



# Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

Date: October 19, 2023

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Virtual

**Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.  
No quorum established.**

### **Roll Call**

Present for BIPAC

Attending remotely:

Michele Hodges; Traverse City, Michigan

Michael Curis; Detroit, Michigan

Bud Denker; Lansing, Michigan

Excused

Lonnie Peek

Unexcused

Sommer Woods

Brad Dick

DNR Staff Present

Ron Olson

Tom Bissett

Karis Floyd

Gail Fitch

Amanda Treadwell

Todd Szyska

Dashika Hill

Erika Compton

Barbrea Young

Marie Kaphengst

Robbert McKay

Griselda Trevino

Barbara Graves

Others Present

Nancy Vella, Belle Isle Conservancy  
Katy LaBarrie, Belle Isle Conservancy  
Ayo Thomas, Belle Isle Conservancy  
Amy Greene, Nature Center Director, Detroit Zoological Society  
Henry Goitz, Friends of Detroit Rowing  
Todd Platt, Friends of Detroit Rowing

Chair Hodges opened the meeting with member Curis. She said she will be retiring her position at the Belle Isle Conservancy to assume the role of President and CEO of Habitat for Humanity Oakland next month. She will continue to chair the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee until a replacement is appointed.

With the recent attention to the Belle Isle boathouse, she wanted to make it clear that conversations have taken place with the department and from those discussion will continue with the Friends of Detroit Rowing, primarily on how they can continue their operations by establishing a temporary facility for storage and operational needs. Demolition is not being discussed at this time. The DNR intends to further the discussion with a thorough public engagement process.

## **General Updates**

Parks and Recreation (Ron Olson, Chief, PRD)

Chief Olson addressed the recent media attention to the Belle Isle boathouse. He emphasized that the discussion today was for the ongoing conversations with the Friends of Detroit Rowing so that they can erect a temporary storage facility in the confines of the parking lot area. The boathouse building has extensive damage and has been declared unsafe to enter. Therefore, they are collaborating with the rowing group to find ways so that they can continue to operate.

Chief Olson continued by giving a recap of the millions that have been carved out for Belle Isle for needed projects during the last budget cycle, in addition to the \$14M of ARPA funds, that are going to much needed projects such as the aquarium, casino building, Flynn Pavilion, Scott Fountain, and the conservatory. So far, since 2014 when the lease started, over \$110M has been invested into Belle Isle, and there are still lot more things to do. He also pointed out that visitation to the island has boomed. The department will post the Smith Group study that delineates the dynamics of the compromised boathouse building. A public meeting and workshop will be arranged in the future to discuss options.

Member Curis commended the DNR team and knows there is a lot of holes to plug.

Park Updates, Tom Bissett and Karis Floyd

Karis Floyd, Park Manager, extended a warm welcome to the new Park Supervisor, Gail Fitch, and said they are still in the process of filling the full-time janitor position. He also provided the latest updates regarding the Scott Fountain, which will continue to run until the first week of November. Following that, winter operations will start and announcements about which buildings will be winterized, and the availability of additional porta-johns will be posted on their Facebook page to keep the general public informed.

Tom Bissett, Urban District Supervisor, provided an overview of recent developments, addressed the boathouse resolution, and discussed the assistance available for the boathouse facility. The recent updates encompassed a comprehensive assessment of both internal and external conditions, highlighting significant structural hazards that have rendered the boathouse unsuitable for use. To ensure the Rowing Club's ongoing functionality, a potential remedy involves exploring the option of leasing a temporary housing structure.

A Resolution was offered in the agenda for support for the Detroit Rowing Club to be able to establish a temporary structure.

Chair Hodges invited the community to attend future workshops and meetings for more dialogue and information and expressed that we do everything we can to preserve the Rowing Club's tradition and that there are many demands to manage with very limited resources.

Member Denker highlighted the advantages of the Rowing Club in positively impacting numerous young individuals. He raised the question of what the consequences would be if we hinder the Club from continuing its mission. He strongly advocates for proactive efforts in seeking a resolution.

Member Curis agreed and pointed out two issues; the temporary facility and the long-term plan for the structure.

Tom Bissett, Urban District Supervisor provided further information on the supplemental appropriations, covering various aspects, including the aquarium, Conservatory, Scott Fountain, and parkwide initiatives. Tom then presented a detailed breakdown of specific allocations, focusing on activities such as stabilizing and developing plans to address deteriorated structures

and implementing improvements, assisting with mobility around the island, and hazardous material removal.

Member Curis said with greater than 5,000,000 visitors a year, dollars need to go where they most effectively support the visitors that come every year.

Infrastructure Update – Amanda Treadwell, Urban Area Field Planner

Amanda gave a presentation with updates on the \$1.25 million allocated from general funds for Belle Isle projects that included construction updates at the athletic complex and the restoration progress for the Sawmill.

Member Denker asked if the casino and conservatory will be available this coming summer. Amanda Treadwell replied that June is the tentative completion time, and they will do their best to stay on schedule. Member Denker said it would be nice to have an opening celebration.

Member Curis said it is amazing how many projects are ongoing on the island at any one time and that it is easy to overlook, but important. He asked if there is a construction schedule. Amanda said the master plan list is reprioritized bi-annually. Since the structures are old, sometimes priorities are reevaluated. The ARPA projects money has to be spent by 2026. Member Curis asked if they could get the list quarterly for updates.

Law Update – Lt. Todd Szyska, DNR Law Enforcement

Lt. Szyska said they have switched into fall/winter staffing and still have full coverage with them and MSP. If there are any issues, please contact 911. Received calls from citizens that are confused about the traffic and parking. He asks the public to bear with it as it will continue for a while. He reminds the public that the speed limit is 25 mph as they are still having issues with speeding. They finished the Race for the Cure this past weekend, one of the bigger events hosted on the isle and it went well. He thanked Darlisa Terrell and the events team for helping with it.

Belle Isle Conservancy Updates - Ayo Thomas, Belle Isle Conservancy  
(Update attached)

Ayo shared slides and gave an update on the Conservatory and Dossin Great Lakes Museum fall and winter hours, event activities, including Motown Madness, Boo at the Nature Center, and the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Lost Mariners remembrance, and others.

## **Public Comment**

Patrick Livingston (written comment) – I recently reviewed the results of the Belle Isle Mobility Study and found no mention of the proposed status or usage of the 10 acres of concrete that comprise the former Gran Prix Paddock Area.

Over the past several years I have made a variety of suggestions for repurposing of that area via the Public Comments of the DNR Belle Isle Planning and Advisory Committee. Several of those suggestions were included in the meeting minutes.

I also shared my suggestions via the Mobility Study's online survey. The only responses I received from Ms. Hodges, Mr. Floyd and yourself were vague assurances that the Mobility Study would address this issue as part of their planning process.

While the Mobility Study states an intent to create a "welcome bridge" to the island, there is nothing in the report addressing how the Paddock area will be used in that regard. I don't believe the Paddock area was referenced at all in the study.

I am concerned that this issue will not be addressed by this study and that the paddock eyesore will remain in situ. as a result, park visitors, expecting a tranquil experience upon entering the park will instead be greeted by either a police and fire training ground or a 10 acre parking lot. Or both.

Deb Sumner – Spoke of the boathouse demolition and hoping it will be on the infrastructure update and renovated in phases. She thinks the State of Michigan DNR needs to reach out in a different way for public input. She has been involved in many building renovation input sessions. She feels there is a lot of opportunity here and believes the DNR has responsibility to preserve and protect the resources.

Stephen Malbouef – Thanked the DNR for what they have done so far on the island. Pointed out that many of the structures have not been used as much as the boathouse and everything was working up until a few years ago. The \$54M quote from the study is covering a lot of things besides the building itself. The work that needs to be done now is the exterior envelope. Due diligence needs to take place before talks of demolition. He is working on forming a new non-profit that would focus on fundraising for the boathouse and work on opening it as a public gateway to the Detroit River. If anyone is interested in reaching out his e-mail is phephen1701@gmail.com.

Chris Eastham and Mark Payne – agree with Stephen in that a lot can be done to the boathouse instead of demolition. If more could be done in stages. He thanked the BIPAC, DNR, MSP for the continued operation of Belle Isle.

Michael Betzhold – Express the fact that if the DNR wants to demo something, they should start with the concrete paddock and replace it with a naturalized area. Amazed that the state is considering spending money on demolishing a historic structure when they cannot even do anything about the pedestrian bike path that has gaps in it. He does not understand what the priorities are. Getting rid of historic buildings should be the last priority.

Dennis Wojdyla – On board of Friends of Detroit Rowing. He thanked the committee and the DNR for their support in their critical time in 185-year history and to maintain their designation of the oldest rowing club in America. This summer they had a bad windstorm. They are not currently occupying the building but would like to have something covering the holes in the building to maintain what is still in the building. He would like to meet with the DNR.

Rebecca Savage – Works at the City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board. Following issues with the boathouse and would like to offer their assistance.

David Carleton – He appreciates what the DNR has done to date. There is a lot of work to be done at the boathouse, and he would recommend that the boathouse building not go down in the legacy of the city.

Michelle Potter – Spoke on the boathouse and would not want the building to be demolished and there are many benefits to the history.

Constance George-Simms – Spoke against the boathouse demolition. Detroit is a beautiful city and has the opportunity to restore it.

Dan Austin – Spoke against demolition of the boathouse. Drawing attention to \$54M, nobody is expecting taxpayers to spend that kind of money. He thinks the \$16M is a more accurate figure to what needs to be done right now, and there are many who are ready to volunteer to help. More studies need to be performed.

Chair Hodges said she will depart the BIC at the end of the month for Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County, and Maude Lyon will serve as her replacement until another person is appointed. She thanked everyone for serving with her so far.

Michael Curis complimented the DNR and State of Michigan in that they have never made them or Detroiters secondary and it has been a great partnership. He wished Michele Hodges the best of luck.

Bud Denker said this is a tough role Michele has taken for many years with so many different opinions of users of the park, but the one thing she has never lacked is the passion for Belle Isle.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 10:52 a.m.

Next regular meeting:  
November 16, 2023  
9:00 a.m.



# Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Updates

October 19, 2023



# Belle Isle FY 2024 Capital Outlay Projects - \$1,864,000

## **Belle Isle Park FY '24 Capital Outlay:**

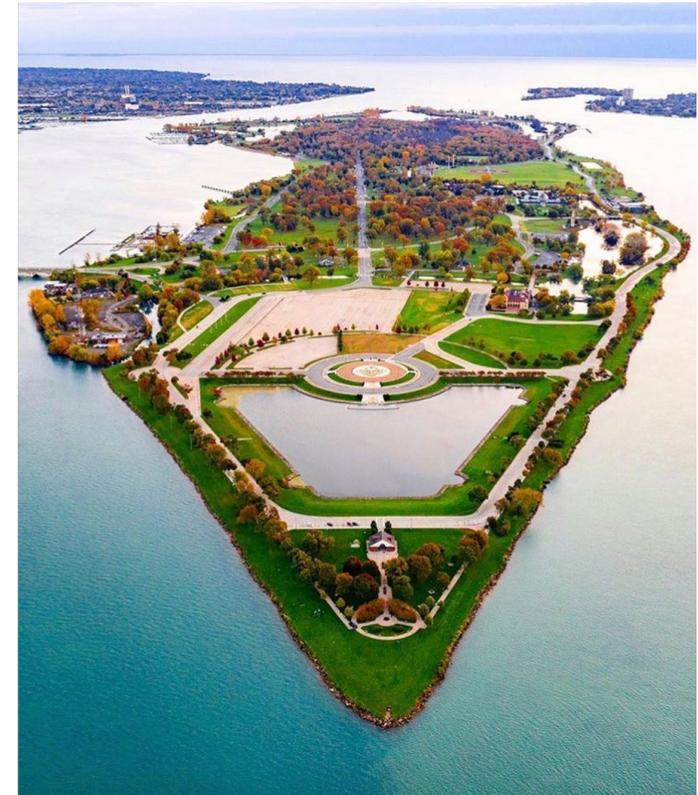
**\$1,250,000**

- \$400,000 – Casino ADA Access improvements
- \$450,000 - Shelter 19, 20 and Oxbow Restroom improvement project.
- \$400,000 - Contingency

## **DNR PRD FY '24 Capital Outlay:**

**\$614,000**

- \$300,000 - Athletic Shelter Utility (New Heater, water heater and related repairs).
- \$314,000 – Match for LWCF Grant for Ralph Wilson, Jr. Trail (\*additional IBT funds as well)



*2024 Projects to address existing infrastructure and projects underway.*

# Athletic Complex Handball Courts

**Progress Status – COMPLETE!**



*Structural repairs and painting complete*

# Athletic Complex Handball Courts **Complete**



# Belle Isle Sawmill

## Progress Status – Phase 2:

- ADA Accessible Concrete entrance will be poured.
- New site drainage to be installed at front of building.
- Custom folding wall/barn doors will be fabricated.
- All windows now boarded up.



*Boarded panels removed and concrete excavation*

# Belle Isle Casino Roof Replacement

## Work Underway:

- New equipment enclosure footings and new condenser pad being poured.
- Masonry repairs around window lentils.
- New Lights will be installed under soffit and loggia. Reviewing fixture and installation methods now.
- Boiler room drain lines, from roof, and for equipment under review for replacement options.



*Belle Isle Casino – Contractor preparing for new HVAC equipment*

# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

- Boiler room structural roof repairs underway
- Sewer line repair is underway
- Quotes are being secured to address leaking pipes and radiators of existing boiler system.



# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## Boiler room roof structural repairs

- Masonry repairs made to abandoned chimney.
- Roof Decking removed and existing roof beams inspected.
- Additional structural support required where sagging beams exist. Exposed beams have been discovered to be deteriorated more than initially observed



Roof is under- supported and needs replacement and reinforcement to stabilize roof.

# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## **Boiler room roof structural repairs**



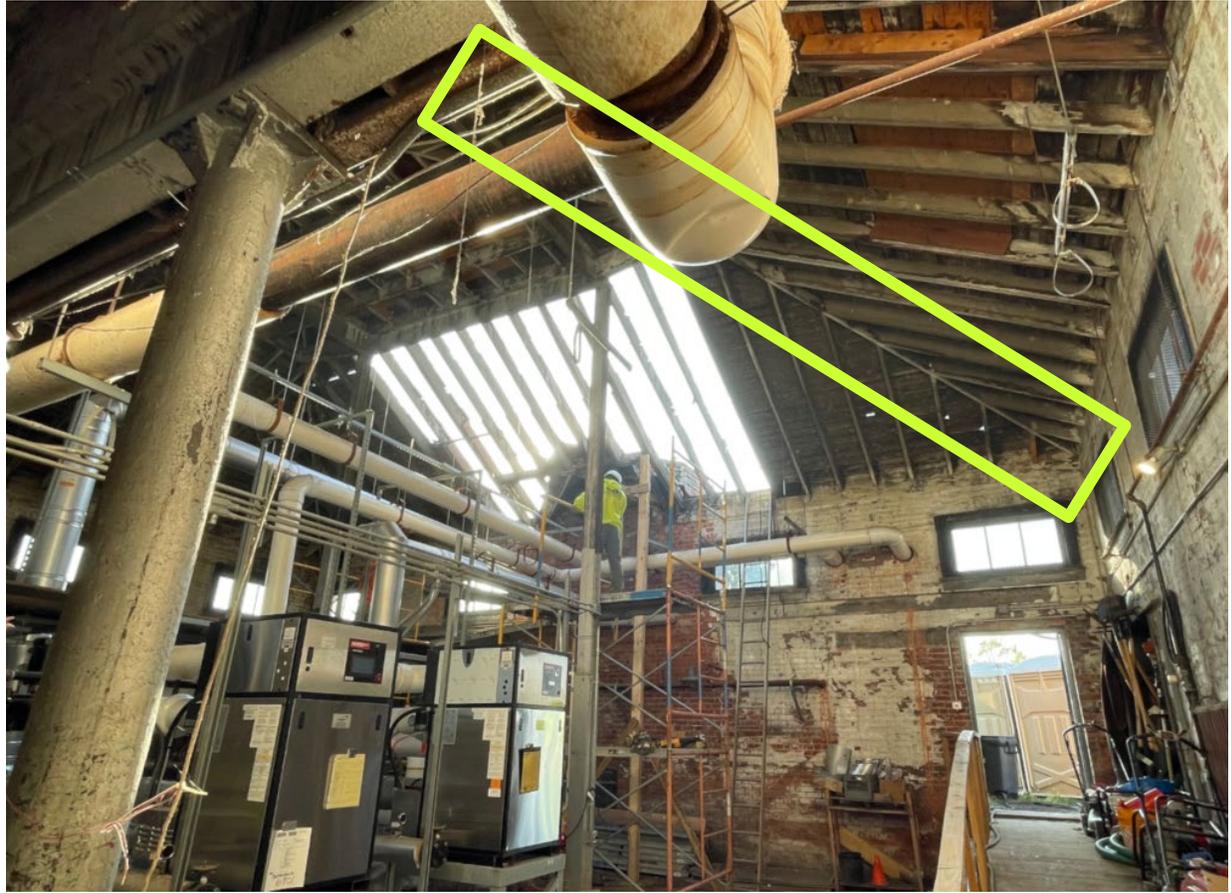
Existing beams open for inspection by structural engineer

# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## Boiler room roof structural repairs



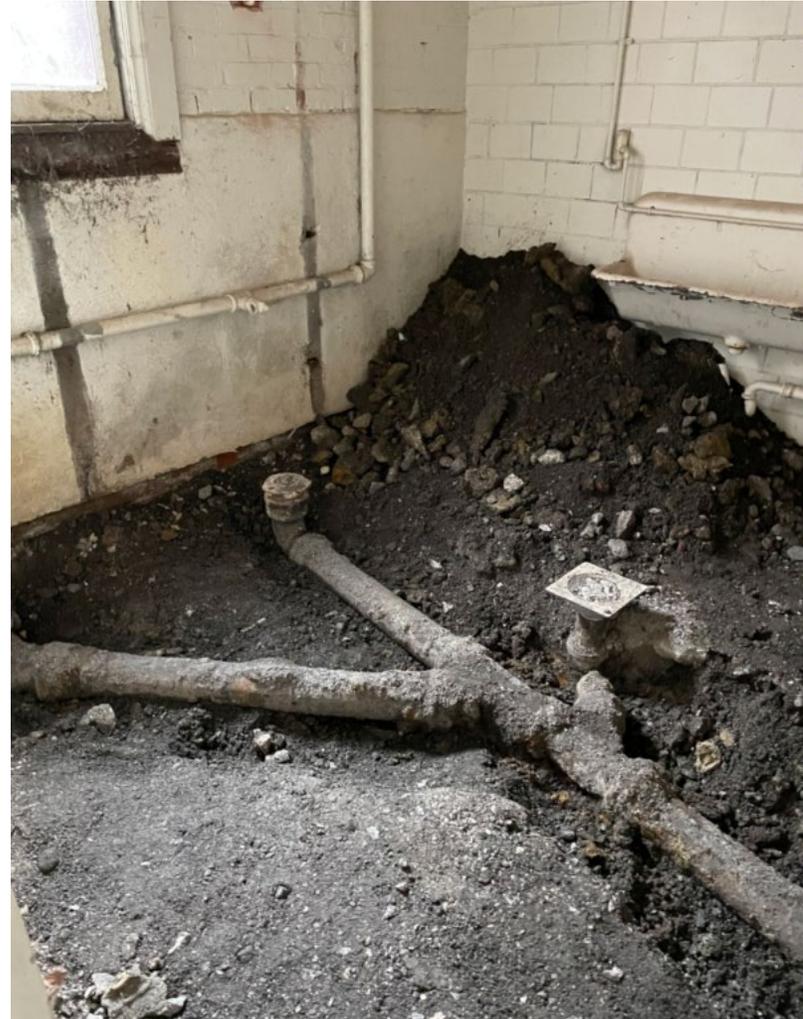
Existing beams open for inspection by structural engineer



# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## **Sewer line repairs**

- Replacing abandoned sewer line.
- Sewer line had previously been tied to undersized line when broken line was abandoned.
- New line expected to address previous basement flooding.



Old sewer line exposed for removal.

# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## Sewer line repairs



Interior bathroom where new sewer line to be installed and connected to new exterior sewer line..

# Belle Isle Aquarium Update

## Boiler Line Repairs

- Bleeding radiators and replacing bleeder valves.
- Replacing leaking valve in tank room.



Boiler line valve needs to be replaced.

# Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory

## **Boiler room roof structural repairs**

- Glass and bar cap installation is 50% complete.
- Upper cupola glass will be all cut this week.
- Dome glass installation to be complete before Thanksgiving.
- DNR has approved for new glass and bar caps for the lower houses (tropical and desert).



New glass installation in upper dome

# Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory



New glass installation in upper dome



# Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory



New glass installation in upper dome



# Flynn Pavilion Window and Carpentry Repair

## **Work Underway:**

- Downspout and fascia replacement.
- Window Repair scheduled through December 2023.
- Painting will be complete in Spring 2023, weather permitting.



*Window and carpentry repairs underway in 2023.*

# Belle Isle Multimodal Mobility Study

- Project team preparing response to public comments
- DNR – PRD and MDOT leadership support maintaining one-way traffic on out loop and using alternative traffic calming measure in lieu of original project proposal.
- Project team continuing working with signage consultant to develop signage and wayfinding design package. Implementation is planned to start next year.



Public Open House at Dossin, July 8, 2023

# Belle Isle Hazardous Material and Structural Study Master Document

## Draft Submitted:

- Island wide comprehensive report with testing results for 44 structures in park.
- Report will guide prioritization for addressing hazardous removal throughout park.
- Abatement and structural repairs will be executed with PFC ARPA funds.



*3,000 page draft Report for Haz. Mtls Testing records.*



# October Update



Island Stakeholders & Belle Isle Conservancy Community Engagement

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October 19, 2023

BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
BIC STAKEHOLDER & ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Visit

# BELLE ISLE



## FALL/WINTER FACILITY HOURS

(holiday hours may apply)

### BELLE ISLE AQUARIUM

**FRI-SUN | 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

### BELLE ISLE NATURE CENTER

**DAILY | 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM**

### DOSSIN GREAT LAKES MUSEUM

**FRI-SAT | 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM | SUN | 1:00- 5:00 PM**

\$5/PERSON OR \$20 FOR SIX ADULTS AND CHILDREN WITH THE SAME ADDRESS. UNDER 6, FREE

### LOUDOLF GARDEN

**DAILY | 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM**

### \*\*ANNA SCRIPPS WHITCOMB CONSERVATORY

**CLOSED FOR CONSTRUCTION THROUGH 2024**

### FOR BELLE ISLE UPDATES

**TEXT GEM TO 80888**

### BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

**MONTHLY ON THE FOURTH THURSDAY**

ISLAND OPEN 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM DAILY

TAKE THE #12 CONANT OR #9 JEFFERSON BUSES TO BELLE ISLE!

**MICHIGAN RECREATION PASSPORT IS ONLY REQUIRED FOR VEHICLE ACCESS.**



# Island Stakeholder Updates

Detroit Boat Club Crew



**OPEN NOW:**

**JUNIOR RACING TEAM (REGISTRATION CLOSSES 11/16) \$450**

**MIDDLE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT (REGISTRATION CLOSSES 11/3) \$300- \$450**

For more information, visit [www.detroitboatclubcrew.com](http://www.detroitboatclubcrew.com).

# Island Stakeholder Updates

## Detroit Boat Club Crew



**MOTOWN MADNESS RACE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN:**

For more information, visit [www.detroitboatclubcrew.com](http://www.detroitboatclubcrew.com).



# Island Stakeholder Highlight

Belle Isle Nature Center (Detroit Zoo)

## SAVE THE DATE : BOO AT THE NATURE CENTER

Oct. 28-29 | 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. (Free, No Registration Required)

Boo at the Nature Center, the Belle Isle Nature Center’s annual Halloween celebration, is returning with opportunities to trick-or-treat for goodies inside the Nature Center and along a paved outdoor path.

**Reusable bags and costumes are encouraged. No bags will be provided.**

visit [belleislenaturecenter.detroitzoo.org](http://belleislenaturecenter.detroitzoo.org) for more info.



**Microplastics**  
Here, There and Everywhere



# Island Stakeholder Updates

**Dossin Great Lakes Museum (Detroit Historical Society)**

Open Fri & Sat 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM and Sun 1:00- 5:00 PM

Admission: Free Under 6, \$5 for adults and Children

\$20 for a single household (up to 6 parents and children)

For more information, visit [detroithistorical.org](http://detroithistorical.org).

**SAVE THE DATE | Nov 10 | 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

**24th Annual Lost Mariners Remembrance**

**Open Regular Hours Friday, November 24 (10:00 AM - 5:00 PM)**

Check out the Microplastics Here, There, Everywhere exhibit (through April 2024)



# Island Stakeholder Updates

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## Oudolf Garden (Friends of The Oudolf Garden)

Oudolf Garden Detroit is a Four Season Garden! Visit any time the park is open (year-round from 5 a.m.- 10 p.m., with the exception of special events).

Guided Tours are available by appointment, Monday through Thursday, for groups of 25 or more individuals. ( Suggested \$5 donation.)

Directions: Oudolf Garden Detroit is easy to find on Google and Apple Maps. Parking is free, and picnic areas are available nearby. City bus service is also available to Belle Isle. Please check local schedules.

**Check out the NOW BLOOMING Segment online!**

**(Pictured: *Perovskia atriplicifolia* 'Blue Steel,' 'Blue Steel' Russian Sage, A Bed)**

Visit [oudolfgardendetroit.org](http://oudolfgardendetroit.org) for more info.



**AQUA-TALKS RETURN TO BELLE ISLE AQUARIUM!**  
Weekly, Saturday Mornings at 11:30

# DETROIT CITY COUNCIL SUPPORTS SENATE BILL NO.228



**SAY NO TO PLASTIC**

On October 3rd 2023, the Detroit City Council unanimously voted to approve a resolution to support Michigan State Bill No. 228 (SB 228), meant to repeal Michigan Public Act No. 389 (PA 389) of 2016. PA 389 is a preemption law prohibiting the regulation of single-use plastic containers, or “auxiliary containers”, by local jurisdictions such as the city of Detroit.

The resolution was introduced by Detroit City Council member Scott Benson (District 3), who chairs the Green Task Force.

# VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION



Are you interested in volunteering at Belle Isle Aquarium, Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, or supporting community programming?

Visit [belleisleconservancy.org](http://belleisleconservancy.org) to register for the upcoming Belle Isle Park Volunteer Orientation and join the passionate group of Belle Isle Conservancy volunteers.

Volunteer Benefits include:

- 20% off discount at the Belle Isle Aquarium gift shop
- Exclusive volunteer-only educational events
- Behind the scenes Aquarium tour (after five shifts)
- Volunteer appreciation socials
- Bi-monthly Volunteer insider e-newsletter
- Aquarium Volunteer T-shirt and Badge (after two shifts)

Questions? Contact [volunteer@belleisleconservancy.org](mailto:volunteer@belleisleconservancy.org)

# SUMMER PROGRAMMING RECAP



## COMMUNITY SOUND BATHS

215 PARTICIPANTS  
2 SESSIONS



## KEEP BELLE ISLE BEAUTIFUL

1800+ VOLUNTEERS  
REMOVED 8,568 POUNDS  
OF LITTER FROM THE  
LAND AND WATERWAYS  
OF BELLE ISLE.



## YOGA IN THE PARKS

393 PARTICIPANTS  
SESSIONS



## COMMUNITY FUN DAY

1,832 AQUARIUM VISITORS



## OUTDOOR AQUATIC SCIENCE INVESTIGATION SERIES (OASIS)

344 PARTICIPANTS  
44 FREE SESSIONS

# AHHHSCARIUM!!!

October 28 - 29

BELLE ISLE AQUARIUM

**JOIN OUR DIGITAL COMMUNITY. FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!**  
**@BELLEISLEAQUARIUM**





BELLE ISLE  

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CONSERVANCY