



Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee

Special Meeting Minutes

Date: November 7, 2024

Flynn Pavilion 4435 Muse Rd., Detroit, MI 48207

Meeting began at 6:02 p.m.

Roll Call

Present for BIPAC

Dr. Meagan Elliott, Chair
Michael Curis
Angela Lugo Thomas
Melia Howard

Absent

Dr. Lonnie Peak
Sommer Woods
Dr. Brian Banks

DNR Staff Present

Jacklin Blodgett
Ed Golder
Tom Bissett
Gail Fitch
Lt. Todd Szyska
Raelyn Maroney
Robb McKay
Erika Compton
Scott Pratt
Marie Kaphengst
Barbara Graves

Others Present

David Carleton, Stuart-Pitman
Steve Mar-Pohl, InSite Consulting Architects
Lt. Lance Couturier, MSP
Shawna Mitchell, BIC

Chair Elliott opened the meeting at 6:02 p.m. and began with roll call for members of the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee before explaining the purpose of the meeting and how the meeting will proceed.

Information Only

Tom Bissett, Urban District Supervisor, then gave an overview of the boathouse proposal. Mr. Bissett explained the process that led up to this meeting beginning with the submitted proposals and clarified that no definitive solution has been agreed upon yet, and that this meeting is strictly informational and for the public to be made aware of the status of the boathouse remediation.

David Carleton, Principal, Stuart-Pitman, was next on the agenda and presented his Belle Isle Boathouse proposal which included a rendering of the proposed renovations as well as sharing his past projects in the city of Detroit. <https://www.detroitboathouseconservancy.com/>

Chair Elliott then opened the room to member discussion, and inquired about the budget for the project and what parts of the budget have already been worked into the plan. Mr. Carleton explained his estimates are around \$25 to \$35 million, however those numbers are rough estimates, and further inspections are necessary to see a more accurate amount.

Member Lugo-Thomas inquired about the structural pylons and how the restoration project aims to address that issue. Steve Mar-Pohl, Architect, InSite Consulting Architects, responded stating that the building is in rough shape, but not in such rough shape that it cannot be saved.

Member Curis commented on how he believes the proposal is a great start and commended the DNR team for their efforts, and that the efforts need to continue from everyone for this project to be a success. He also mentioned that the ownership of the building will not go to Stuart-Pitman, but to the City of Detroit and that the boathouse will need to be profitable for all involved. He further commended the DNR for all the work that has been done to Belle Isle in making it a safe and clean park for all to enjoy. He explained how the financing will need to be approved and upheld and how the proposal still needs to be approved by the City of Detroit. He finished his comment by mentioning how excited he is for the project and is looking forward to the future.

Chair Elliott stated she will put the comments and questions to paper after the meeting so the proposal team can provide written answers.

Public Comment

*Note: All questions and answers will be posted to the information page at <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/prd/boathouse>

Chair Elliott began the public comments by reading the grouped, common questions submitted via comment cards during the meeting.

How does this specific project fit into the park-wide priorities? Mr. Carleton responded that this proposal fits into the park-wide priority list because it does not just entail the boathouse and spoke about possible shuttles around the island and using the boathouse as a gateway to the other popular attractions of the park.

Will the funding for this project will take away from other projects on the island? Mr. Carleton responded stating he does not have that answer yet and that will need to be discussed in length going forward.

Local contractors and architects for the project . . . are there plans to incorporate sustainable building materials? Mr. Carleton responded that the project needs to be a Michigan and Detroit worker-prioritized project, he also spoke about possible sustainable building materials he could possibly incorporate into the project.

How long the project will take? Mr. Carleton responded that it depends on how long it takes to get a lease in place.

Chair Elliott then asked Tom Bissett about the priority of the boathouse in the list of projects needing to get done on the island. Mr. Bissett responded that when they first obtained the lease, there was millions in needed repairs. The boathouse is the first thing you see and the first impression so it is a major priority. It is a huge and significant cost. They received ARPA money to fix the buildings on Belle Isle, but picking what to fix is difficult because there is a lot of need. He suggested the public visit the Belle Isle Boathouse Information web page for more information:

<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/prd/boathouse>

Guest 1 – Asked about the percentage of minority and women-owned businesses that will be a part of the renovation process. Also asked about how the educational programs will be selected. Mr. Carleton responded that the team is not developed yet, but there is a plan for community involvement, and the selection process is going to include programs that are already working with the DNR and other possible pathways.

Guest 2 (Lisa DiChiera) – Thanked the MDNR team for their willingness to hear proposals to save the boathouse rather than demolish it. Then asked about the \$2 million that was originally awarded to the boathouse for demolition, and asked Mr. Carleton about how the project will be phased. Mr. Bissett responded to the question about the \$2 million that the original \$2 million from the ARPA funds could not be used specifically for the boathouse because the deadline for allocation of funds was November 7, 2024 by end of the business day, and that because there was no set plan for the boathouse

before the deadline, the \$2 million will be going to another project on the island. Mr. Mar-Pohl responded to the question about the project phases that will begin where there is the most damage and work to the least damaged area.

Guest 3 (Bill Barr) – Shared a story of how he is connected to the boathouse and commented on his excitement for the project.

Guest 4 – Spoke about the clubs and people who use the boathouse and their excitement for the project. Inquired about the timeline for the project and applauded Mr. Carleton for his proposal. Also stated concerns about the lease and funding for the project.

Guest 5 – Mentioned concerns about the priority of other projects on the island and how the funding will be raised for this project when there is so many other projects that need attention and funding. Also asked about how much money is needed to get the project up and running. Mr. Carleton responded that the exact amount is not known, and details will need to be worked out further to get a true estimate.

Guest 6 (Amy Hubbard) – Commented on how she joined the call for saving the boathouse and how she is connected to the boathouse. She commented on her excitement for the project and commended David for his proposal. Would like to see a water taxi on the island.

Guest 7 (Kate Blanchard) – Commented on how she always must tell people there is no restaurant on the island and urged for there to be a restaurant in the boathouse project.

Guest 8 – Inquired on if there would be any outreach to Detroit public schools for the project involvement. Mr. Carleton responded that he is looking for those opportunities.

Guest 9 (Jim Turner) – Mentioned his involvement into the Randolph program and spoke on how he wants to have community involvement for this project.

Guest 10 (Calvin Jackson) – Detroit Historic Preservation – Said it is good to see another renovation project at least get considered. Is overjoyed to see renovations going on and historic preservations in the city. Expressed excitement for the project.

Guest 11 (Constance Simms) – Commented on their connection to the boathouse and excitement for the proposal. Inquired if there would be a board that consists of the developers as well as the community for the boathouse project. Mr. Carleton responded that we are in the early stages, but they are planning to have a nonprofit to oversee the building project.

Guest 12 – Commented on lack of waterfront docks to dock boats on the Detroit River and wants to see more places to be able to dock a boat and get out. Mr. Carleton responded that they should check out the informational website specifically for the boathouse.

Guest 13 (Kendall) – Question on zero carbon and decarbonization to make a net zero building and how those could be incorporated into the proposal. Mr. Carleton responded that they are looking into those options.

Guest 14 (Dan) – Commented on the islands improvements and commended the City and the DNR team for the work that has been done and the effort of preserving the history of Belle Isle.

Guest 15 (Constance B.) – Commented on excitement for the project and made 3 points on ethics, sustainability, and programs to get on the water.

Guest 16 (Tim Profit) – Commented on excitement for project.

Guest 17 (Harry Jones), Detroit Community Sailing – Commented on MDNRs outreach for boathouse and thanked DNR and the development team for the proposal.

Guest 18 (Mike) – Thanked Mr. Carleton for the proposal and commented on accessibility to Belle Isle for the community.

Guest 19 (Thomas) – Commented on Iron Belle Trail and Belle Isle being a gateway for that trail and commended the development of the island.

Guest 20 (Kate Sommerfield) - Thanked everyone for trying to save the boathouse. She also offered volunteering her time to assist with the restoration in any way she can.

Member Comments

Member Curis mentioned that the state has spent about \$159 million on the island since it took over the lease and has done a great job. He asked Chair Elliott to explain to the public why the BIPAC team exists and what they do for Belle Isle. He also asked Tom what the next steps were.

Chair Elliott said the BIPAC is formed as part of the relationship between the city and the state. The purpose is to have a public forum to understand what is happening on the island and as an opportunity to share information.

Tom Bissett shared the next step which will be a meeting with the DNR executive team to answer any more questions they may have. He directed the public to the boathouse information page to stay updated.

<https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/prd/boathouse>

Chair Elliott invited the public to communicate with them. All comments will be answered on the MDNR's boathouse page which will be the main source for updates.

Member Curis spoke on the dedication from the BIPAC team to Belle Isle and suggested there be another special meeting for the public in case people cannot make the regularly scheduled BIPAC meetings.

Member Elliott thanked everyone who came to participate.

With no further business the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.