

FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES - OCPRC STAFF

PROJECT: **miOTTAWA SANDS PARK**

MEETING DATE: July 13, 2020

PRESENT: Jason Shamblin, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Curt TerHaar, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Aaron Bodbyl-Mast, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Jessica VanGinhoven, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Eric Frifeldt, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Jason Boerger, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Collin Zackrison, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Jeremy Cook, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Kristen Hintz, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Curtis Dykstra, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Bob Reichel, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Melanie Manion, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Nealy Molheok, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
Kyle Roffey, Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission
David Yocca, Ecological Planner
Trevor Bosworth, VIRIDIS Design Group
Lindsey Gadbois, VIRIDIS Design Group
SuLin Kotowicz, VIRIDIS Design Group

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom 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) VIRIDIS Design Group (VIRIDIS) is the design consultant that OCPRC has retained for the master plan process, through a Coastal Management Program grant.
2. Trevor with VIRIDIS described the process to date:

- a) We started the master plan process in January 2020. We will complete the process by the end of the year, per the grant. We are still in Phase 1, Analysis and Programming.
 - b) David Yocca, landscape architect and ecological planner, is part of the VIRIDIS team, along with Gerry Wilhelm, botanist, to help the team use the redevelopment process to restore and enhance the ecology in the park.
 - c) Focus for the master plan process includes:
 - i. 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. We don't want to duplicate types of programming with other local amenities
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. We will incorporate low-impact, sustainable site development principles that will support proposed improvements and programming.
 - iv. Proposed development shall be considered within the context of the entire coastal corridor and encourage long-term collaborative planning and land management.
 - d) A migratory bird study is also being completed concurrently by the Audubon Society.
 - e) Our first community input session will be July 18.
 - f) Phase 2 is for Plan Development, and will go from the end of July through October. We will incorporate input from focus groups, stakeholders, and the public and bring several concepts to the public for feedback at our second public input session, mid-September.
 - g) With input received, VIRIDIS will prepare a preferred plan by the end of October for review and final feedback with OCPRC. Phase 3 will be plan finalization, with a final plan reveal for the public at the end of November. The final plan and report will be presented to the Parks Commission for approval in December.
3. The July 18 Community Input Session will be a Field Day at the park from 10 am - 2 pm. It will be a family-friendly event. The public also has a chance to weigh in through other outlets, including an online survey. We've received around 300 responses so far; OCPRC staff should take the survey. Another opportunity for input is the Community Photovision Challenge, an Instagram photosharing campaign allowing the public to share what they like, how they use the park currently, what they'd like to see, and what they'd like to change. There will be five input stations at the Field Day event with educational opportunities along a 1.5 mile loop.
- a) Station 1: Site History/Background, to share information about the sand mining and predevelopment ecology
 - b) Station 2: Riverfront Activation, to get feedback on types of water activities desired
 - c) Station 3: Camping, to get feedback on types of camping desired, or whether no camping in the park is preferred
 - d) Station 4: Habitat and Ecology, to educate about ecology on site
 - e) Station 5: Recreation, to get feedback on the types of activities desired in the park
 - f) The Facebook event can be shared from OCPRC's page.

- g) Participants will drive into the check in station location by the existing building/Sag. For participants unable to make the 1.5 mile hike, they will be able to share input at the check in station

4. Ideas for Active/Passive Recreation at Ottawa Sands County Park:

- a) Jason B. - would like to see multiple types of camping types, including unique, tent, and RV on a small portion of the site, a playground, a day-use/camper-use swimming beach, kayak, canoe, paddleboard rental, and contain recreation to the 80 acres disturbed by mining
- b) Melanie - highest priority is to provide boardwalks along the Sag for bird watchers, camping has scored high on previous surveys, and there's a need in the community for it, scuba diving (including having volunteers help remove invasive species from the lake), no fishing as it's not sustainable. The fish are stunted and there's not a lot of energy in the lake; OCPRC would need guidance for a stocking program.
- c) Bob - agrees about fishing not being sustainable, could only do catch and release, boats under 16' with an electric trolling motor - launch by hand, likes the idea of boardwalks on the Sag, keep natural areas natural, and wants a camping spot
- d) Kristen - agrees with boardwalks for birding, would like to see a lot of the park natural, OCPRC provided rentals such as kayaks and paddle boards, concerned about park visitors bringing in own watercraft due to invasive species, likes tent camping but is worried about air quality with campfires, is concerned about access if we're bringing a lot of people in to the site, and it would be nice to have a trail/boardwalk for visitors in wheelchairs, and a satellite nature center on site
- e) Curtis D - would like to see access along the Sag for birding, perhaps a boardwalk, camping but low-use with only tents and spread-out sites, wondered about doing something in the open dune area viewed from North Shore Drive, building to be a rentable facility with restrooms, maybe a gathering place for campers or school groups
- f) Melanie - we've had a school group from Detroit visiting to learn about dune ecology, so improvements should be accessible for large buses
- g) Trevor mentioned that in the City of Ferrysburg focus group, they mentioned that they like the existing viewsheds into the park
- h) Kristen - suggested archery as a unique recreational opportunity, maybe OCPRC could offer classes
- i) Jessica - would like to have a staffed center for education, since Ottawa Sands is at the intersection of two major greenways, this could be a hub of activity. Suggested snorkeling, climbing wall, cross country skiing, ice skating, making use of the areas impacted by mining, use the park as an opportunity to connect kids with nature, teaching them how to engage with nature
- j) Melanie - deer hunting, connect to the urban centers around us (Muskegon, Grand Rapids, Holland) to get more people to visit and connect to the natural areas, diversify the park users, she mentioned the Audubon Society's Indigo project
- k) Bob - campground opportunity; across the river is downtown Grand Haven; we could offer a shuttle service for campers to the Grand Haven marina
- l) Jessica - tourists have expressed interest in a water taxi

- m) Jason B - a water taxi could have a lot of uses, see Spring Lake, tour the channel, educational harbor tours, school groups, and bird watching boat tours
- n) Melanie - concern about the highly erodable nature of this stretch of the river
- o) Trevor said that edge ecology must be taken into consideration with future uses; river dredging may be a management strategy

5. Thoughts about Maintenance, Management and Infrastructure Opportunities/Concerns:

- a) Melanie - Pitcher Thistle is a rare species present because of the mining disturbance, potential for erosion on the dunes if more people go where there's no vegetation
- b) Jason B - staffing will be required with the addition of active recreation. Camping helps toward financial sustainability. Tents vs RVs; you get more income from RVs
- c) Bob - hard to talk about maintenance and management before the master plan and an understanding of what programs will be here. They have had trouble with treated lumber on top of the sand only lasting 10-15 years; they've seen more decay
- d) Kyle - avid camper, would like to have a divider between day users and campers, including parking areas, no motorized boats on the lake, kayak launch on the Sag, trees for shade in some extensive prairie areas, consider space for the entry booth
- e) Jessica - lakeshore parks don't have a 'fast pass' lane, which is very frustrating, should have that at Ottawa Sands
- f) Bob - agree about the extra lane
- g) Kristen - likes Canada campgrounds where the camping is dispersed and RVs are separated from tents
- h) Jessica - Sleeping Bear Dunes is a good example facility, they have camp sites right on the trail
- i) Jason B - different types of campers have different expectations, tents need trees
- j) Bob - agrees that different types of camping should have separation, wondered about group camping or rustic sites for backpackers

6. 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