



## **Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**Date:** September 14, 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 Ann Arbor, MI), Robert Marans (attending from Ann Arbor Township, MI), Jo Ann McCollum (attending from Ypsilanti Township, MI), Evan Pratt (attending from Ann Arbor, MI), Brenda McKinney (attending from Superior Township, MI) and Jason Morgan (attending from Ann Arbor, MI)

**Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Coy Vaughn, Director; Meghan Bonfiglio, Deputy Director; Ginny Leikam, Superintendent of Park Planning and Natural Areas; Jason Brooks, Manager of Finance and Administration; Ann Ziolkowski, Communication Manager; Peter Sanderson, Park Planner; Allison Krueger, Stewardship Manager; and Rosie Pahl-Donaldson, Park Planner

**Others Present:** Catherine McClary, Washtenaw County Treasurer

#### **1. Call to Order/Moment of Silence**

Ms. Scribner called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m. with a moment of silence in appreciation of first responders.

#### **2. Roll Call and Announcement of Location**

#### **3. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the August 14, 2021 regular meeting were included with the agenda material.

***It was moved by Ms. McCollum and seconded by Mr. Marans to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2021 regular meeting. Roll call vote: 9 Ayes, 0 Nays, 1 Absent (Jefferson), the motion was approved.***

#### **4. Public Comment**

Toni Spears, resident of Webster Township, thanked the Commission for their efforts to help manage the deer population in parks and preserves. She added that MiOFO is a great partner to help organize hunts. She also appreciated the excellent work done by Jacqueline Courteau to help study the impact of deer on the landscape.

## **5. Communications, Projects & Activities**

Mr. Vaughn reported on the August communications which were included in the packet. Mr. Marans said that it was a nice gesture to have a party to show appreciation for our seasonal staff at Rolling Hills. He added that it would be nice to invite Commissioners next year. Mr. Jefferson voiced his support for the pedestrian improvements on the Grove Road overpass. He asked if a new railing was going to be installed with the project. Mr. Sanderson responded that the railing would be installed by MDOT as a separate project.

***It was moved by Mr. Marans and seconded by Ms. McKinney to accept and file the Communications, Projects & Activities for the month of August 2021, as submitted. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

## **6. Financial & Recreation Reports – August 2021**

### **A. Financial Reports**

Mr. Brooks reported and stated that the total for the claims for the month of August was \$910,034.85.

***It was moved by Mr. Ezekiel and seconded by Ms. Bobrin to accept and file the Financial Reports for the month of August 2021 as submitted. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

### **B. Recreation Reports**

Mr. Brooks reported on recreation reports for the month of August 2021 and highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the attendance of our Park Facilities.

Mr. Ezekiel asked what the anticipated shortfall was for this year due to COVID19 Impacts. Mr. Brooks explained that right now we are looking at approximately \$1.2 - 1.4M but we will see some reduction in expenses this fall that will make up some of the shortfall.

***It was moved by Mr. Marans and seconded by Mr. Pratt to accept and file the Recreation Reports for the month of August 2021 as submitted. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

## **7. Old Business**

### **A. Special Revenue Fund Update**

Mr. Brooks introduced Catherine McClary, Washtenaw County Treasurer. Ms. McClary presented the performance of the fund and explained how it was invested. Mr. Marans thanked Ms. McClary for the informative presentation and asked how often we get professional guidance on the fund. Ms. McClary explained that the funds are actively managed, and that the financial advisor meets with us often. Mr. Ezekiel agreed that the report was great news and that he believes we are well on our way to having a sustainable NAPP/B2B fund.

### **B. B2B – Barton/Bandemer Trail and Tunnel Engineering**

Mr. Sanderson reported that at the August 2021 regular meeting, the Commission authorized staff to execute a project agreement with the City of Ann Arbor to advance the Barton-Bandemer Tunnel and Trail

project into the engineering and construction phases. Per the agreement, the Commission will hire and manage the consultant team to design and engineer the project.

The feasibility study, completed in December 2020 by Bergmann Associates and OHM Advisors (the Project Team), was originally awarded through county RFP #7541 in 2018. The Project Team was the low bid by a significant margin (25% below the next highest bidder), likely because they were currently engineering an analogous project for the City of Ann Arbor, called the *Allen Creek Berm Opening* – a pedestrian and stormwater tunnel underneath the same railroad approximately one mile south of the Barton-Bandemer Tunnel and Trail Project. The Allen Creek Berm Opening project was constructed and open to the public in 2020.

Mr. Sanderson explained that staff solicited and reviewed a proposal from the Project Team to complete the project's engineering using the feasibility study's preferred option as the basis for design and believes the price to be competitive and fair. This proposal was discussed with the County's purchasing department, who recommended that a new contract be issued as opposed to a contract amendment.

Bergmann and OHM's proposal is for \$443,784. The project agreement (previous action item) states that the City will contribute 45% (approx. \$200,000) towards the engineering of the project. Additionally, the current feasibility study contract has a remaining balance of \$35,050.63, which would remain unused if a new contract is awarded.

Budget:

\$443,784 – Total Engineering Contract  
- \$200,000 – Less City of Ann Arbor's contribution  
\$243,787 – WCPARC total contribution  
- \$ 35,050 – Less remaining balance in feasibility study contract  
\$208,737 – Total new WCPARC expenditure

Ms. Bobrin asked about the \$35,000 left in the current contract and wanted to know if we would get that money back if we went with another firm. Mr. Sanderson responded that she was correct and clarified that the money left over from the previous contract could be applied to any firm that was awarded the contract.

Mr. Marans asked what the plan was for the trail headed west from the Barton Nature Area. Mr. Sanderson explained that the current plan is to build it on the south side of the RR tracks.

***It was moved by Ms. Bobrin and seconded by Mr. Morgan that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission authorize staff to award the engineering contract to Bergmann Associates in the amount of \$443,784.00 for the Barton to Bandemer Tunnel and Trail Project. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

### **C. Deer Management Update**

Ms. Krueger reported that the Leonard Preserve was purchased in 2004 and includes 259 acres along the River Raisin. After purchase and initial stewardship efforts, staff voiced concern with the many deer consistently observed on the preserve. To address these concerns, WCPARC began to study the deer population and effects on natural resources at Leonard Preserve. Deer exclosures were constructed in 2009, aerial deer surveys were conducted from 2010-2015, and in 2014-5 Dr. Jacqueline Courteau conducted the first deer browse research study. All data verified that deer browse is causing significant damage to the native plant community.

Ms. Krueger explained that in 2016, staff presented the deer browse data to the Park Commission and included a plan to introduce limited hunting at Leonard Preserve to better manage the land. In the plan, hunting was to occur through a partnership with Michigan Operations Freedom Outdoors (MiOFO). MiOFO is a non-profit dedicated to providing equipment and outdoor experiences for disabled veterans and community members. The commission approved the initial hunting plan for five years and requested that Dr. Courteau's research be repeated to assess results of the hunting effort.

Dr. Courteau repeated her browse study in 2020-2021. Results show some improvements but also document browse levels still significant enough to continue to threaten native plant communities and the resources they provide for wildlife.

Before and throughout the hunting program we have conducted public meetings and yearly mailings to neighbors. The hunt has also been covered by the Manchester Mirror, an online Manchester focused newspaper. With all outreach efforts, we have received minimal concerns and complaints from the public. Concerns with neighbors were minimal and addressed in the design of the hunt areas and events. Overall, public response has been supportive and positive. Given the success in this community and with this program, we are also exploring other options to further support deer management efforts in the Manchester community. Ms. Krueger explained that staff intends to report back at a future meeting to discuss those opportunities.

Mr. Marans asked if the public knew that WCPARC was associated with the hunt or is MiOFO more the public facing entity. Ms. Krueger responded that the public understands that the Leonard Preserve is owned by WCPARC, the hunt is organized by us, and that MiOFO is our partner.

***It was moved by Ms. McCollum and seconded by Mr. Ezekiel to authorize the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission to continue hunting at Leonard Preserve for another five years. The design of the hunt and events might change based on Dr. Courteau's management recommendations, but the public outreach and communication of the program will continue. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

#### **D. NAPP – Poulter Property Final Approval**

Ms. Pahl-Donaldson reported that in September 2019, ALPAC identified several properties as top priorities for preservation in the Round 19 nominations. The Poulter property was acknowledged as one of the highest-ranking properties and was determined suitable to apply for a Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) grant, which provides matching funds for the purchase of conservation easements on agricultural properties. In December 2019, the Commission authorized the submittal of the grant application for the Poulter property in Dexter Township. In March 2020, staff was notified of the grant award in the amount of \$480,000, which the Commission accepted at the April 2020 meeting. The Commission approved preparation of a sales contract on May 12, 2020.

The Poulter farm property is in active agriculture and was designated a medium-high quality by the Assessment and Prioritization mapping for both agriculture and natural sites and identified as a priority for new patch establishment. The Commission's scoring system gives this project 72/100 points. This would be NAPP's first agricultural conservation easement in Dexter Township.

Ms. Pahl-Donaldson explained that an appraisal of the property was completed in October 2019 and the conservation easement value was determined to be \$972,000, or roughly \$3,926 an acre, for 247 acres. The final FMV and payments have been adjusted by the exact surveyed acres. ALPAC recommended to pursue the purchase of the property at their April 2020 meeting.

***It was moved by Mr. Marans and seconded by Mr. Joerg that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission authorize the purchase of a conservation easement on the Poulter Farm property in Dexter Township in the amount of \$948,222.33, contingent upon attorney approval of final documents. Also, that \$15,000 be contributed to the stewardship special revenue fund for the future monitoring and enforcement of the conservation easement. Roll call vote: 10 ayes, 0 nays, the motion was approved.***

#### **E. NAPP – Basset & DeLoof Property Final Approval**

Ms. Leikam presented the Basset and DeLoof property, located in Freedom Township, and explained that it was nominated to NAPP and reviewed by the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Committee as part of the Round 18 nominations. At the time, the property was identified as a priority for the purchase of a conservation easement, based on review of all the applications received in Round 18. It was also agreed that it was a prime candidate for receiving federal funding through the USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). In February 2019, WCPARC submitted an ACEP application for the farm, which was subsequently awarded.

The property is located on the east and west side of Ernst Road, just south of Bethel Church Road. The property is in active agriculture with corn/soybean/wheat rotation. A portion of the farm is also enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), administered by NRCS. Approximately 80% of the property consists of prime or locally important farmland soils. Based on the Agriculture Assessment & Prioritization mapping, part of the property was assessed as medium – high quality and prioritized based on patch expansion and stream protection. The Commission's scoring system gives this project 60/100 points.

Ms. Leikam explained that in December 2019, the Parks Commission approved a sales contract for the purchase of the property. Per the terms of the sales contract, due diligence has been completed.

***It was moved by Mr. Joerg and seconded by Ms. McCollum that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission authorize the purchase of a conservation easement on the Basset and DeLoof Farm property in Freedom Township in the amount of \$494,179, contingent upon attorney approval of final documents. Further, that \$15,000 be contributed to the stewardship special revenue fund for the future monitoring and enforcement of the conservation easement. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

#### **F. Draper Houston Boardwalk Award**

Ms. Krueger reported on the boardwalks at Draper-Houston Meadows Preserve and explained that they provide important trail connections through the preserve. Two sections of the boardwalk were significantly damaged during flooding events in 2020. Though some improvements were made to allow for safe public use, the damage became worse in 2021 and the boardwalks are now closed for safety reasons.

Staff have been working with ROWE engineers to redesign the two section of damaged boardwalks. The first boardwalk will be lifted above ground level to increase clearance for water and debris to flow during high water events. This section of boardwalk is 185' long and will remain in the floodplain to connect the pedestrian bridge over the Saline River to the remaining trail system. The second boardwalk will also be lifted from ground level and has been relocated in the new design. The relocation will reduce the overall constructed length from 115' to 40' and move the structure outside of the floodplain. Permits to EGLE and WCWR have been submitted and being reviewed with approval expected this fall.

Ms. Krueger explained that the closure of the boardwalks is disruptive to the hiking trails, specifically from the primary entrance on Mooreville Road. Staff have been working to sign the closure and promote use of other areas of the preserve accessible from Platt Road. All work associated with the contract must be completed before August 1, 2022. With permit approval expected this fall, we hope to see reconstruction over the winter months.

Construction documents were produced, and RFP #8136 was released in August. Six contractors attended the mandatory pre-bid meeting on 8/19/2021. One bid was received from LJ Construction for \$171,115.00. The submitted bid was less than the cost estimate provided by ROWE in June 2021. We expect the reduction in cost is due to the availability and stability of costs of lumber and material currently.

Since the damage was caused by flooding, insurance will support most of the reconstruction costs. Costs associated with the redesign of the boardwalks, or development of construction documents, is not eligible for insurance claim.

***It was moved by Mr. Marans and seconded by Ms. Ezekiel that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission authorize staff to award the construction contract to LJ Construction in the amount of \$171,115.00, and authorize a 10% contingency (\$17,111.50) for the reconstruction of boardwalks at Draper-Houston Meadows Preserve. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.***

#### **G. Dominican Meadows Parking Lot Award**

Ms. Krueger reported that in 2015, Dominican Meadows was purchased fee simple. The preserve contains 81 acres of grasslands and forests in Ann Arbor Township. WCPARC also owns a conservation easement protecting habitat along a major tributary of Fleming Creek on the western border of the preserve. The landscape at Dominican Meadows includes quality natural resources and varied topography that will create a compelling public trail system once the preserve is opened.

Construction of the Dominican Meadows parking lot was first approved by WCPARC and awarded to Carver Construction in September 2019. Though permits were in hand by June 2020, the contract was terminated on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 with Carver Construction never beginning work at the site. Carver Construction has completed several parking projects with WCPARC but claimed a heavy workload and impacts from the pandemic for the inability to begin work at Dominican Meadows.

Ms. Krueger explained that with the contract terminated, staff developed a second RFP #8133 for release in July 2021. Three bids were submitted with Fonson Company, Inc. being the lowest at \$101,074. Fonson Company, Inc., the lowest bidder, has completed many projects with similar or larger scopes for the Washtenaw County Road Commission and other local municipalities but have never worked directly for WCPARC. The project references provided by Fonson Company resulted an overall positive review of work and management of projects.

*It was moved by Mr. Pratt and seconded by Ms. Bobrin that the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission authorize staff to award the construction contract to Fonson Company, Inc. in the amount of \$101,074.00, and authorize a 10% contingency (\$10,107.40) for the construction of a new parking lot at Dominican Meadows Preserve. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.*

#### **H. Other Old Business**

None.

### **8. New Business**

#### **A. Lyndon Township B2B Trailhead Dedication**

Mr. Vaughn presented a proposal on behalf of the Commission to name the recently opened trailhead at Lyndon Township Hall in honor of former Director, Robert L. Tetens. The new trailhead facility was completed in the Spring of 2020 in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Lyndon Township, and the Huron-Waterloo Pathways Initiative (HWPI). It is located on North Territorial Road next to the Lyndon Township Hall. The trailhead serves as a gateway to nearly 6-miles of new B2B trail north of Chelsea and consists of 50 parking spaces, restroom facilities, drinking fountain, a kiosk, and bike service station.

Robert L. Tetens served as Director of WCPARC for 17 years prior to his retirement in 2017. He was a leading force in the establishment of the B2B trail as one of the top initiatives of WCPARC and garnered the buy-in and support of the many community partners necessary to help make it a reality. More than any other single individual, Mr. Tetens is responsible for establishing and promoting the B2B vision which has grown into a world class trail system serving all the residents of Washtenaw County.

*It was moved by Mr. Marans and seconded by Ms. Bobrin to authorize the proposed renaming of the Lyndon Township B2B Trailhead to honor Robert L. Tetens based on his leadership in the establishment of the B2B and his 17 years of exemplary service to WCPARC and the residents of Washtenaw County. Roll call vote: 10 Ayes, 0 Nays, the motion was approved.*

#### **B. Other New Business**

None.

### **9. Commissioners/Directors Comments**

None.

### **10. Adjournment**

*It was moved by Mr. Morgan and seconded by Ms. McCollum to adjourn the meeting. All ayes.*

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.