Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission

MINUTES OF MEETING

Date: March 23, 2021

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Location: Zoom Digital Meeting

Members Present: Patricia Scribner, WCPARC President (attending from Pittsfield Township, MI); Janis Bobrin, WCPARC Vice President (attending from Ann Arbor, MI); Daniel Ezekiel, WCPARC Secretary/Treasurer (attending from Ann Arbor, MI), Ricky Jefferson (attending from Ypsilanti Township, MI), Robert Joerg (attending from Delta Township, MI), Robert Marans (attending from Lee City, FL), Jo Ann McCollum (attending from Ypsilanti Township, MI), Brenda McKinney (attending from Superior Township, MI), and Evan Pratt (attending from Scio Township, MI)

Members Absent: Jason Morgan

Staff Present: Coy Vaughn, Director; Meghan Bonfiglio, Deputy Director; Ginny Trocchio, Superintendent of Park Planning and Natural Areas; Jason Brooks, Manager of Finance and Administration; Kira Macyda, Park Planner; Peter Sanderson, Park Planner, and Hannah Cooley, Management Analyst

Others Present: Luke Bonner, Bonner Advisory Group; and Tom Gritter, Gritter Real Estate Services

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Scribner called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Overview of Capital Improvement Plan, Budget, and Fund Balance

Mr. Vaughn provided an overview of the various millages and other funding sources that support WCPARC and how capital improvements are planned and financed. He explained that the annual CIP budget was typically around $3.5M and was funded by the development millage. He pointed out that WCPARC historically does not bond for larger capital projects but elects to builds up sufficient fund balance to pay for projects.

4. Staebler Farm County Park

Ms. Macyda provided an overview of Staebler Farm Park and a brief chronology of the park acquisition, She explained the future development plans for the north and south side of the park and provided justification for a new multi-purpose building and renovation of the existing farm house. She offered case studies featuring other successful folk schools around the Midwest and presented a phasing plan for future park improvements.

Ms. Bonfiglio introduced the consultant team of Luke Bonner and Tom Gritter. The consultants proceeded to present a cost-benefit analysis for constructing a new multi-purpose building and for renovating the existing farmhouse. They also discussed the opportunity of WCPARC acquiring the Michigan Folk School. In summary, they recommended that WCPARC move forward with all three opportunities.

Mr. Ezekiel asked if the increased estimate for the multi-purpose building was due to pursuing LEED standards and an all-electric building. Mr. Bonner explained that, while green technology can be more expensive it some situations, this does not account the higher cost of the building.

Mr. Joerg asked where savings could be made to reduce the cost of the building by 20%. Mr. Bonner answered that substituting some of the more expensive materials would likely have the biggest impact.

Mr. Pratt agreed that we should look for opportunities for cost savings on the building, but we shouldn't get locked in at 20% and possibly jeopardize the character and quality of the project. Mr. Marans agreed and stated that we had put considerable time into this design to make sure it was something special. He added that he was less concerned with saving the 20% than making sure we have the building that is needed.

Mr. Joerg asked if some of the extra expense of the pursuing a green building could be made up with utility savings. Mr. Bonner answered that it was likely but was not considered as part of the cost-benefit analysis since it was focused on construction costs.

Ms. McCollum stated that she is supportive of Staebler Farm and all the improvements that are proposed; however, she wants to make sure that the park remains accessible to all. Ms. Bobrin agreed and added that we should focus on providing transportation for some of the programs and classes since the park is not on a bus line.

Mr. Gritter presented the opportunity of WCPARC acquiring the Michigan Folk School. He outlined several alternative arrangements for the relationship between the two organizations but concluded that acquisition was his recommendation.

Ms. Bobrin complemented the consultant team on a great presentation. She commented that much of the focus has been on Mr. Gold since he has proven himself to be a dynamic leader. However, if he were to suddenly leave the MFS we need to be sure that there is strong leadership elsewhere in the organization. Mr. Gritter agreed and explained that the MFS had a strong board with plenty of leaders.

Ms. McKinney asked how volunteers might be utilized to help with the MFS. Mr. Gritter explained that volunteers could be utilized for tending farm animals, gardening, classes, and much more.

Mr. Joerg commented that upon reviewing the staff and instructors utilized by MFS, there appears to be a lack of diversity and reliance on mostly with males. He encouraged more inclusive and diverse staff.

Ms. Trocchio outlined the next steps for moving forward with the development of Staebler Farm, including; hiring and architect to develop plans for the farm house, constructing the multi-purpose building, completing the renovation of the first floor of the farm house, and forming a sub-committee to further explore the potential of acquiring the MFS.

5. Border-to-Border Trail

Mr. Sanderson presented an overview and history of the B2B trail and highlighted the recent acceleration in the pace of new trail construction projects that have allowed WCPARC and partners to build 16 projects, representing nearly 14 miles of trail, since 2018. He also presented a new refresh of the B2B logo, a new website, and a new wayfinding plan. Mr. Sanderson explained that in order to finish the spine of the B2B (Irone-Belle route) that staff recommends a continuation of the current arrangement of funding the trail construction by splitting the cost in thirds – 1/3 WCPARC, 1/3 HWPI, and 1/3 of the funding from grants. This would result a $9-10.7M cost to each between 2022 and 2026.

Mr. Sanderson provided an update on the establishment of a special revenue fund to help pay for future maintenance of the B2B. He explained that HWPI has offered to provide a contribution of $20k to the fund for every mile trail constructed. He suggested that WCPARC should match that per mile contribution plus contribute some additional funds to help seed the account.

Mr. Marans asked if other jurisdictions would be allowed to use the fund, for example the City of Ann Arbor. Mr. Sanderson explained that the special revenue fund would only be used for trail maintenance that is the responsibility of WCPARC.

Mr. Pratt asked if staff could provide more detail regarding what is included in routine trail maintenance and a per mile cost.

Mr. Sanderson outlined the following next steps;

1. Commit to deposit $20,000/mile of new B2B into the B2B Trail Special Revenue Fund to match HWPI's contribution.
2. Initially deposit the B2B Trail Special Revenue fund as follows:
    i. $280,000 (20k/mile, WCPARC)
    ii. $280,000 (20k/mile, HWPI)
    iii. +$400,000 one time (WCPARC)
    iv. $960,000 total
3. At end of 2022, contribute approximately $200,000 to the B2B Trail Special Revenue Fund.
4. Renew the $4M commitment of parks general funds to the B2B 2023-2026 ($1M/year).

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 p.m.