is vital to think about long term management.
14. Bob's view is that the Grand Haven open space is relatively natural and he wants to keep it that way. We need defined trails, not just free form public use. He isn't excited about hard surface trails because it disrupts nature. He prefers a more natural surface trail. He said we've got a real gem of an area, let's not screw it up. He wants to be able to show future generations the dunes. He mentioned that KLH Dunes Preserve has done extensive features inventories.
15. Curt said the OCPRC general approach is to provide equivalent experiences for all, but sometimes it's not possible to have accessible paths, like at Rosy Mound.
16. Jason said that it's pretty neat that they can get someone with mobility challenges to Ottawa Sands lake.
17. VIRIDIS said they would continue to look at the Ottawa Sands park with a lens of access. A universally accessible trail loop would be possible here. Sometimes you can do more harm trying to fit accessibility into a site like this.
18. Mike F shared that historically, Grand Haven started on the other side of the Grand River. Additional historic data can be collected from Jeanette Weiden at the library and Julie Bunke at the Museum. He is in favor of a nature trail in the Grand Haven open space, and acknowledged that future City Councils may make changes to the land use. This is the only long trail opportunity in this area.

19. Jennifer suggested a connection from downtown Grand Haven to a trail connector.
20. VIRIDIS asked the group what types of camping they could envision in Ottawa Sands County Park.
 - a) Jennifer suggested types other than RVs, such as yurts, glamping, or tents on platforms to preserve the dunes.
 - b) Jason said the campground consultant's feasibility study would include looking at economic viability of the various types of camping in the area.
 - c) Bob said the City had a feasibility study done years ago for Harbor Island, and RV camping was one potential use that was not pursued as it had a 13-year payoff.
 - d) Pat will share Harbor Island feasibility study by the 3rd Street bridge with OCPRC.
21. Harbor Island belongs to the City and contains a mitigated wetland from a former industrial airport, landfill site and a marina.
 - a) The power plant is going to be demolished in phases, this summer and next year. There's a two year mitigation plan for the site.
 - b) Future use for the property may include utilities, such as a sub station, control facility or snow melt.
 - c) Mike D said most of the island is below the 100-year floodplain and will be a swamp.
 - d) Mike F said there is a lot of industrial waste on the island.
 - e) Open space on the island was a disposal site for the Army Corps of Engineers' river dredgings, including the existing soccer fields.
 - f) There is a boat launch and four finger piers, and is the closest public launch to Lake Michigan. Fishermen who go to the big lake depart from this location in early morning, while recreational craft (16'-35') use the launch later in the day.
22. Curt mentioned the local consultant may be willing to do a natural features inventory for the Grand Haven Open Space site. If an endangered species is identified, there will be potential restrictions on developing the property.
23. Ideas for Ottawa Sands County Park:
 - a) Robert asked about a potential boat launch; the Grand Haven boat launch may not be usable long-term because of the water table.
 - b) Pat said the City has closed their boat launch while it's underwater, as the pavement gets beat up. The marina will have to shut off power due to the high water level.
 - c) Pat suggested an access dock where people could back and forth across the river to Harbor Island and the downtown area. A water taxi could offload at the marina.
 - d) Curt said there may be ways to get to Dewey Hill from Ottawa Sands or KLH Dunes Preserve, where there is a cool overlook. Pat said they currently discourage foot traffic on Dewey Hill due to erosion. Maybe have some boardwalks and re-vegetation or a crushed limestone path to help keep the dune together. We need to be careful not to be victims of our own success by having too many people on the dune; we need to channel people where we want them to go.
 - e) Pat said formal programming for natural components/education would be positive.

- f) Curt said OCPRC had talked about the Ottawa Sands County Park's existing building housing a satellite for staff for naturalist programming.

24. 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.
- 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.
- e) City events that can advertise for the input sessions or have boards available for additional input include Memorial Day weekend, Earth Day, 4th of July, or the Farmer's Market. Jennifer also mentioned having a powerpoint slide before Zoning meetings this spring. She said the City does not get much participation with Facebook posts. The City would be interested in having VIRIDIS/OCPRC get the word out about their Mission Pier project. Jennifer will follow up with VIRIDIS.

25. Robert said that Instagram was a great platform for the photovision challenge, and thought it is interesting that we will be asking for external ideas.

26. 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

