

## DRAFT MINUTES

### BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JANUARY 30, 2014

Detroit Yacht Club  
One Riverbank Drive, Detroit, MI 48207

#### Present for the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee (BIPAC)

Michele Hodges, chairperson  
Michael Curis  
Bryan Barnhill  
Alicia Minter  
Bud Denker  
Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr.  
Sommer Woods

#### Present for DNR Staff

Keith Creagh, DNR director  
Ron Olson, DNR chief of Parks and Recreation Division  
Gary Hagler, DNR chief of Law Enforcement Division  
Other department staff

Committee Chairperson **Michele Hodges** called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

#### Introductions

**Hodges** said that serving on the advisory committee is a tremendous opportunity to protect the park and noted that the role of the committee is deemed advisory. She expressed that four hallmarks will determine the success of the committee:

1. Inclusiveness.
2. Engagement.
3. Accountability and transparency.
4. Commitment to building trust and respect with the public and working with the DNR.

**Hodges** thanked Governor **Rick Snyder**, City of Detroit Mayor **Mike Duggan**, former City of Detroit Mayor **Dave Bing**, the Detroit City Council and the DNR.

Introductions included board members **Mike Curis**, **Alicia Minter**, **Sommer Woods**, **Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr.**, **Bud Denker**, **Brian Barnhill** and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) representatives Director **Keith Creagh** and Chief of the Parks and Recreation Division **Ron Olson**.

**Creagh** stated that trust is built and earned and this is a good first step for engagement. He said the DNR cannot do this alone; this is not about the DNR, and it's not about the DNR managing Belle Isle. Rather, it's about making a difference for the citizens of Detroit and Michigan and creating a uniform experience along the riverfront that will help in building Detroit.

**Olson** said that during the "All in for Belle Isle" event held December 10, 2013, on Belle Isle, many partners came forward, and it will take many people to achieve success. **Olson** said Belle Isle will provide a healthy, safe place in Detroit.

### **Overview of park lease and transition status**

**Creagh** introduced **Mike Terrell**, DNR acting metro district supervisor, as the individual handling operations questions. **Creagh** said the lease agreement is meant to enhance operations management and maintenance of Belle Isle Park for the benefit of the public. He noted that the DNR administers 102 state parks with a combined visitor count of 122 million. **Creagh** said the road asset management plan is in the process of being created by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and will be shared with the committee when completed.

**Olson** said the DNR will adopt the current park rules and orders. He noted that the Recreation Passport requirement will be phased in beginning February 10, 2014. Revenue generated on the island, other than Recreation Passport revenue, will stay on the island.

**Creagh** said there is a security plan and introduced DNR Law Enforcement Division Chief Gary Hagler. He also introduced Capt. **Monica Yesh** of the Michigan State Police.

**Olson** said the transition of Belle Isle to a state park began last November, and work has already begun. **Olson** said the DNR is taking down hazardous trees, repairing picnic tables, reopening restrooms, reroofing shelters, and is in the process of reviewing vendor contracts. He added that vendor training sessions will be held soon, and job fairs are being held. **Olson** reported there were over 1,000 applications for the first six jobs at Belle Isle Park. He also said that the advisory committee and the DNR will utilize the 2005 master plan to facilitate improvements.

**Olson** confirmed that special events already under agreement with the city will continue. There are also conversations taking place about utility and storm water fees. The goal is storm water separation for reduced costs.

**Olson** noted the following lease agreement exhibits: Exhibit A is a legal description, Exhibit B addresses roads, Exhibit C is a memo of understanding between MDOT and the city of Detroit, Exhibit D addresses the greenhouse, which will remain under city of Detroit management, and Exhibit E addresses short- and long-term planning.

**Olson** said that the following have already been or would be addressed in the first 3-6 months of DNR management: hazardous-tree removal, over 100 picnic tables refurbished, posts put in the ground to hold litter barrels, removal of 80 refuse barrels that have been blown into waterways, Oxbow Comfort Station refurbished, environmental security including proper lighting, and clean restrooms. **Olson** said native trees will be protected and indicated that some tree specimens on the island rival trees in Michigan and the U.S. He also said the DNR is using historic preservation practices, along with sustainable maintenance systems, as it moves forward.

**Olson** reported that development of a mentored gift guide has started through a partnership with the Belle Isle Conservancy. He asked that organizations or individuals interested in athletics on the island work together to coordinate programs and improvements. He said improvements to the fishing pier are also occurring.

**Resolution: Proposed advisory committee bylaws**

**Hodges** proposed a resolution for committee bylaws. She noted that Article 1 focuses on committee creation; Article 2 outlines composition of the committee and states its purpose as advisement to the lessee; and Article 3 focuses on committee membership, which serves without pay, and specifies that the length of terms shall be four years. Article 3 also discusses officers. The bylaws were amended to include monthly meetings. The bylaws were adopted by a unanimous vote (attached).

**Public Comments**

**Hodges** read the official guidelines for the meeting's public appearances.

**Shani Penn**, senior strategy advisor for the governor's office, said she was excited about today and commended DNR Director **Creagh** and DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief **Olson** for working with the advisory board and governor's office. **Penn** also mentioned that she was excited about the composition of the advisory board.

Detroit City Councilmember **James Tate**, representing the council, commended **Creagh**, **Olson** and **Rodney Stokes**. He said the advisory board is not compensated, so he very much appreciates the members' willingness to serve. He said with service there comes an obligation to do what is in the public's best interest. He noted that the level of influence the committee has is not outlined in the lease and asked to be advised on that level. He said this is a new venture and to keep in mind that there will be some growing pains. When these growing pains are experienced, he noted, make certain to resolve them in ways that are respectful to the process and the community. He said that by doing so, it will ensure a partnership that works.

**Helen Gentry**, a frequent visitor to Belle Isle now in her 80s, said she has been coming to Belle Isle for years for family reunions and church outings. She thinks the island doesn't need many things, and she's unsure of what the state will bring. She asks that

the grass be mowed and suggests moving the Grand Prix off the island. She also expressed concern about the felling of 160 trees in the park, even if they were rotten. She asked how many trees have been replanted or will be replanted in the near future.

**Mike Holzhauer**, frequent island visitor, said he enjoys biking the island every morning and is concerned that hours of operation on Belle Isle will change to the normal state park hours of 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. He would like the hours to remain 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

**Tom Greenup**, private citizen, asked what precedence there is for private enterprise taking over the park and restricting public access. He said he's concerned that Penske is doing this.

**Bruce Ross** said Belle Isle is the reason his career is in parks and recreation. He said the park is a golden opportunity to work with young people from Detroit, including The Youth Connection and Healthy Kidz. **Ross** expressed his view that law enforcement should receive sensitivity and urban park training, because Belle Isle is different from state parks conservation officers are used to patrolling.

**Joseph Foya**, representing the Michigan Mountain Bike Association, said the association wants to continue its good relationship with the DNR. He would like to see multi-use mountain bike trails on Belle Isle and gave the committee literature and contact information.

**Paul Palazzolo**, a veteran, said he is working with the Belle Isle Conservancy to build a veterans' park on Belle Isle and hopes private funding will assist. He said an injection of private money is a win-win for everyone. He asked if there is a master plan for the island.

**Thomas Vevine**, representing the Detroit Rowing Club, said the club is the oldest rowing club in the country. He said that 20 college scholarships and several Olympiads have resulted from it. He said that he'd like to raise this awareness and support the work being done on the island.

**Gene Chamberlain**, private photographer, said he is concerned about 24-hour island access. He previously visited the island for photography opportunities at all times of the day and night. He expressed concern with the 10 p.m. park closure time.

**Geraldine Jackson**, leisure educator, believes the park is an educational tool and would like to see resources come back. She said the Belle Isle Conservancy, Friends of Belle Isle, rowers, hikers, walkers, and others did what they could to maintain it.

**Alicia Shane**, seasonal employee for the DNR, said that DNR management of Belle Isle is good for young people, including her. She also said that the Recreation Passport is a very good deal.

**George Abud**, private citizen, said he grew up right across the street from Belle Isle. He urged the advisory board and DNR to maintain and preserve the history on the island, including its infrastructure. He does photography on the island and participates in special events and asks that as soon as events conclude, the area or building be restored back to its normal condition. He said Belle Isle is a safe haven for metropolitan Detroit area residents.

**Alan Heavner**, owner of a canoe rental building, stated his mission is "No Child Left Inside," which includes bringing inner city kids outside on Belle Isle.

**Gary Vaughn**, private citizen, would like mass transit to the island considered. **Olson** said the DNR is currently working with the city of Detroit to make that happen.

**John Cullen**, representing the Gardening World Cup, said the organization is searching for a venue for international designers to compete for the award. He noted Belle Isle is being considered.

#### **Overview of park security plan as outlined in Exhibit F of the lease**

**Gary Hagler** introduced DNR Law Enforcement Division staff who will be patrolling Belle Isle and stated that their goal is to keep Belle Isle safe for the community. He said that Exhibit F of the lease agreement notes utilization of community-oriented policing skills. **Hagler** said that motorized patrols will include trucks, cars, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and marine vessels will include sonar, canoes and kayaks.

Capt. **Monica Yesh** of the Michigan State Police introduced troopers who will be patrolling the island. She said patrols will include bicycles and motorcycles.

Security through environmental design will be used, **Hagler** said. Responding to questions from **Sommer Woods** and Rev. **Lonnie Peek, Jr.** regarding sensitivity training of officers, **Yesh** and **Hagler** said that this was and is already being done. **Yesh** said that state troopers have been working in the city of Detroit and neighborhoods for a number of years. She indicated that officers already receive diversity training. **Hagler** said that the DNR conservation officers have been in existence for 106 years and noted they patrol and police areas of the state that include Flint, Saginaw and Bay City. He said they also have enhanced cultural training because of interaction with tribal nations. **Hagler** said additional training also has been developed and will be occurring soon.

#### **Park rules process review**

**Olson** said current park rules will be adopted for 2014. Park hours will remain the same, opening at 6 a.m. and closing at 10 p.m. **Olson** said that the DNR will send the current park rules to the advisory committee. He noted that throughout the first portion of the year, the current park rules will be evaluated and assessed. Once the evaluation is completed, rules will be brought to the advisory group for discussion.

**Establishing 2014 meeting schedule**

**Hodges** said that the advisory committee bylaws require meeting six times per year. **Hodges** proposed meeting on the last Thursday of the month from 9-11a.m. **Curis** suggested meeting every month for the first six months. **Olson** agreed with the proposal. **Barnhill** issued a challenge for all committee members to purchase a Recreation Passport by the third advisory committee meeting.

**Belle Isle Master Plan review by Hamilton Associates**

**Kent Anderson** of Hamilton Associates presented an overview of the 2005 Belle Isle Master Plan. Information on the original Olmstead plan, created in 1882, was reviewed, and the current master plan was summarized.

**Barnhill** said he'd like to see the plan implemented fully or partially but wants an understanding of the barriers for implementation, noting that the main one is financial. **Barnhill** would like to explore partnership opportunities, including any that could be done with Pure Michigan, to ensure at least partial plan implementation.

**Peek** noted that the last cost analysis to implement the entire plan was about \$300 million. The plan does, however, itemize the scope of work, **Anderson** said. **Peek** said the plan is a model and a tool and part of the process the board should use to prioritize and reaffirm.

**Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn was made by **Minter**, seconded by **Peek**, and passed unanimously by the committee. Chairman **Hodges** adjourned the meeting at 11:57 a.m.

APPROVED: Date January 30, 2014

  
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Michele Hodges  
BIPAC chairperson

  
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Ron Olson  
DNR chief of Parks and Recreation