

MINUTES

Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 19, 2018

Location: Belle Isle Nature Center

Meeting: 9:00 a.m.
Quorum reached at 9:35 a.m.
Roll Call and Excused Absences

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Bud Denker

NOT PRESENT

Rev. Lonnie Peek
Sommer Woods

PRESENT FOR BIPAC

Chair Michele Hodges
Bradley Dick
Michael Curis
Bryan Barnhill

DNR STAFF PRESENT

Ron Olson
Damon Owens, LED
Carrie Warren, MDOT
Amanda Treadwell
Jacob Brown
Darlisa Rickman
Kristen Bennett
Deb Jenson
Egypt Burnley
Jacinda Bingoff

APPROVAL FOR EXCUSED ABSENCES

Motion to approve excused absence was approved.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chair Hodges requested approval of the March 15, 2018 meeting minutes. *Mike Curis* moved to approve with *Bryan Barnhill* seconding the motion. Minutes for March 15, 2018 were approved with no corrections.

CONSESSION AND VENDOR UPDATE

Riverside Kayak Connection

Anita Twardesky, Riverside Kayak Connection, gave an overview of upcoming opportunities to come to the Riverside Kayak Connection. Anita shared that Riverside Kayak Connection is ready to take Belle Isle Park to a whole new level with an expansion. The following are new programs and opportunities that are coming:

- Launching a new program that will have youth groups begin at the Coleman A. Young Center and then visit Belle Isle Park to gain experience kayaking in open water.
- Stewardship opportunities that will lead into cleanup efforts on the park.
- Riverside Kayak will be working with the Police Athlete League Pal program to provide kayaking to all the summer camp youth.
- Belle Isle Aquarium: Youth will meet staff, learn about the fish and aquarium maintenance, then follow up with a kayaking session and cleanup effort.
- The Nature Centers day camp will come out and kayak and follow with a cleanup effort.
- Plan of additional tours:
 - Sunset Pointe every Thursday evening. The route will begin at Kayak Beach to Sunset point and back.
 - The most popular paddles will continue; both the Blue Heron Lagoon Tour and the Full Moon Paddle.
 - Paddling from Belle Isle to Wyandotte on the Detroit River.
- Increased classes for canoeing, kayaking, and stand up paddle board classes.
- Currently working with Genevieve Nowak on a “Keep Belle Isle Beautiful One Paddle at a Time” event. Event will occur every 3rd Saturday of each month for a cleanup effort. Event starts with the spring cleanup on April 21, 2018.
- May 19, 2018 the Detroit River Cleanup will be held
- Bi- weekly clean up with volunteer groups.
- Bike Rentals, currently developing a self-guided bike tour created by Michigan State University.

PRESENTATIONS

Trail Updates – Iron Belle Trail

Paul Yauk, State Trails Coordinator, and *Kristen Bennett*, Non-motorized Trail Programming, were present to share with members a status update on the Iron Belle Trail and other trail efforts.

The Iron Belle Trail is designed to connect Detroit to Ironwood, Michigan. The name “Iron Belle” originated from the names of the starting and ending points of the trail. The Iron Belle Trail has been 5 years in the making with 2,200 miles of trail. The southern trail head will begin by the lighthouse, here on Belle Isle and will be starting soon.

The Iron Belle Trail benefits each city it connects, bringing parks to the city and people to the park. In a sense it rejuvenates the towns it extends to, turning formerly old decrepit buildings into restaurants, bars and other economically beneficial facilities for the community.

The trail encompasses over 2,000 miles, touching 48 counties, 83 cities and villages and 240 townships. Today we have a biking and hiking trail in place making the Iron Belle Trail about 63% complete. We hope to be 80% complete sometime next year. We currently have 54 projects under construction. There is a host of projects within the City of Detroit and throughout the State of Michigan that will contribute to making the Iron Belle Trail whole.

(Please see the Iron Belle trail <https://michigantrails.org/trails/featured-trails/iron-belle-trail/> for additional information)

Lake Okonoke Progress Update

Sam Lovall, Friends of the Detroit River, attended today’s meeting to share an update on the Lake Okonoka project. This project will help restore the hydrology of the lake and its habitat. The Lake Okonoka project is simply just the dredging of the lake; which will restore the natural habitat. The Red Bridge that was located there is currently in storage and will be put back in place once dredging is complete. **Mr. Lovall** stated that there have been problems in the past with over flows and we still have some issues when there is heavy rain.

Mr. Lovall, further explained that with the clean water act of 1987 Canada and the United States deemed the Detroit River an “Area of Concern”. Drainage was significantly blocked for a period, Amanda Treadwell is working to study the hydrology of the forest. A slide presentation was shared with the members outlining further details of the project.

GENERAL UPDATES

Proposed By-Law Amendment

Chair Hodges, spoke about the proposed amendment to the by-laws, included in committee members packets. Upon discussion Committee Member, **Barnhill** moved to support a motion to amend the by-laws to reflect the updates presented. Motion was seconded by Committee Member **Curis**, motion was approved unanimously. By-Laws will be updated and posted to the Belle Isle site.

Belle Isle Strategic Management Plan

Debbie Jenson, Park Management Plan Administrator, PRD was present to briefly review the updated Strategic Management Plan. A draft was previously presented in January 2018, followed by public meetings held on February 1, 2018 at the Outdoor Adventure Center. There were some comments about the Grand Prix and others requesting a boat launch. Deb stated that the plan has 65% of the island zoned for recreation.

A few changes were made to some of the language in the plan, explaining what the term “developing” means contrary to what the public thought it meant. Other items mentioned were the rehabilitation of the Aquarium and Conservatory, picnic tables, and reopening of the zoo. Other changes included adding a goal to conduct an analysis of the river shoreline proposed by the Belle Isle Conservancy staff. A bullet was added to consider the boating access feasibility study; the plan does not say yes or no it is just being recognized. The plan now notes the recently signed MOU between the DNR and the BIC. All projects on the island total up to about \$20 million, which is a small portion of the bigger picture. Total project needs on the island are about \$300 million. We ask that the committee review and support what we believe is the final draft.

DNR Law Enforcement Update

Conservation Officer Damon Owens was present, they continue to work in conjunction with Michigan State Police 24/7 to keep the island safe.

Chair Hodges’s stated there was a blue pickup truck driving the wrong way down the nature trail.

Jacob Brown apologized that he was driving down the wrong way; that he was in rush, it will not happen again.

Park Operations Update

Jacob Brown, Belle Isle Park Supervisor, shared the following operational items with the committee.

- Currently somewhat short staffed due to the new rangers attending the Academy. Jacob stated that “In parks we try to do all repairs ourselves”. Quoting **Michael Terrell** Metro District Supervisor, as saying to us rangers, “You are the Yellow Pages”, and we are trying to rise to that expectation.
- The restroom buildings will be back open; now that the weather is getting warmer. They are winterized for the season and do not have heat. Some restroom buildings will need repairs prior to opening.
- Two water main breaks were reported to the City of Detroit.
- Staff have moved back to the White House Administrative Office; the heat is working, and abatement is complete.

- Belle Isle Park is hiring janitorial, maintenance, and cash handler positions. These are seasonal, full time positions. We have begun the interview process. If you know anyone interested please share our contact information, they can call (313) 821-9844 to inquire and apply.
- Spring- Clean up is Saturday April 21, 2018; expecting 900
- Community garden was presented to the Michigan Farm Bureau Association; the garden was located in between the white house and Green Houses. Planning on creating a community garden for everyone to enjoy.

Infrastructure Updates

Amanda Treadwell, Urban Field Planner, provided a written update on the infrastructure projects; the update was included in committee member's packets. A Powerpoint with pictures of some of the projects was also presented.

- **Belle Isle Customer Service Center**
 - The contractor mobilized onsite April 12, 2018, demolition work will be done within the first 30 days. The Belle Isle Conservancy staff will also be located at this location.
- **Athlete Complex**
 - Masonry and roof renovations on handball courts beginning.
 - The fields will not be opened until that lawn is established. The soccer field will have new foam posts.
- **Belle Isle Aquarium and Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory**
The DNR and BIC staff are working closely on this project. Both staffs teamed up to review the modernized life support system at the Toledo Aquarium. They are now working on outlining the operation needs of the aquarium.
- Field work for the Conservatory has been conducted; construction document submission date is May 18, 2018. Phase 2 includes reviewing the upper dome, replacing glass and re-glazing.
- **Wet-Mesic Flatwoods Habitat Restoration Plan** - Public meeting on May 3, 2018 from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.at the Nature Center. Engineering design will be reviewed for public input.

Ron Olson addressed the rumors of a boat launch stating we will not be adding a boat launch to Belle Isle Park.

Upcoming New Projects

- Scott Fountain – ADA accessibility
- Northshore shoreline improvement
- DTE boring the island. Updating the electrical system by 2020.
- MacArthur Bridge - MDOT maintenance

Outreach and Upcoming Events

Darlisa Rickman Event Coordinator

- April 16th Grand Prix load in began
- April 21st Spring Cleanup
- May 5th Coy Festival 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
- May 27th/28th Riverside Kayak Moonlight Kayaking
- May 30th Grand Prix Slow Roll 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
- Spring into Belle Isle 5k at the end of the month begins 10:00 a.m.
- Riverside Kayak hosting demo day at the beach 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

In 2017:

- 221 Weddings Occurred
- 164 Other Special Events

Ron Olson stated we have not received a proposal or request from the Grand Prix to move past this year.

Merrill Cane, Grand Prix Representative, the process for the load in has been reduced about a week. The load out has been reduced by about a month. Other than that, the weather has thrown the crew off a bit. We will also be participating in spring clean-up this Saturday

Michelle added, we are looking forward to Grand Premiere it is a great opportunity to raise funds to keep the Aquarium open and free to the public.

Ron Olson the daffodil luncheon was held yesterday. The Grand Prix will be donating funds to assist with the purchase of additional bulbs to be planted at the front of the bridge on Jefferson. This year's floral display is delayed due to the weather.

Belle Isle Conservancy Update

Chair Hodges reminded the committee of the upcoming “Spring Clean Project” on Saturday, it is expected to be the largest that we have hosted. We will also be launching “Keep Belle Isle Beautiful” created by Genevieve Nowak.

Chair Hodges also shared the following updates below:

- July 11, 2018 Metro Detroit Youth Day
- April 7, 2018 90th Anniversary of the police dispatch station was celebrated
- April 22, 2018 Volunteer Recognition week concluded

Chair Hodges shared that a new volunteer room had opened in the Aquarium. Further suggesting a visit to view the seahorses for Father’s Day. Noting they are the only male specie to give birth.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (3 minutes each)

Michael Betzold Shared his personal connection to Detroit and Belle Isle Park. Feels the Grand Prix is inconsiderate of the island, concrete blocks killing the grass, party tents popped up, etc. Expressed the Grand Prix should not come back past this year. Directly addressed Chair Hodges stating “Michelle, you now admit that the Grand Prix has a negative effect, yet you still say the private-public partnership raises money for the conservancy, if you help get the Grand Prix off the island, myself and others will personally help raise the money you need”. Very angry about the Grand Prix.

Skip Davis Does not support the Grand Prix. Concerned about the construction impact on the bridge, stating that semi-trucks crossing the bridge were not anticipated 100 years ago. Further asking the following questions: How much does it cost to rent the Scott Fountain, the Casino, the western half of the island for 90 days? I will not bring my guests April- June as it is embarrassing.

Mr. Comfort Lake St. Clair Walleye Club. Asked **Ron Olson** if he has received the 4,000 signatures for a boat launch on Belle Isle.

Ron Olson replies yes.

Feels that since boaters pay fees for the boats and gas that they should have a place to launch their boats on the island. Mentions the cyclist and run/walkers shouldn’t have the right to tell people what they can and cannot do on the park.

Mr. Hennessy Reads the Conservancy newsletter. Stated he is amazed at how much must get done and what has been done so far. Feels the island is very beautiful. Questioned “what if the people who donate stop supporting the park, where would the money go and what would happen to the park?”

Scott Carter What is the status of the old zoo? Is it in the Master Plan?

Ron Olson stated yes, it is in the master plan. However, we have projects and infrastructure needs to be completed first and the

funding must be distributed accordingly. Eventually we intend to work on a plan to get that area open.

Betty Roberts

Supporter of the Grand Prix. People come from all over the world to see this race occur here at Belle Isle Park. The money that is brought to the businesses is very helpful to the city.

Regina Kuper

Does not support the Grand Prix. Upset that the island is not accessible during the prime months. What is happening with the Piet Oudolf garden?

Carol Rhodes

Visitors are upset that the race is on the island. Stating that the 27-day reduction is untrue, further stating that MDOT repaved the roads in February for the race and they are using that time as their reduction. Also questioning if there is a website for the Strategic Management Plan? And stating that there should be an email for people who replied to the Strategic Management Plan.

Carri Warren, MDOT, replied that this is incorrect, stating the repaving in February had nothing to with tax dollars or the Grand Prix.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ITEMS

No Committee Member items.

Meeting Concluded:

11:13 a.m.

NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

May 17, 2018

Belle Isle Nature Center

Belle Isle Park

Detroit, MI 48207

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 am.

Approved: _____
Michele Hodges

Ronald A. Olson, Chief

Date: _____