

MINUTES
Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, June 16, 2022
Location: Teleconference

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

PRESENT FOR BIPAC

Attending remotely:

Michele Hodges; Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan
Michael Curis; Detroit, Michigan
Bud Denker; Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Lonnie Peek; Detroit, Michigan
Sommer Woods; Detroit, Michigan

EXECUSED

Brad Dick

DNR STAFF PRESENT

Scott Pratt
Karis Floyd
Joel Thomas
Amanda Treadwell
Lt. Todd Szyska
Nicole Hill
Griselda Trevino
Lakisha Dansby
Barbara Graves

OTHERS PRESENT

Lance Couturier, MSP
Merrill Cain, Penske Corp.
Amy Greene, Nature Center Director, Detroit Zoological Society
Amy Emmert, Belle Isle Conservancy
Taylor Mock, Belle Isle Conservancy
Ayo Thomas, Belle Isle Conservancy
Aly Melnik, Belle Isle Conservancy

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of Minutes for May 19, 2022

Moved by: **Bud Denker**

Seconded by: **Michael Curis**

Chair Hodges asked for a moment of silence for **Ghadeer Saleh**

PRESENTATION

Belle Isle Conservancy Education Team Presentation – Summer Educational Programming at Belle Isle Aquarium and the Education Dock (Amy Emmert and Taylor Mock)

Amy Emmert, Director of Education at the Belle Isle Conservancy, spoke about Summer at the Belle Isle Aquarium. The aquarium, which is 117 years old, is open Friday, Saturdays, and Sundays. They offer both youth and adult self-guided tours. Self-guided tours are on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, at 10:00, 11:30, and 1:30, for up to 50 people. One of the programs that was emphasized is the Outdoor Aquatic Science Investigation program, held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays also at 10:00, 11:30, and 1:30. They have recently installed a floating dock on the canal; opened on Earth Day. They have interns who are within the aquarium or outside with bio facts and table of activities. They often bring in the Detroit Public Schools community. They currently have programs for second and fifth graders. They serve a little over 3,000 students. They have a team of volunteers who help with the program. They are soliciting volunteers for their summer programming as well as for the Keep Belle Isle Beautiful campaign. You can find more information about programs and volunteering for cleanup at www.belleisleconservancy.org under the “What We Do” menu option.

Chair Hodges said the program’s success is due to the partnership with the Grand Prix and General Motors. They are celebrating 10 years. She wants us to be aware that Amy Emmert has been named by the Michigan Science Teachers Association as their informal educator of the year. It was the grant received by the Grand Prix and General Motors that allowed Amy’s position to be funded and provided the funding for the outdoor classroom and the floating dock.

Committee members congratulated Amy and the team.

Park Update - Scott Pratt, Karis Floyd, Joel Thomas; PRD

- Hit and run fatality on the island – PRD met immediately afterwards with LED and MDOT, who oversees the trunkline. Speed signage will be added, and they are looking into what kind of barriers can be utilized and also increasing law enforcement around high use areas. Continuing communications with MDOT.
- Received three bids back for trolley system and are to have completion in bid offering by June 24 2022; no charge to visitors for the service and will be ADA accessible. Mobility study has been extremely helpful.
- Short Term Worker wage increase to \$15/hr. has resulted in a good turnout with applicants.
- Working with Law for the fireworks show; opening park at 2 p.m., road barriers will be out to control traffic.
- Staff have been cleaning up the park during the busy season. Have had closures due to overcapacity. If anyone wants to stay informed of closures, text “GEM” to 80888, and also on Facebook.

Grand Prix Update, Merrill Cain, Grand Prix

Mr. Cain spoke about the bittersweet weekend and celebrating the final Grand Prix on Belle Isle, after a successful run. He thanked Amy Emmert and the team and are honored to play a role in the aquarium. They had over 1,000 volunteers from the Grand Prix association, GM, and Lear, and an all-time high attendance of over 110,000 people. The race broadcasted from IndyCar and was broadcast to over 130 countries around the world. There was a legacy display that commemorated all the years that the Grand Prix was on Belle Isle starting from 1992. This was the twenty-second event that was held on Belle Isle. The Grand Prixmiere Friday night in Campus Martius Park in Cadillac Square, along with the Conservancy, raised over \$500,000. Team Penske won the race. A new record of over 280 on-track passes during the IndyCar race was set. This was Chevrolet's one-hundredth win. The following Monday morning, a ceremonial passing of the torch from Belle Isle to downtown Detroit was done.

Rev. Peek said it has been a unique and tremendous effort and support on the island and thanked **Bud Denker** and the others for making it a success and looks forward to the race going back downtown.

Chair Hodges wished them the very best going forward and thanked them for their partnership and all they have done on Belle Isle; a wonderful, positive impact.

Michael Curis thanked **Bud Denker** and Roger Penske for their dedication to the island and for their recognition that it was time to move back downtown.

Law Enforcement Update – Lt. Todd Szyska, Lt. Lance Couturier, DNR Law Division

They are at summer staffing, with a need for more people. There have been closures due to overcrowding. Closures are for safety so emergency vehicles can access. They are working in tandem with MSP for the fireworks show. The park will be closed until 2 p.m. on day of fireworks. Extra bike patrols are on the island through Labor Day.

The beach hit and run incident investigation is ongoing and lead by MSP. An arrest was made, charges were authorized for pre-meditated murder, first degree and multiple other charges, and is currently going through the court system.

Infrastructure Update - Amanda Treadwell, Urban Field Planner

The conservatory upper dome structural improvements have been funded and are out to bid. The responses are due back at the end of June. They have a consultant on the project and the funding is in the process of being approved. The project is based on a comprehensive study that has been completed about the condition of the roof and what needs to happen.

She shared some pictures from Kenneth Smith of the nature and wildlife on Belle Isle. She highlighted that although the zoo will not be restored at Belle Isle, there is still plenty of animals on the park in their natural habitat. They have had a 10-year partnership with MSU and their design students who are using the Zoo as a project site. She sees this as a great way to let the public know that the zoo, although it has been put on the back burner, has not been forgotten. The partnership is an opportunity for the students to partner with the National Charette Institute.

The students came up with six design themes. There is a survey that can be used for the public's input on the subject.

They started the Belle Isle Multimodal Transportation and Traffic Study. The goal is to reduce vehicular congestion, increase visitor safety and park experience by improving access and wayfinding on the Island. The study will help to come up with a plan for implementing improvements to manage traffic circulation and multimodal transportation services. It will also give recommendations for park visitor and park vehicle capacity. Wayfinding is one of the main causes for accidents on Belle Isle and so this will be a huge focus for the study and the design. The final design is slated to be completed by 12/21/2023. DNR is currently contracted with KMA, and they are working on signage standards for Belle Isle. Wade Trim, a traffic engineering company is working on a park circulation traffic and management plan. Part of the plan will include how the paddock will be utilized. Whether this area will be the central transit station will be determined and included in the plan. The historic nature and landscape of the park is being kept at the forefront of the study and the plan. This part of the plan is being done using Living Lab Architects. Stakeholders are being prompted to participate in the planning.

Belle Isle Conservancy Updates - Michele Hodges, Ayo Thomas

- Detroit Boat Club Crew is holding a BBQ fundraiser on July 23 from 6 – 10 p.m. to help purchase much-needed equipment.
- The Oudolf Garden is open and free to all park users, from 5 a.m. – 10 p.m. daily.
- The Dossin Great Lakes Museum is open Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It closes at 4 p.m. on Saturday. The museum also has an Outdoor Artifacts virtual program coming.
- Outdoor programming continues on Fridays and Saturdays while the Nature Center undergoes renovations.
- Encouraging the shareholders to complete the 2022 feedback for Belle Isle Conservancy that is on the website. They currently have 114 participants out of their goal of 500.

Upcoming Activities:

July 10 Detroit Kite Festival www.detroitkitefestival.org

August 6 - 7 Belle Isle Art Fair www.belleisleartfair.com

September 16 - 18 Michigan Tree Climbing Championship

August 18 - 21 Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory 118th birthday and the Belle Isle

Aquarium 10th anniversary of the reopening to the public

September 13 Garden Party on Belle Isle.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Jones - Has a degree in urban and regional planning and advocates around public space and transit in the city of Detroit. He is disappointed about everything that's going on with cars on the island. He says that he has been hearing that the logistics on the park are being considered with no change and would like to see some change. Chair Hodges provided her e-mail address and will connect him with Amanda Treadwell so he can be part of the transportation mobility planning.

Ted Tansley - Is a resident and a block club public relations officer in Detroit. He thinks it is a good idea to ban cars on the island. He feels that this will allow residents like himself who do not own a vehicle to stay safe.

David Gifford - Spoke about the fatality and how he expects DNR, MDOT, Michigan State Police, and the City of Detroit to protect the visitors. He gave statistics of past accidents. He would like to see Mogo bicycles.

Laura Aichhorn - Thanks everyone for their work on the Belle Isle Advisory Committee. She too wants to see car free days and Mogo stations. She wants a barrier build between the road and bike path and beach along the northeast end of the island to keep people safe.

Mary Ellen Howard - The picnic tables need replacing and wants to see the Zoo to be returned to a natural space. Karis says that an order for picnic tables has been placed.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Chairman Hodges mentioned that the new Riverwalk section will be finished this summer, connecting Mount Elliot Park to the McArthur Bridge bringing more bicycles. Some of these will be Mogo which will give visitors the ability to get from one side of the island to the other or across the bridge, which is over a half mile long.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

July 21, 2022

9:00 a.m.