



Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Date: March 21, 2024

Location: 99 Pleasure Dr., Detroit, MI 48207

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

Quorum established

Roll Call

Present for BIPAC

Michele Hodges, Chair

Angela Lugo-Thomas

Michael Curis

Megan Elliott

Sommer Woods, Wayne County, Detroit (virtual)

Unexcused

Rev. Lonnie Peek

DNR Staff Present

Ron Olson, Chief

Tom Bissett

Amanda Treadwell

Sgt. Damon Owens

Barbrea Young

Erika Compton

Marie Kaphengst

Darlisa Terrell

Scott Pratt

Others Present

Summer Ritner, Belle Isle Conservancy

Ryan Vance, Supervisor, Detroit Zoological Society

Chair Hodges called the meeting to order and asked members to introduce themselves.

Chair Hodges then asked for a motion to approve the February 15, 2024, meeting minutes. The motion to approve the minutes was made by Member Curis, supported by Member Elliott, and passed unanimously.

The meeting continued with an update on the Belle Isle Aquarium. Summer Ritner, COO of the Belle Isle Conservancy gave a presentation on the Belle Isle Aquarium that included updates on signage, the interpretive plan, the animals, visitor numbers, donations, events, volunteership, amenities, and the planning for future improvements. Ms. Ritner also updated the group on the accreditation process program they are currently going through. (Presentation attached.)

Ryan Vance, Supervisor of the Detroit Zoological Society then gave a presentation on the Nature Center that included the 2023 attendance numbers, current and upcoming events, and the Co-Designing Conservation with Communities project, and also the progress towards accreditation. For more information about the Co-Designing Conservation with (not for) Communities project please reach out to him at RVance@dzs.org and Community Outreach Associate Amanda White at Awhite2@dzs.org. (Presentation attached.)

Newer member Megan Elliott reintroduced herself to the group. She is the Deputy CFO for the development and grants for the City of Detroit, a position she has held for the last 10 years. Prior to this role she was the Chief Parks Planner.

Member Woods, who joined virtually, introduced herself and said she was calling in from Detroit, Wayne County.

General Updates

Parks and Recreation Update – Ron Olson, Chief

Chief Olson began by thanking the folks at the Nature Center and the Aquarium for their updates. He continued with an update on the fiscal year 2025 governor's proposed budget which includes the Recreation Passport opt-out and exemption for honorably discharged and active veterans. He also informed the group that the annual Belle Isle report briefing to the Detroit City Council will occur sometime in May and an overview will be provided at a later BIPAC meeting.

Park Update - Tom Bissett, Urban District Supervisor and Gail Fitch, Unit Supervisor

Tom Bissett began by asking that visitors be patient with them as they work through all of the construction projects that are going on simultaneously in the park. He also encouraged anyone interested in working at the park to please apply for the several seasonal positions that are open. These positions will work the April through October season.

Gail Fitch said they have been monitoring overnight temperatures in relation to the plumbing and will open restrooms when possible. There are portables as well as the restroom available at the Bus Stop.

Tom reported that the department of transportation (MDOT) will be doing a resurfacing project on the Strand and around to the riverbank this summer and that the department will coordinate with MDOT to keep some of the roads open during this process, and that they are gathering proposals for events this summer and are excited to get the Flynn and Conservatory open to have the events in the coming year.

The boathouse – DNR staff went through the boathouse with the Detroit News crew to give them a good perspective of the condition. He encourages folks to submit their informal proposals for review. These informal proposals are due at the end of the month, and there will be an update on the process at the next BIPAC meeting. The formal proposals will be due at the end of July. More information can be found on the Belle Isle Park web page at: <https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=736&type=SPRK>

Members Elliott and Curis asked about timelines. Tom replied that the letters of intent are due at the end of the month and the formal proposals are due the end of July. Proposals would have to be shovel-ready and the money has to be on a work order by the end of 2024. If a proposal cannot be completed, the funds will be put to use for another project.

Member Elliott asked the staff to clarify the state procurement process and the timelines for that. Tom Bissett and Amanda Treadwell explained the bidding and contractor process that is administered through the Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB), a department of the state that handles all of the state contracts. DTMB has their own set of standards, procedures and contract reviews. This process can be lengthy, so reviewing the schedule of the proposals will be important.

Member Elliott commented that it can be a lengthy process and seem bureaucratic, but it is critical to follow all of the rules in the process because it is public dollars going into the projects.

The meeting continued with updates.

Law Updates

Sgt. Damon Owen reported that enforcement has been steady on the island and they will be shifting to summer hours, patrolling 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 11 p.m., and Michigan State Police will be patrolling from 11 p.m. to 7

a.m. He added that the island has a significant amount of speed signs now and most of the officers in District 9 are radar certified. There will be a digital sign and officers with radars. He stressed the 25-mph speed limit, as speed limit violations have been significantly high, with speeds topping over 70 mph.

Infrastructure Updates

Amanda Treadwell gave a presentation on the current infrastructure projects, including the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, Casino, ARPA funded investments, and capital projects. (Presentation attached.)

Public Comment

Amy Hubbard – Spoke on the island waterways being underutilized and asked if there are any plans for ferry docks.

Stephen Malbouf – Asked what the process is for deeming the letters of intent for the boathouse as feasible vs. non-feasible, who came up with the \$2M quote estimate for the boathouse demo, and wanted to reiterate the importance of the boathouse.

Robin Heller – Asked if the kayak launch would be coming back and gave the date for the next Daffodil Luncheon which is April 17.
<https://www.michiganwnfqa.org/daffodils4detroit-2024.html>

Rich Rybicki – Spoke of his concern about the police station and its condition.

Griffin Gonzales – Is working with Stephen Malbouf in educating the public about the historic boathouse. They have launched “Save Belle Isle Boathouse” petition and are against its demolition.

Richard Bell – Member of the Great Lake Maritime Institute, spoke on the boathouse and asked if the DNR will be restarting the boiler, the desire to return to the boathouse, and asked about creating a foundation to seek funding for it.

Michelle Potter – resident of Detroit who spoke against the demolition of the boathouse.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

Next regular meeting: Thursday, April 18, 2024.

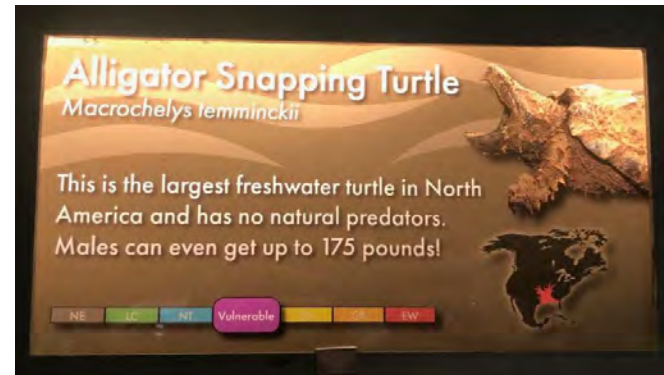
Belle Isle Aquarium





Central
& South
America

Signage



Lakes & Rivers
of
North America



Interpretive Plan

Our historic building is home to animals with unique adaptations suited to their habitats, which are impacted by humans and environmental events.

Focus: The connection of fresh water systems around the world.

Great Rivers of the world

Great Lakes of the world

Rivers to lakes to oceans

Conservation

Adaptations



A Beloved Attraction and Experience

Free Admission

Open Friday – Sunday

Summer Thursdays

2012: 16,500 visitors

2023: 160,000 visitors

2021: \$88,024 (\$1.01pp)

2023: \$196,915 (\$1.29pp)





Tank Sponsorships

- \$2,500 - \$10,000 per year, depending on tank size and species
- Twelve months of recognition
- Name displayed prominently on the exhibit

29 tanks are currently sponsored

11 tanks need sponsors



Our Volunteers

Docents

Interpreters

Educators

Greeters

Tankscapers

Events

FOG



Watch for in 2024: Interactive Postcard



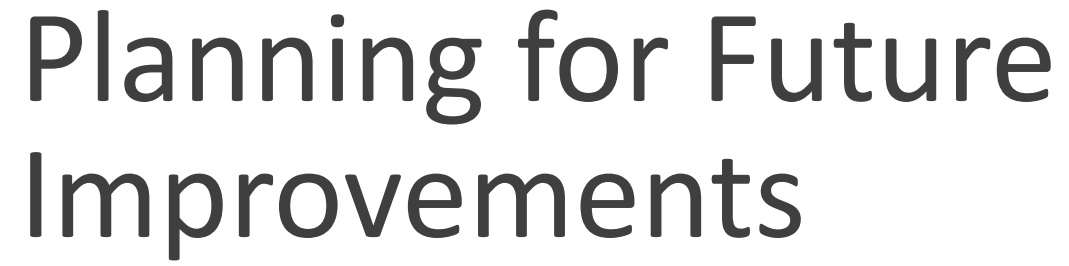
Jim Cricket
Anaheim, CA

Watch for in 2024: Carhartt Retail Kiosk



Watch for in 2024: Outdoor Classroom Mural





Mini Master Plan

Tank 29 & Pagoda



BELLE ISLE NATURE CENTER®



DETROIT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Belle Isle Nature Center program attendance

2023 annual visitor attendance: 103,487



Learning Labs onsite



Public programs and events



Outreach



Overall program totals

- Learning Labs facilitated at the Nature Center: **177**
- Number of schools that visited the Nature Center: 159
- Total Youth school program participants: **5,505**
- Total Adult school program participants: 1,397

(Winterfest, Mudpuppypalooza, Bee Fest, etc.)

- Total participants: **5,568**
- Total youth: 3,113
- Total adult: 2,455

(Brilliant Detroit, Downtown Boxing Gym, etc.)

- Total number of sessions offered off site: 83
- Total youth participants of off-site programs: **1,195**
- Total adult participants of off-site programs: 768

(Camp, field trips, outreach, programs and events):

- Youth: 10182
- Adults: 4930
- Total: **15,112**

FREE events at the Belle Isle Nature Center



Nature at Night: Thursday, March 21, 5-8pm
Join us for a hike at dusk to notice the birds that call Belle Isle home

Visit BelleIsleNatureCenter.org for more information

FREE events at the Belle Isle Nature Center



Mudpuppypalooza: Sunday, March 24, 11a-4p
Celebrate the aquatic amphibian that call the Detroit River home.

Visit BelleIsleNatureCenter.org for more information

FREE events at the Belle Isle Nature Center



STATEWIDE ASTRONOMY NIGHT

at the BELLE ISLE NATURE CENTER

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
**SCIENCE
FESTIVAL**

MICHIGAN
**Science
CENTER**
A SMITHSONIAN AFFILIATE

wayne state university
PLANETARIUM

Statewide Astronomy Night: Friday, April 12, 7-10pm

Join us for a night of celebrating the importance of dark skies for wildlife. Register today!

Visit BelleIsleNatureCenter.org for more information

FREE events at the Belle Isle Nature Center

The logo features the words "GREEN DAY" in a bold, dark green, sans-serif font. A stylized leafy branch is integrated into the text, with leaves appearing to grow from the letters. The background is a vibrant green with a blurred image of foliage.

**GREEN
DAY**

at the Belle Isle Nature Center

*CONSERVE.
PROTECT.
GO GREEN.*

Green Day: Saturday, April 20, 11a-4p

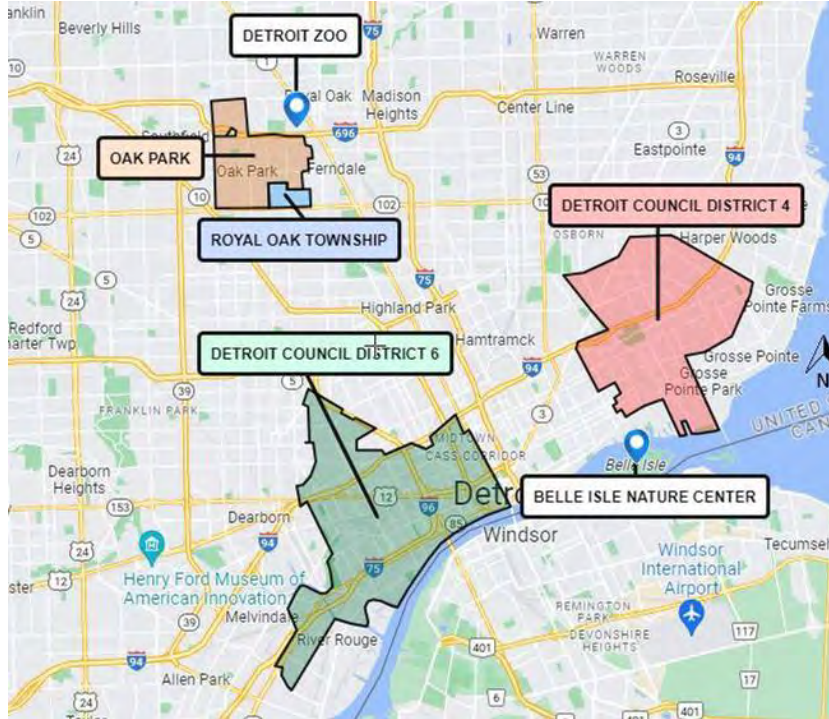
Enjoy earth-friendly crafts, games, keeper talks and exhibits by local conservation groups.

Visit BelleIsleNatureCenter.org for more information

Co-Designing Conservation with (not for) Communities



Co-Designing Conservation with (not for) Communities



Determining Communities

1. Total population must be <300,000.
2. Each community must have >13% persons in poverty.
3. All 3 counties should be represented.
4. West and east sides of Detroit should be represented.

Co-Designing Conservation with (not for) Communities



THANK YOU



BELLE ISLE NATURE CENTER®



DETROIT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Updates

March 21, 2024



Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory

Project Status

- Exterior Scaffolding is being removed, a two – month task.
- Ideal preparing to install new catwalks in dome.
- Ideal is working with glass installer to order new glass for low houses.
- Architect finalizing plans for vestibule roof and show room floor improvements.



Ariel of scaffolding being removed.

Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory



Ariel of scaffolding being removed.

Belle Isle Casino

Project Status

- Next two weeks will be installing chillers, electric connections and testing of equipment
- New soffit lights and porch lights to be installed this spring
- Roof replacement scheduled to begin mid April through June.



New air cooling equipment installed.

Belle Isle Casino



Screen wall for new equipment..



Belle Isle Casino

ADA Improvements



New ADA ramp and sloped walk will provide access to plaza and porch.



Automatic door openers will be added to vestibule doors.



Porch and steps will be resurfaced.

ARPA funded investments

Engineering Proposals for Parkwide & Site Investments due March 21, 2024

- Hazardous material remediation.
- Former zoo structure removals.
- Boathouse specifications and removals

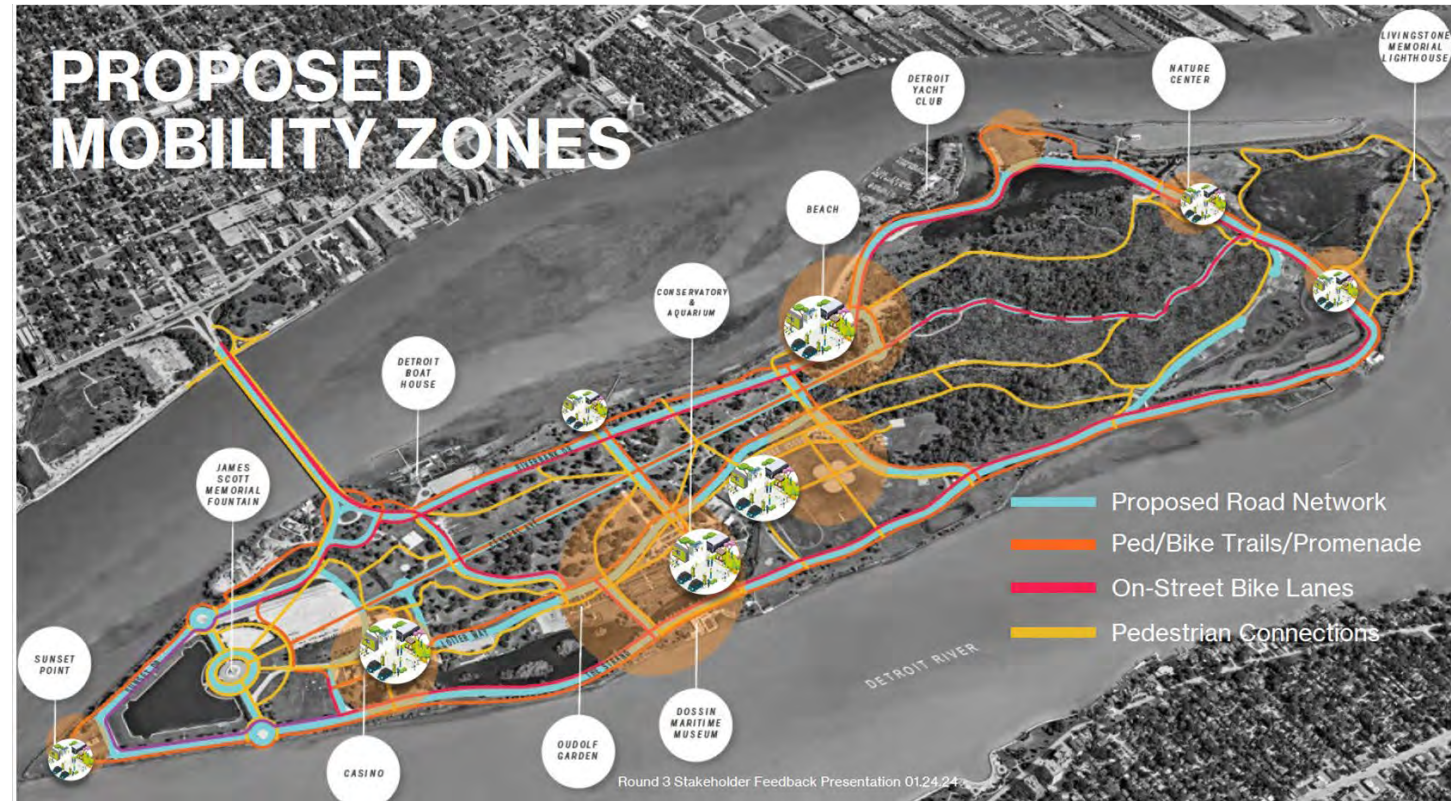


Entrance buildings to the former zoo damaged by hazardous trees.

ARPA funded investments

Engineering Proposals for development plans due March 27th, 2024

- Belle Isle Aquarium and Conservatory Facility Development Plan
- Belle Isle Park Strategic Development Plan



The Belle Isle Park Strategic Plan will be based upon previous planning studies including the multimodal mobility plan.

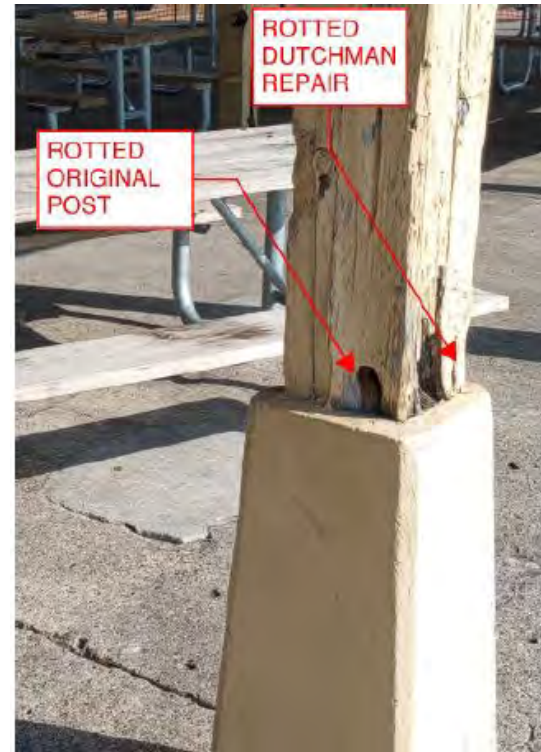
Belle Isle Capital Projects

- **8 Projects completed last year.**
(\$1,980,000)
- **10 Construction projects underway this year.**
- **13 Design Projects underway this year.**
(\$54,760,000)

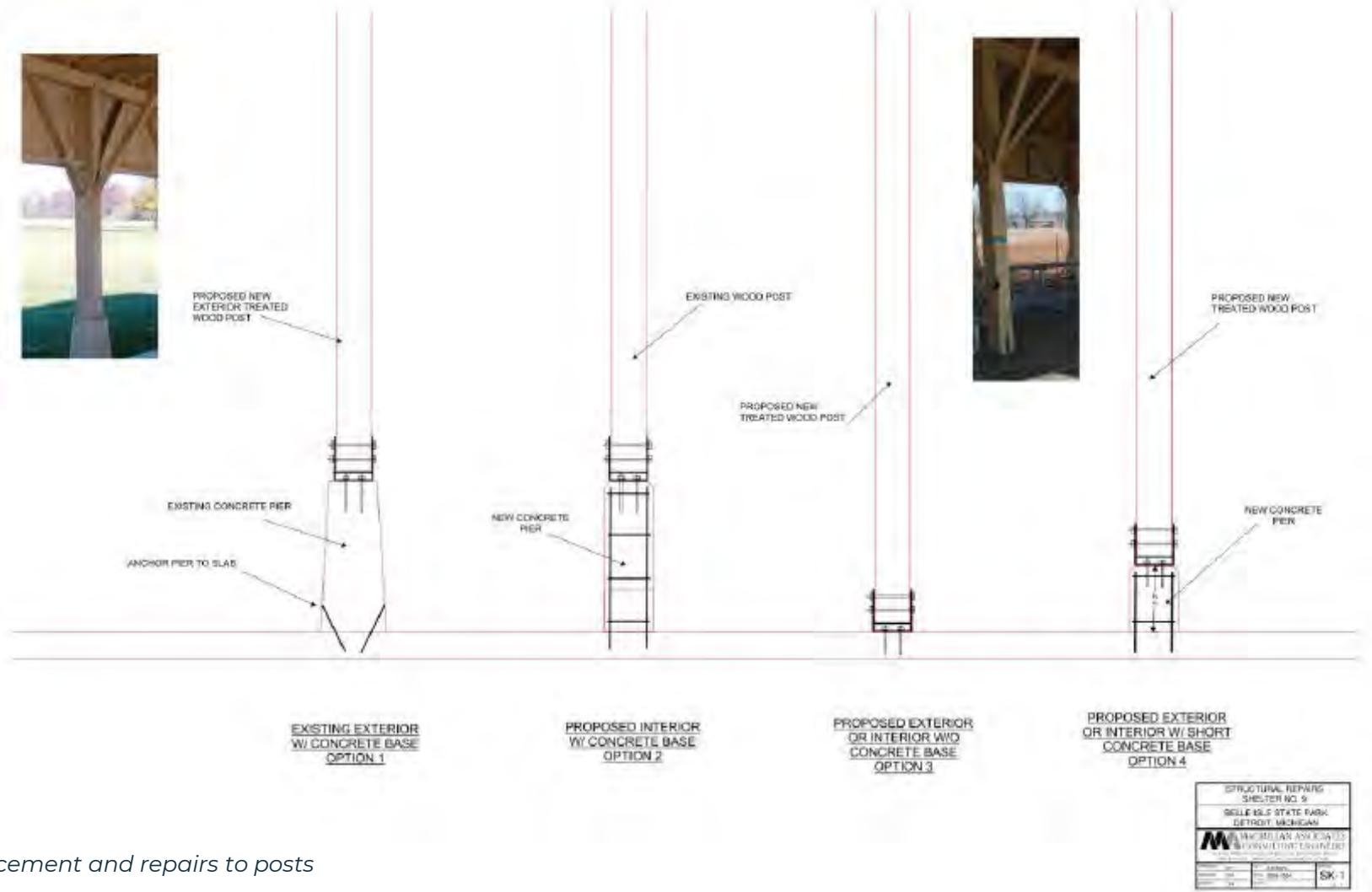


Shelter #9

Structural Repairs



Structural Repairs



Proposed replacement and repairs to posts

Belle Isle Sawmill

Project Status

- Concrete and retaining walls installed.
- New barn doors on site and installation will be complete in two weeks.



Concrete sloped access and retaining walls complete.

James Brady Statue

Restoration donated by Detroit Goodfellows



Restoration specialists working on statue masonry

Dante Alighieri Bust

Restoration donated by Dante Alighieri Society of Michigan.



The plinth for Dante Bust will be replaced with new marble feature.