

Michigan State Waterways Commission Meeting Minutes

Location: Virtual meeting

Date: December 2, 2021

Roll Call

Present for the Waterways Commission:

- Commissioner, Chair, Barb Brooks, Boyne City, MI
- Commissioner, Vice-Chair, Pat Egan, Brimley, MI
- Commissioner, Secretary, Mary Rising, Fenton, MI
- Commissioner, Fred Sitkins, Suttons Bay, MI
- Commissioner, Elaine Isely, Grand Rapids, MI
- Commissioner, Chris Shepler, Harbor Springs, MI
- Commissioner, Mark Yonan, Clarkston, MI

Others Present:

- Ron Olson, DNR, Ann Arbor, MI
- Maia Turek, DNR, Traverse City, MI
- Jordan Byelich, DNR, Haslett, MI
- Paul Petersen, DNR, Muskegon, MI
- Michelle Wieber, DNR, Recorder, Haslett, MI
- Vicki McGhee, DNR, Lansing, MI
- Michael Desnoyer, DNR, Jackson, MI
- Linnae Dawson, DNR, Elmira, MI
- Jacklin Blodgett, DNR, Portland, MI

Meeting minutes

Opening Comments:

- Chair, Barb Brooks called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m., December 2, 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held virtually.
- The meeting began with reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Appearance:

- Written correspondence was submitted for the meeting packet by Chris Clark, 2022 Mackinac Race Chairman, regarding the Bayview Yacht Club Port Huron to Mackinac Race. Mr. Clark states the usage at Mackinac Island State Harbor has become increasingly restricted and fears it will affect the race participants and island venues negatively.
- Written correspondence was submitted for the meeting packet by Ron Dwelle, recreational boater of Grand Rapids and Cheboygan. Mr. Dwelle wrote with concern regarding Little Lake Federal Harbor of Refuge, stating that making Little Lake accessible, through modification of the channel protections, would be invaluable.
- In attendance, Jim Sroka of Port Sanilac, expressed to the Commission his gratitude towards their service. Mr. Sroka also said he'd like to see a change in the harbor reservation cancelation policy, to have the cancelation window altered to create additional revenue by being able to fill the canceled slip again.
- In attendance, Commodore Nick Berberian with the Chicago Yacht Club, organizing authority to the Chicago Yacht Club Race to Mackinac, stated the Club was vying for rafting to be allowed at Mackinac Island State Harbor for the 2022 race.
- In attendance, Kyle Burleson, representing the Bayview Mackinac Race, offered his assistance if any questions were to arise.
- In attendance, Tim Hygh of the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau, offered his assistance if any questions were to arise.
- In attendance, Bradley Moffatt, resident of Petoskey, mentioned after the topic was brought up on Little Lake Federal Harbor of Refuge at the October Michigan State Waterways Commission meeting, he traveled to the site. Based on Mr. Moffatt's observations, he stated the dock did not seem to be in disrepair, and that his greatest concern was entry into Little Lake in the event a boater needed to exit Lake Superior due to a weather emergency. Mr. Moffatt also stated his gratitude towards the Commission.

Action Items:

- The Commission gave a warm welcome to the newly appointed Commissioner, Chris Shepler. Chris is the President of Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry. He has a passion for boating and has sailed world-wide. Chris is looking forward to serving on the Michigan State Waterways Commission alongside his fellow Commissioners.

- MOTION: Each December, officer elections take place. Barb Brooks was nominated to remain as Chair of the Commission. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Mary Rising and was seconded by Commissioner Mark Yonan. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.
- MOTION: Pat Egan was nominated to assume the Vice-Chair position. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Mark Yonan and was seconded by Commissioner Elaine Isely. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.
- MOTION: Mary Rising was nominated to assume the Secretary position. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Fred Sitkins and was seconded by Commissioner Mark Yonan. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.
- Some subcommittee assignment changes occurred based on vacancies and the Commissioner's areas of interest to serve.
- MOTION: Chair Barb Brooks asked for a motion for approval for the minutes from the October 7, 2021, Michigan State Waterways Commission meeting. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Mary Rising and seconded by Commissioner Mark Yonan. Motion carried unanimously, 6-0.
- Lead by Vicki McGhee, the Retreat Action Items were updated collaboratively. Committee chairs/staff were requested to update the Action matrix before each MSWC meeting, as needed. Chair Barb Brooks suggested the Commission conduct a full matrix progress review twice per year.
- Chris Shepler responded to remarks regarding Mackinac Island State Harbor safety concerns. Commissioner Shepler stated there are many factors in the heightened wake at the harbor – freighters, pleasure boaters, Mackinac Island ferries, and wind direction. Chris stated there are streaming cameras at the Shepler dock offices that will be made accessible to DNR, if needed. Posting No Wake signage was also discussed as an option to help curb the issue.
- MOTION: Michigan State Waterways Commission Bylaws were updated to include verbiage regarding virtual meetings. Chair Barb Brooks asked for a motion for approval of adoption. The motion was put into place by Commissioner Fred Sitkins and seconded by Commissioner Elaine Isely. Motion carried unanimously, 5-0.
- Special note – although all (7) Commissioners were a part of the meeting, by the time voting took place, one Commissioner was absent due to a power outage, and one who needed to leave to attend another meeting, therefore the vote counts appear different.

Committee Reports:

- The Facilities Subcommittee met, had a discussion on Little Lake Federal Harbor of Refuge, as the access and egress area in distress. There has been communication with the United States Army Corp of Engineers regarding funding for taking steps to improve the infrastructure of this site.
- Special Projects Subcommittee members mentioned the boat registration fees are still being discussed and meetings with other entities are being established.

General Updates

- Conversations went on regarding the sailboat races to Mackinac Island. Meetings between interested parties have begun and will continue, to map the best outcome for all. Ron Olson stated that the health, safety, and security of the participants are priority. Meeting guest, Nick Berberian mentioned race registration opens February 1, 2022, a solution is needed as soon as possible for proper communication, as the Chicago Yacht Club Race to Mackinac draws nearly 300 boats, about 2,000 people from all over the world. Commissioners chimed in to say it's important to work with the race community, as it's a culture, a tradition, and the timeliness is critical. Tim Hygh said this is a meaningful experience and limits on rafting will have a negative impact. The Commission unanimously stated they support the event and these types of events, also with the understanding that the race is a unique event, including how it's managed. They encourage DNR staff to continue supporting it. In closing of the conversation Ron stated it's a process, in process and is accepting of the points of view that were brought up. Lastly, Linnae Dawson mentioned preliminary meetings are occurring, and conveyed the DNR is very cognizant of the timeline.

Financial Updates

- Financial information updates were provided to the Commissioners in the meeting packet. Michael Desnoyer provided further details including updates to revenue and expenditures. Revenue for gas tax, boater registrations, and State Harbor reservations were all up over last year.

Operations Updates

- Linnae Dawson provided an Operations update to the Commissioners. Graphs and survey results were provided to the Commissioners in the meeting packet. The graphs depicted transient slip usage for 2021, which resulted in an overall increase from 2020. The Michigan State Harbor Harbor/Marina survey results were displayed in the meeting packet. Surveys were collected between April and September, which resulted in 2,275 responses. Boater satisfaction content all scored over 80%, including that 94% of the boaters would visit again.

Marketing Updates

- Maia Turek mentioned she would present an update at the next meeting.

Project Repots

- The Michigan State Waterways Development Program Project Report was included in each Commissioner's meeting packet for their information.
- Jordan Byelich provided an update to the Commission on State projects. The permit application has been submitted for Port Austin State Harbor. Amending the professional

services contract for final design for repairs and replacements is also being done. Final design and bidding anticipated to take place in 2022, with construction projected for late 2022, or early 2023. Jordan also reported about Lexington State Harbor's multi-phase redevelopment. The first phase for the comfort station will see an expansion to accommodate a boater lounge, staff area, and laundry amenities. Parking lot repairs also part of this phase. This has an anticipated completion date of next summer 2022.

- Paul Petersen provided a quick update to the Commission, noting the community grants have all been sent out, but some are still in process of execution. He also provided updates regarding Marine Safety Grants.

Other

- Commissioner Mary Rising provided a written 2021 year-in-review.
- The 2022 meeting schedule was announced, with February 2, April 29, June 14, August 24, October 5, and December 6 as recommended meeting dates. Virtual meetings will be held until it is safe to resume in-person meetings.

Transmittals

- No transmittals to report.

Great Lakes Water Level Report

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District Great Lakes water level outlook was included in each Commissioner's meeting packet for their information.

Non-Agenda Items

- Chair Barb Brooks mentioned it would be helpful to the newer Commissioners if the Waterways Program Facilities Assessment (2019) was a part of the discussion for the next meeting.

Adjournment

- The meeting adjourned at 2:51 p.m.

The next Michigan State Waterways Commission Meeting: February 2, 2022.