

# MINUTES

## Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 16, 2020

Location: Teleconference

**Meeting called to order at 9:05 a.m.**

A Quorum was established at 9:08 a.m.

### **EXCUSED ABSENCES**

None reported

### **UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

Bryan Barnhill

Brad Dick

### **PRESENT FOR BIPAC**

Chair, Michele Hodges

Michael Curis

Bud Denker

Lonnie Peek

Sommer Woods

### **DNR STAFF PRESENT**

Ron Olson, Chief

Scott Pratt

Michael Terrell

Karis Floyd

Darlisa Rickman

Amanda Treadwell

Barbara Graves

Chris Kargel

Kimberley Hicks

Mia Moore

Lt. Todd Szyska

### **OTHERS PRESENT**

Lance Couturier, MSP

Bill Shreck, MDOT

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

### **Approval of Minutes for February 20, 2020: (No meeting held for March due to COVID-19)**

Moved by: Rev. Lonnie Peek

Seconded by: Michael Curis

**Michele Hodges** called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the first historic, virtual meeting of the committee and thanked everyone for their patience as they move through this new format. She asked that everyone take a moment to reflect on the many people in the community who have lost relatives, or who have lost their lives due to the virus, and the many more who are struggling. She would like to salute the DNR team as well as the Belle Isle Aquarium team who have both been on the front lines while others have been able to be home safe and sound.

## **GENERAL UPDATES**

### **Ron Olson, Chief, DNR-PRD**

With the Executive Order, state parks are deemed an essential service and they were given parameters to run safe, sanitary parks. In order to avoid direct contact with the public, they have reduced gathering spots. Events were postponed or cancelled depending on the circumstances. Facilities were closed, along with the aquarium, conservatory, and restrooms. Porta johns were put in place because they can be maintained without having staff engaged in the cleaning process. Basketball, handball, tennis courts and children's playgrounds were also closed because they are gathering spots. Under the Executive Order we are only allowed to perform contract work that fits into the critical health and safety rules. One of these is the coffer dam because of the flooding and potential problems with electric and sewer.

**Amanda Treadwell**, PRD Planner, Southeast Michigan, updated the committee on the culvert project going in the Strand managed by the Friends of the Detroit River. All projects are on hold except the most critical projects which include the Lake Okonoka restoration.

**Karis Floyd**, Park Manager, Belle Isle and Milliken, updated the committee on several projects.

- Shelter 9 has a coffer dam installed, a donation of \$15K from the Dam-It-Dams company.
- They ran into issues with the general public thinking the dam was a bouncy toy. The dam suffered a puncture and is being repaired. They will put signage out to deter this behavior.
- Started installation of coffer dam in Blue Herron Lagoon last Saturday. Staff spent about 14 hours trying to install but waves and winds made it impossible. Seeking to get help from Coast Guard and Harbor Master to assist as it will take at least three vessels to accomplish.
- Working on the canal pumps, thanks to the Grand Prix.
- Lost a boiler at the Casino. The part is about \$5,800 and has to be ordered. Once ordered the company can come out and install. For now, operating on one boiler.
- Seeing a tremendous amount of people in the parks. Beach area was having issues with social distancing, but COs are on top of it. Along the Strand and picnic area social distancing seems to be adhered to.
- Game courts secured because of gathering.

- Rangers are running on three shifts to inspect and make repairs.
- They have had vandalism to the white house, the old police station and green houses. The MSP has been on point to address those issues. **Lt. Szyska** said they have had issues in the past few days and they believe it may be caused by a mentally unstable individual. A lot of the shelters were shut down and they are trying to find different places for them to stay.

**Lt. Todd Szyska**, DNR Law, said they are continuing to patrol the parks to make sure people are adhering to social distancing. There were some issues at the beach on the warmer days. He thanked park staff for closing down the courts because of the potential for the COVID-19 virus living on surfaces, and he appreciates the teamwork. They are addressing issues with the public via a PA; most people have been compliant. They understand that people are tired of being cooped up.

**Chief Olson** added that the COs have been targeting other parks with high visitations numbers, such as Sterling, Holland, and Island Lake. Patrols have been stepped up at these areas for the last couple of weeks. Some tickets and several warnings were given out at Sterling. Tippy Dam had to be closed because people were not abiding the social distancing order. The good news for Belle Isle is that this has not been an issue with tickets.

The Recreation Passport requirement has been lifted at this time and will remain in effect until the Executive Order is lifted.

Communication is being conveyed through the Executive Order FAQs, media and signage in the parks. Banners will be put up in the parks to convey the social distancing requirement. They are considering a rented message board for Belle Isle to put on the bridge.

State government revenues, particularly general fund, is under stress and there is going to be curtailment on spending. Belle Isle is funded heavily with general funds, so there may be some reductions. There is additional loss in revenue between the Grand Prix and other events that have been cancelled. They will have updates at the next meeting in terms of the impact to service.

The Happy Little Trees virtual 5k walk/runs have been cancelled. They have revised the message to encourage people to go out on their own and practice social distancing.

**Karis Floyd** said park staff will take over operation of the fountain. **Scott Pratt** said due to the stay at home order there will be a delay until the orders are lifted.

**Bud Denker** spoke on the canceling of the Grand Prix. They worked with the department for a potential delay until October, however because of the buildup to prepare, there would have been over 60 events that would have been impacted. As a result, they decided to cancel. It will have an impact that reaches far - - the DNR, the conservatory, a thousand employees that will now not be employed, including the economic impact of millions to the city. It is the right decision at this time, and they look forward to having event in 2021.

**Michele Hodges** thanked him and his team for being exceptional partners, and that this will impact the Conservancy. The Conservancy is working to broaden and stabilize funding sources and are engaging in good business minded solutions, but they have not been implemented yet. The loss is significant to the DNR and the Conservancy.

**Reverend Peek** replied to Bud's comment that it is a difficult time and the pain is felt not only as a businessperson but personally. He asked the committee permission to close with a prayer, which was approved.

**Michael Curis** wanted to say that he applauds Bud and Penske for not just delaying, but for canceling the Grand Prix. The city of Detroit has lost many people in the past six weeks, many great people, and he would appreciate the prayer.

**Sommer Woods** stated that it was a hard decision and wanted to go on record that from a community perspective they are going to feel the pain not only economically, but quality of life as well.

**Reverend Peek**, said he was inspired by a woman he saw on TV, a mother of three children who was laid off. That speaks to the depth of where we are, beyond people dying. He said we are all in this together, but we suffer differently. This is tragic and as we move forward, we will have to deal with people who have lost jobs and lost family. The pain cannot be put into words. He went into prayer.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment. Anyone wishing to submit comments can do so by sending them to [floydk@michigan.gov](mailto:floydk@michigan.gov).

**Motion to Adjourn. No motion made. Meeting adjourned by Michele Hodges at 10:01 a.m.**

### **NEXT REGULAR MEETING:**

**May 21, 2020**  
Belle Isle Nature Center  
Belle Isle Park  
Detroit, MI 48207  
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michele Hodges Ronald A. Olson, Chief

Date: \_\_\_\_\_