

FOCUS GROUP MEETING MINUTES - PARK LEADERSHIP

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
Rick Bosch, Friends of Ottawa County Parks
Greg DeJong, County Commissioner & Parks Commission Member
Pete Esser, OCPRC Foundation
Matt Fenske, County Commissioner
Cathy Feyt, OCPRC Foundation
Jane Longstreet, OCPRC Board Member
Bobbie Sabine, OCPRC Foundation
Brian Stauffer, OCPRC Foundation
Marjie Viveen, OCPRC Foundation
Anita Yoder, OCPRC Foundation
David Yocca, Ecological Planner
Trevor Bosworth, VIRIDIS Design Group
Lindsey Gadbois, VIRIDIS Design Group
SuLin Kotowicz, VIRIDIS Design Group

A hybrid meeting was held via Zoom and at OCPRC 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 final focus group meeting, where we talk with important stakeholders to identify what we need to talk about with the public.

- d) 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 this fantastic opportunity showcase and restore the ecology in the park for lasting value.
 - 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.
 - 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. This document will also be useful for outreach and fundraising.
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; focus group participants 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) With COVID-19 and the quarantine, people have been getting out and experiencing parks
- g) All input from the focus groups, public input event, surveys, etc. will inform the concepts that VIRIDIS will develop in Phase 2.
- h) Parks Foundation will share the event on their Facebook page

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

- a) Bobbie - this park offers a critical link to connect open spaces, ecological restoration is vital to the master plan, she cringes at the idea of RVs on site, prefers tent camping, wants to create a special, unique destination by creating six tree houses accessible by kayak near the Sag, and any restoration plan must include deer management
- b) Brian - concerned about RVs on site, likes the idea of tree houses and suggested they could be accessed by a hiking trail, and wondered about a portage between the river and the lake. He wants to keep the park as natural as possible.
- c) Anita - agrees with keeping the park as natural as possible, and suggested having tent camping with very few sites, maybe some camping sites on the river with boardwalk, a riverwalk boardwalk, access the park from a kayak, lake water vessels, but is worried about invasive species
- d) Trevor suggested a rental-based water activity for the lake would prevent invasives from personal watercraft
- e) Curt - the current rules for the lake were made out of caution, though the lake is not as pristine as we originally thought
- f) Marjie - it is important to tell the long history of sand mining in Ottawa County. She is concerned about motorized boat traffic in the river and how that affects kayakers, is concerned about hiking around the lake, as it is difficult in the loose sand, would like to see an elevated boardwalk and swimming. Camping has economic advantages but also comes with more maintenance
- g) Curt - we've always considered swimming because of the clean water, just need to create a safe shelf
- h) Jane - likes the idea of boardwalks, since there are accessibility issues for some users, but doesn't see the value in offering camping since there's lots of camping in the area at State Parks. She also feels that accessibility for trails is important
- i) Bobbie - boardwalks help keep people on the trail, and she wondered if there is a no-wake zone in the Sag
- j) Trevor mentioned Holland has been successful with activation, separating pedestrians and non-motorized water activities
- k) Brian - uses this in Holland, and noted it is also right in front of Coast Guard so has direct supervision
- l) Pete - the Sag is a good opportunity for kayaking and he enjoys seeing the eagle nest but is concerned about how increased activity will affect wildlife

- m) Rick - likes the idea of considering enhancements to the Grand Haven open space through the Ottawa Sands master plan, recreation around the bend, wide open area, campground should be unique
- n) Marjie - suggested a hammock garden, though has heard other places have had problems with hammocking
- o) Bobbie - has seen hammocking on the other side of the channel
- p) Curt - OCPRC does regulate hammocking in their parks
- q) David - we have some opportunities with the interesting range of ecosystems in a compact area, the intersection of greenways, some remnant dunes that have been unaltered, the serenity of the site and the diverse range of natural landscapes. In some ways, we have a blank slate where the mining operations occurred that need to be stabilized and managed
- r) Greg - fishing dock or platform for catch and release fishing, multiple overlook docks, boardwalk for seniors and young kids or paved opportunities, maybe offer golf carts
- s) Jane - also thought about golf carts
- t) Marjie - concessions for food and drink, kayak rentals, or golf carts. In Florida, concessions folks start campfires for you
- u) Brian - need a balance to environmental purists and being able to enjoy the site
- v) Bobbie - Grand River Park has fishing that's accessible
- w) Jason - we have an opportunity at Ottawa Sands to have outdoor education to get kids close to the water
- x) We should get school kids engaged, have a pavilion for groups, organize a walk or tour and teach people about the site
- y) Marjie - what about a day camp like at Pigeon Creek, meet some educational goals
- z) Brian - share history of the riverwalk, trading post, logging, working with the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians on the greenway to bring history alive, camping to bring in own water, have pit toilets?
- aa) Greg - dog park opportunity with open water
- ab) Jason - Coast Guard Park across the street has a dog park
- ac) Pete - winter activities like cross country skiing and ice skating
- ad) Trevor asked if there were any outdoor public ice skating opportunities nearby
- ae) Cathy - Grand Haven and Ferrysburg have eliminated their ice skating, so there aren't any public rinks
- af) Curt - would like winter activities like snowshoeing
- ag) Marjie - maybe sledding
- ah) Bobbie - how much parking will we need?
- ai) Jason - we can consider that once we know what development we're looking at
- aj) VIRIDIS will consider parking and traffic backups on North Shore Drive with the master plan concepts
- ak) Curt - we will need to look at a safe pedestrian connection to Coast Guard Park
- al) Marjie - will there be a connection to North Beach Park?
- am) Curt - we are looking at a possible connection
- an) Pete - Holland State Park has put in flashing lights for crossing, might think about that on North Shore Drive

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5. Trevor invited the group to attend the public input event on Saturday.
6. Any other thoughts can be e-mailed to Jason Shamblin or Curt TerHaar with OCPRC or to Trevor Bosworth with VIRIDIS Design Group; the input received will help inform the next phase of design.

Respectfully submitted,
VIRIDIS Design Group