



PARKS AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
August 22, 2023

The Parks and Public Works Committee met for Regular Committee Meeting at 9:30 a.m.
City Hall
102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Baldwin at 9:30 a.m.

Attendance:

Present: Chair Baldwin, Committee members Charak, DeJong, Kimble (arrived @ 9:40 am) & Roche.

Absent: Committee member Johnson.

Others Present: Superintendent Herbert, Deputy Clerk & DPW Asst. Williams

Approval of Agenda:

Motion by Charak, second by DeJong, to table item 6B7 on the agenda for July 25, 2023. Via voice vote, motion carried 3-0.

Approval of Minutes from 7/25/23:

Motion by DeJong, second by Roche, to approve the minutes from the July 25, 2023, meeting. Via voice vote, motion carried 3-0.

Public Speaker:

Ruth Thornton from the Land Conservancy of WM, Land Protection Director, was in person to speak to the Committee about who they are and the kind of work that they do. They work in an eight-county area in Western Michigan where they have prioritized and have completed a strategic plan. They have three focal areas that they prioritize for their work which are Big Forests & Wild Rivers, the Lake Michigan Shoreline, and the Eastern Glacial Corridor. They also have Strategic Plan focus areas where there is very high conservation potential for the West Michigan Shoreline. Thornton went over how they partner with Local and State Governments on projects such as the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, Tallmadge Woods, Lost Lake, Meinert Park, North Ottawa Dunes, and the Upper Macatawa Natural Area. She also discussed the criteria for land projects and explained how a landowner is able to donate a conservation easement.

Public Comments (agenda items only):

Chris Clark (Saugatuck Township) – John Vanderbeek asked him to come and be a resource, particularly with the presentation. He is active in the Riverwood Council and the hiking clubs, so he has hiked all of the trails and he is quite familiar with most of the properties. He has been looking into easements and everything and has learned that you have to make sure that the real estate attorneys understand that you're looking at an easement in perpetuity. Most of them are not usually doing that, like farmers can do temporary easements. He has seen the airport property several times and he has walked with Helen a couple of times and says that if there is any way he can be helpful, let him know. He is particularly interested in the Mount Baldhead area and believes one thing that might help them as they look into who owns what is to speak with the Land Conservancy of Western Michigan. He is sure they hold the easements for Tallmadge Woods, and they are the ones who work so they probably have a lot of research somewhere in a file. He said that they may be able to answer some of their questions. There are probably some sort of handshake agreements and some misunderstandings about who owns what over there. He doesn't think it will be terribly hard to clear that up. He is willing to help if needed.

John Kerr (Douglas) – Mount Baldhead Park is arguably Saugatuck's most popular, most historic, and most iconic landmark and he thinks that is evidenced by the two historic photos in the room of Mount Baldhead and the view from Mount Baldhead. Every summer, thousands of people from around the country and around the world face the challenge of climbing to the top of the big sand dune with the dome on top of it. It's a real gem in the community. For the last five years, he has worked as a volunteer for the pump house museum, and he gets to meet these people. They have a map where they ask people to put a pin in the map to show where they have come from. Every year they have hundreds and hundreds of people from around the world coming to visit that site. Compared to other city parks in Saugatuck, Mount Baldhead Park is in sad shape. It has been neglected over the years with minimal maintenance and needs attention. The lovely old picnic pavilion is dirty. The roof is covered with years of debris and rafters are filled with birds and the messes that they make. The electricity doesn't work at all, and the light bulbs are dangling from the wires from the ceiling. A couple of the picnic tables are simply rotting. It is not a place that families want to enjoy a picnic with a view over the river. The restrooms are primitive and haven't been updated in decades. They never seem clean, and the doors don't close on either one. The fixtures are ancient. They are definitely not family friendly. People don't want to send their children into them. On the plus side, they do have running water. At the top of the stairs, the wooden joint platform is sliding down the dune. If you walk around, there are rotten timbers in numerous places. There are a lot of hazards up there. Because of its popularity with all the tourists and the locals as well, the facilities at Mount Baldhead get a lot of wear and tear. It is this popularity that we feel makes it incumbent upon the City to step up. With the help of volunteers like himself, they can make it a place that they can be proud of once again.

Renee Zita (985 Park St) – Her family has had a home on Park Street since 1932. Says it is painful to see the way Mount Baldhead looks and she pleads with the Committee to address that.

Review/Discussion:

A. Department of Public Works and Administrative Updates:

DPW Superintendent Herbert thanked Ruth Thornton for the presentation she delivered. She did an excellent job and there was quite a bit of thought-provoking data there. He said that he was thinking during the presentation that it may be a good idea to bring Jon Moxey from Fleis & VandenBrink in to help with the data collection that would be needed. As they go through different parcels, that may be helpful.

We are roughly 2 weeks away from Labor Day, and Herbert wanted to take a quick look backwards and then talk about a little bit of what they have got going on this fall. He thinks that DPW overall had a very successful summer. One of the main challenges that Public Works faces is the Oval Beach Management position as it has been a difficult position to fulfill. They had a longtime beach manager for over a decade and then she resigned in May of 2021. Since that time, they have gone through seven managers. They really need to fill that position with somebody who is going to be consistent and be here for the long-term. He said that he has taken some steps and had some conversations with people after posting the job, but you never really know until you get somebody hired in and see how they work out and make sure they like the position and they want to stay awhile. The downside of going through that much turnover is there is so much training involved. It is a critical operation for the city. There are public safety elements to it, food handling elements to it so it has been a key role for them at Public Works. He just wanted to bring to light some of the challenges that they face.

When asked why the beach had such a high turnover in the management position, Herbert explained that there are different reasons for each of the seven. The main reason is that the job is very demanding. They pay a certain amount of money for the position, but really what they are giving up is their summer, by working holidays and weekends. You are dealing with seasonal staff that work for only 99 days per summer and those employees have varying degrees of work ethic, and for some employees, this is their very first job. So, for these reasons, it has just been difficult. He thinks that they are making good progress. Herbert said that he is hopeful going into the 2024 season, Public Works will have a few positions available, and one of them is a hybrid position between an Equipment Operator slash Oval Beach Manager position. It is a very unique position. He has had conversations with someone, and he plans to offer the job to him as he has interviewed and did quite well. He hopes to gain good traction in 2024 and then get to a level of training with this individual to where they can go beyond that and start getting a little more innovative with their operation out there. There are a lot of ideas out there. Herbert is trying to keep his nose to the ground and say that that this is where they are currently, and then building off of that, there is so much potential out there that they can go in any number of directions and there are lots of good ideas. He said that they need to take one step at a time and make sure that they have consistent leadership at the beach, that are going to be there and make sure that everyone is safe, and the organization is being run well. So that was a look back at the 2023 season.

The biggest challenge for DPW this fall is that they are pretty project heavy this fall. He said that they are going to get pretty aggressive this year with road construction projects. In a matter of weeks, they are tearing into Taylor, Takken, East, and West Streets. There is also a section of road that they will be redoing on North Maple Street. Herbert said that he just signed a proposal with

TNT Roofing who will be doing the roof replacement on the restroom facility, as well as the pavilion at Mount Baldhead this fall.

This City Hall exterior still has some work to be completed. The large projects are done, but there are a couple of details like the shutters need to get reattached to the building. He is told that would be completed by last week. Another issue that has come up is the rain gutters on the building. They discharge off to the side of the building, mulch gets covered on the sidewalk, it has been a problem for a really long time. They plan to do the exterior work before the project is fully complete where they will be refurbishing the landscaping, but also some cracked sidewalks out front in the driveway apron. While they have the concrete torn up, they plan on connecting the rain gutters to the catch basin that is in front of the building, which is the proper fix.

After Labor Day, they will be moving forward with refurbishing the Rose Garden fence as well as the iron gate on the restroom building. He has spoken to Douglas DPW Director Rick Zoet, regarding having the same company refurbish the streetlamps on the Saugatuck Blue Star Highway Bridge, as they are kind of rusted out particularly where the snow hits the post consistently with salt.

Ace Parking Lot Striping still has some work to do. They came in hot and heavy downtown earlier this summer. There are still some crosswalks, stop bars, and then the whole west side of the river that still needs to get painted. Herbert said that crack sealing will take place this fall. Crack sealing is a treatment that they apply to roads that are in fairly good condition and help preserve the life of the road before it deteriorates more. The next thing on the list will be to get the irrigation replaced at Willow Park. He said that this is stuff that will be going on with the DPW team during the fall season and he is looking forward to seeing everything completed.

B. Study Group Updates:

a. Invasive Species:

Committee member Charak said that the Allegan County Conservation District is working to treat 4000 Hemlock trees on City property. Contracts and qualifications that they have to have along with insurance, license, and a couple of years of experience. They have picked out a contractor from Allendale and they are going to start working on that soon.

City Manager Heise added that the Allegan Conservation District has also been treating, working with private landowners in the same area. There are dual efforts going on at the same time. The City did budget the amount as far as a little bit from GEI, and it will be on the Council agenda, Monday for action. This has been a long-standing issue and the City Council has been supportive.

b. Airport Property:

Chair Baldwin gave all PPW members a copy of the ecological and sustainability evaluations that were provided by the ODC. The update is there for you. The thing that she was most interested in and what she is happiest about is it looks like there is nothing to stop them from grooming the already established trails and giving more legitimacy to those trails. She was disappointed to see that there is not really an opportunity to do solar, but she is okay

with it because it opens up for other things that they can possibly do in those areas. They have an optional planning session that they have already paid for with the ODC so she would like to set that up and contact them. Hopefully they can get something squared away where she would like to talk about next steps then on their trails and what that looks like. Baldwin said that it makes sense to have transparency and have it during a normally scheduled meeting. She says the next steps would be to contact them and get the meeting set up and then start making the next move to get the trails legitimized. She thinks that could be really exciting stuff, something to put a feather in their cap.

c. Blue Star Multimodal Path:

Committee member Kimble said they had their project kickoff Zoom meeting on August 8th and that it went really well. That included everyone that is on the tribe, community, committee so they have representatives from Saugatuck Township, Douglas, Saugatuck City, and the Friends of the Blue Star Trail. The timeline is so long that they are not scheduled to start construction until probably Spring of 2025. That gives them six months or more to prepare, and there is still quite a bit of work that needs to be done. They will be working on all of the fine tuning the design of the path so they can start the bids in January. They will have a meeting with Saugatuck City so that they can start talking about some of the anticipated controversial aspects of the project. The Friends of The Blue Star Trail had their gala and done very well. They are putting money aside for adding the next portion to the trail. Kimble said that they are also in need of new board members.

d. Village Square:

Committee members DeJong and Roche teamed up for a presentation regarding the progress at Village Square. They went over the ODC Inspection regarding the playground equipment. There are many Priority 1 and 2 safety concerns and it is currently non-compliant and should be corrected ASAP. They have advised that the equipment be demolished, and that the City move forward with replacement. They went over the playground location and goals for the playground which are:

1. Keeping at current location
2. Maximize existing footprint
3. Broaden age range to 2-12 years
4. Include unique & modern features
5. Use long-lasting materials
6. Keep the existing trees
7. Pursue themes – nature, art/music, maritime
8. Add solar, flashing crosswalk sign

They spoke about the Vendors/Designers Meetings with the ODC, Adventure World, Sinclair using GameTime/Playcore, and Penchura using Landscape Structures. They visited 12 playgrounds, looked through several catalogues & online components, and received multiple

renderings with feedback. They presented to the Committee several options from each vendor/designer and explained the differences between all of them. They also went over the timeline which involves the following:

August 22, 2023 – Present work to PPW & get feedback.

August 25, 2023 – Receive updated renderings/quotes.

September 2023 – PPW Special Meeting to make decision to send to CC.

October 2023 – CC approval & playground demolition.

October 27, 2023 – GameTime grant is due.

April 2024 – Community build.

d. Park Street & Mount Baldhead:

City Manager Heise said that AT&T are hanging tough with them, dealing with multiple stakeholders as it stands now. They are working with the Historical Society to try to make accommodations inside the radar dome, to leave their giant antenna intact inside the radar. AT&T has been very patient with them, and they have been working with their engineers. Heise says they feel like there is a way to work with the Historical Society to allow the antenna to stay in place in the radar. They are moving forward to a couple more steps with that. They have had to go through the Zoning Board of Appeals for some setback issues following their city ordinances. Other than that, they've already made investments in getting fiber installed out there. They are ready to go with that and are hoping to have this installed in time for summer events next year. He doesn't believe that AT&T have any interest in upgrading the bathrooms at this point. Heise suggested working as a group to renovate them and that they want to try to stay inside that existing footprint given the Archaeological Survey. Heise had a meeting with Consumers Energy, and they let him know about a project which is pretty significant. He said that they stated they would bury all of the utilities on Park Street. They have so many issues with the trees and the sand to stabilize the poles. A lot of the poles and trees are leaning, and he thinks that it is just too difficult for them to get their footings in there. He is unsure of the timeline for that project at this time but will have more details at a later date.

One the agenda for Council is the donation box that Ms. Eda and Mr. Curb placed at the steps at Mount Baldhead. What City Manager Heise has asked of them is to have a clear understanding of questions such as who is collecting money and where does the money go? He thinks that the donation box is a great idea. They have informed him that the Historical Society will collect the funds and then everything goes to the City for Mount Baldhead infrastructure steps, and some of the other issues that were pointed out earlier in the meeting. They just need to get that in writing and in front of City Council so that they know where the money is going. If the money is being collected by the Historical Society, are the funds distributed half and half? Heise said that there are a lot of nonprofits that would love to put out donation boxes in different areas. He just wants to make sure that they have a good handle on the management of the funds. They probably make \$100 per week if he had to guess and said that

they have already collected over \$100, and it has only been out there a couple of weeks. He has requested new signage as they want to put up a QR code for larger donors because not a lot of people like cash.

e. Recycling Bins:

Committee Member Roche said that at the last meeting she spoke to the Committee about recycling bins and trying to integrate them in commercial spaces or public spaces. She did some research on that and got some quotes after speaking with Scott Herbert and receiving some feedback. Scott operates with a small crew so they have to make sure that this will work for his team. He suggested 55-gallon bins, so they don't have to empty them every hour and they also want them to match. Roche did some research into what the best behavior or habit creator is and said that it is the restrictive opening cans, because they will be starting with only bottles and cans that hopefully have less contamination. They can label the downside of the can and do the same thing for waste. They also like the hinges on the garbage because they have a lot of dogs and food and things get put in there on hot days, they really want to keep the smell down. They are made from 100% recyclable materials. They are looking to purchase three sets, three of each is around \$6600 to do six cans which is not cheap, but they are durable. She proposed to the group that they would like to do a pilot of putting these in three locations. Scott suggested the Saugatuck Drug Store corner, at Village Square, and at Mount Baldhead, which are all high traffic locations. They will do a test and then get feedback from DPW. They will also need to get a new dumpster because they will be collecting materials that they haven't collected before. They are hoping that this keeps the levels of garbage down because they will be putting the materials where it belongs.

C. Tri-Community Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update:

John McCann and Lindsey Gadbois from Veritas Design Group were in person to speak to the Committee regarding the Tri-Community Parks & Recreation Master Plan. John said that they were spearheading the updates to the rec plan in collaboration with Douglas, Saugatuck Township, and the local school district to create a joint five-year plan for the area. They have focus groups set up with each individual community as part of their outreach and their process so they can hear specifically what their ideas are, and if there are any thoughts or concerns. They are also working with a steering committee to help guide the project in general. They would like to hear what each community wants to do, so that they can gather all of the input and try to reconcile together with that and what they hear from the public piece to that. They have already met with the Township, and then later in the day they plan to meet with Douglas and the school district. To be eligible for grants through the DNR, you have to have a current Parks and Recreation Master Plan on file, which it is required to update every five years. That is the main purpose that communities do these plans. However, there are other benefits to doing that as it gives you a chance to look at your facilities and evaluate what you have, what you need, and what you are missing, gives you an idea of the public perception through your public outreach. It gives you an idea of how the community perceives the facilities versus what council or others in the community see so you can help reconcile that. It provides you an opportunity to set

big goals and objectives for future improvements and developments, and lets you look at the big picture stuff in addition to the little picture stuff. You can think about things like sustainability and conservation, all of the great things the Committee has been talking about here. It will let you set a timetable through an action plan. The DNR would like to see if you apply for a grant that the project is inside your plan. They always encourage them to include as much as you think you might do in the plan. It may include some really high in the sky type projects that maybe there is no way you can do it. You never know when an opportunity might come along, or a donor. They encourage you to include those types of projects. You also include specific projects that you think you can do like the Playground at Village Square Park. It kind of covers you for all bases. They do a pretty robust public input process, and they are working on an online survey. They have put it out there as a draft and they are getting feedback now. They will make the changes and then they will send it out for a final review. This gives the community an opportunity in the comfort of their own home to get on the computer and provide feedback where they don't have to come to a meeting and interact, which is a little bit safer for them. They generally get a lot of good feedback through those surveys because they will be multiple choice or checkboxes, but then there are also common boxes where they can tell you all the things and you will hear all the things. They will also have a public input open house where they solicit input from the community regarding Parks and Recreation. It is a good opportunity for folks to come in and provide feedback. Usually, they have handouts and other materials that can make it interactive and fun for everybody. A community event has been discussed or piggybacking off another community event that is already happening in the community. They can come and set up a table and just kind of be there in the background and talk to people as they come through. The intention is to try to get diverse coverage and feedback. They aren't targeting just a certain group, they are getting families, seniors and everyone included. There is also a 30-day public review period. Once they have a draft of the plan put together, they are required to have a 30-day review period, so anyone can complete it and provide feedback. When they take it to council, they will also have a public review period. There are lots of opportunities.

McCann then gave the Committee a quick rundown of the sections of the plan and what all goes into the plan. Generally, the DNR kind of mandates certain sections that are required in the plan, and they can always add more if necessary. This may be the case in this community because you have the waterfront piece, so they may need to expand that section a little bit. Usually, there is a community description section that provides the description of the existing community in terms of topography, vegetation, demographics, transportation, and other things of the sort. He said that they will probably regurgitate a lot of that information from the previous plan since it doesn't change very often. There is an administrative structure piece where they describe a breakdown of how the hierarchy of the communities and how the leadership is set up the different committees and boards, what their roles are, how decisions are made, and things like the budgets for parks and the overall community. This gives them a good understanding of how things work. There is the recreational inventory piece where they go out to each park and do an inventory, look at accessibility, what types of facilities that they have, make a big matrix and list everything out. They have already been to a bunch of parks and started that process. They get a whole list of all of the facilities that are available to the community members to get an idea of what is there. They can describe the public input process and

then they can give you the results and let you know all of the things that they've done for public input. Then they will do a recreational needs and deficiencies analysis. They look at the National Park standards and then they will benchmark this community based on population in the area and see how it compares with the National Park. Those things vary from community to community. They use a lot of information from the previous plans and carry that forward. The last two sections, the goals, objectives, and the action plan are where they are looking for your feedback and input as well as input from the community. They would like to get an idea from your point of view of the goals, objectives in the previous plan are still valid or if they need to tweak them, change them, delete them, whatever they see fit. John said that the action plan is where you describe your timetable for projects and what projects you would like to do. In this project, since it is a joint Community Plan where they are still working out how they are going to get all of everyone's projects listed in there and have a cohesive overall joint type of plan. They still want to hear what your thoughts are on those types of things.

Review Next Steps: None.

Public Comments: Lisa Mize, Executive Director of the CVB – She appreciates what the committee is doing. She is very interested in the Tri-Community Master Plan update. Everything that she has heard about the “pie in the sky” projects is in line with what the CVB is currently looking at. They have a subcommittee put together right now to look at potential grant opportunities. What they have described in the Master Plan fits perfectly. She would love to have input into the Master Plan and loves what the committee is doing.

Member Closing Comments:

Committee Member Charak – loved the session regarding the five-year plan.

Committee Member Kimble – Agrees that the five-year plan session was good to emphasize this area and the idea of preserving their natural areas, but also encouraging education opportunities for people to create them.

Committee Member DeJong – Feels like they are really making progress. They've recommended something to City Council, and they have something that they will come back with in just a couple of weeks and recommend to City Council as well.

Committee Member Roche – She would like to take a deep dive into this at the next meeting and for the Committee members to do a deep dive and come back to this. She thinks this is great for analytical but says that this is their working order for the next several years. She says that they need to get really great as far as what they are doing not just for grants but for this community, and get numbers tied to it so that they don't feel so disorganized wondering what they can and can't do.

Chair Baldwin – She echoes that they probably need another working session on this. There is a lot to digest in the five-year plan. She agrees that she liked the five-year plan and talked about long term but is excited about in the short-term getting the playground before Council. They have \$175K earmarked, they can come up with the rest of it and think that they need to go big and propose it. She thanked everyone for their hard work and their three hours in the chair.

Adjournment:

Motion by Roche, second by Charak, to approve adjournment of the meeting. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Chairwoman Baldwin adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Williams, City Deputy Clerk & DPW Administrative Assistant