

**MINUTES**

**Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting**

Thursday, June 21, 2018

**Location: Belle Isle Nature Center**

Meeting called to order at 9:05 a.m.  
Roll Call and Excused Absences

**EXCUSED ABSENCES**

No Excused

**PRESENT FOR BIPAC**

Chair Michele Hodges  
Sommer Woods  
Michael Curis  
Bud Denker  
Bryan Barnhill  
Bradley Dick  
Rev. Lonnie Peek

**DNR STAFF PRESENT**

Ron Olson, DNR, PRD  
Scott Pratt, Field OPS, PRD  
Jacob Brown, Belle Isle Park, PRD  
Darlisa Rickman, Belle Isle Park, PRD  
Amanda Hertl, Field OPS, PRD  
Lt. Molnar, DNR, LED

**APPROVAL FOR EXCUSED ABSENCES**

No absences

**REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Motion:** *Chair Hodges* requested approval of the May 17, 2018 meeting minutes. *Bud Denker* moved to approve with *Bradley Dick* seconding the motion. Minutes for May 17, 2018 approved with no corrections.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### ***The Belle Isle Boat House***

**Todd Platt** and **Ryan Abney**, Belle Isle Boat Club, were present. **Todd Platt** explained they are more than a boat house, they are very busy and have a lot of activities on a regular basis.

**Ryan Abney**, Event Manager, has been in that role a year. Events held as a means of generating income for building renovations and enabling community use. They have launched a website for rentals and have had 4,000-5,000 people utilize the space in the last year. Some events hosted in collaboration with the Friends of Detroit Rowing. Another 5,000 people have utilized the space for weddings and private events. All weekends through 2018 are booked; there are some months booked in 2019, and inquiries into 2020. Aside from weddings, they hosted a large event for YELP, even was open to anyone with a YELP account. They also hosted “Detroit Gets Married” event featuring local food and entertainment vendors for those who were interested in getting married in Detroit.

Harvard University expressed interest in possibly hosting an alumni event; as their president is originally from the Metro Detroit area.

**Todd Platt** indicated the club is open to the public involving programs to learn to row, for both youth and adults. On the competitive side our junior rowers compete on a regular basis in the U.S. Rowing Youth Championships. There is also a master’s and veteran’s rowing program; programs at multiple levels. The club is working closely with the DNR to put together a plan to fund a master plan for the boat house. The purpose is to understand how best to address the building restoration.

**Park guest** asked how did the removal of the dilapidated dockage occur?

**Todd Platt** stated we worked closely with the Grand Prix and the Penske organization, who helped clean up those docks.

**Committee member Denker** stated that it helps as people drive into the park and people are parking over there and going to the Grand Prix they are amazed by the improved view.

**Chair Hodges** stated that something the community is interested in is the physical condition of the facility and the future of the boat house.

**Todd Platt** stated that the inside of the building is quite nice; we have many volunteer efforts. There are challenges, as the old pools behind the building that are past their usable life and need to be removed. For example, the site has been vastly cleaned up to allow events to take place on the outside. Unfortunately, all our equipment won’t fit in the building, so it is behind the building and exposed to the elements. Therefore, there is a need to plan to accommodate the uses of the building.

Friends of Detroit Rowing does fundraising to assist in the restoration. We are one of the oldest rowing organizations in the world and we were formed in 1839. We are working closely with the DNR to plan.

**Chair Hodges** asked about the timing of the Master plan project?

**Todd Platt** responded that they are working internally and have a fundraising effort underway to raise a portion of those funds as we are working with the DNR.

**Committee member Peek** asked what the total projected renovation cost is?

**Todd Platt**, we want to go through a detailed process to determine the actual cost estimate.

**Committee member Denker** asked if there is a lot of remediation that must take place as far as asbestos?

**Todd Platt** stated that many issues have been addressed.

**Todd Platt** stated they work very closely with the Grand Prix and we are not affected at all by the Grand Prix event as questioned by a member of the public.

**Chair Hodges** stated that MDOT will be assisting with the restoration of that parking lot.

**Todd Platt** further explained that in exchange for utilizing the lot MDOT will be resurfacing it, for staging for the bridge project, which will help with the overall outside appearance of the site.

**Committee member Barnhill** asked about the resources people can access for community or youth programming?

**Todd Platt** shared the events website is [BelleIsleBoatHouse.com](http://BelleIsleBoatHouse.com) and the rowing website is [DetroitBoatClubCrew.com](http://DetroitBoatClubCrew.com)

### ***Belle Isle 2017 Annual Report***

**Ron Olson** shared that on May 9, 2018 we attended the Detroit City Council meeting and presented the 2017 annual report on Belle Isle. Based on car counts, there were over 4.2 million visitors to the park last year, up from 3.5 million the previous year, as both utilization and visitation continue to grow. Since 2014 between philanthropic giving, grants, and operating budgets about \$42 million has been invested in Belle Isle since 2014. The Lake Okonoka Project is a key project that cost \$5 million alone and will be completed by the end of summer. The Belle Isle Conservancy maintains many partnerships and provide various programs and fundraising.

Such as partnerships with the Detroit Zoo, the Dossin Museum and we will be working closely with the Rowing Club and the Boat Club. There are plans to attempt to repurpose the old Belle Isle Zoo site; that will require extensive planning. The picnic shelters have been renovated and made ADA accessible. Something that was mentioned before but that is still relatively new is the repurposing of the old Internal Affairs building. That will be the future site of the new customer service center and the White House will be repurposed. Engagement with the law enforcement has been very positive on the island involving the Michigan State Police (MSP) and DNR Conservation Officers' regarding park safety. The goal is to have a park that is clean, safe, welcoming and accommodating.

There are still problems with water main breaks and infrastructure issues. Those are some of the highlights of the presentation, the full presentation is available online for perusal at [BelleIslePark.org](http://BelleIslePark.org)

**Chair Hodges** encouraged everyone to view the presentation online. Further thanking the City of Detroit colleagues, expressing a good meeting was had with the City Council. Hodges also thanked **Committee members Bud Denker** and **Rev. Lonnie Peek** for attending the meeting and supporting that conversation.

**Committee member Denker** stated that he thinks it's important to understand \$42 million of investment has been made since the original commitment of ...how much?

**Ron Olson** stated that it was originally said we would commit \$20 million in 3-years, and \$42 million has been committed in that same amount of time.

**Committee member Denker** stated that it's a real gift and thinks it's important to not just know where the money is but to be able to properly execute putting the dollars into action. **Denker** further noted that park visitation has increased by double digits again and wanted to know how that compares on an overall state park basis?

**Ron Olson** explained that the gross total of visitation is more than any of the state parks, however, the level of growth and attendance over the last 3 years is also greater than any other park.

**Committee member Dick** shared that attendance at City of Detroit parks is up too. Stating it's hard to track the attendance of 300 parks; we track it by trash collection.

Trash collection is way up and I think it is reflective of what is going on in Detroit. The City has added 4 new trash collection crews this year and they are already running on overtime. People are feeling good about the City of Detroit and it is reflective in Belle Isle and in the City.

**Committee member Peek** asked if we are counting based upon trash?

**Committee member Curis** stated that as a comparison, we see all the money spent on the stadiums downtown we now draw more people on this island than all of them combined.

**Chair Hodges** further stated that we are the top visited state park in the country.

## **GENERAL UPDATES**

**Ron Olson**, Chief, DNR gave a brief update regarding the status of the Grand Prix. **Olson** shared that at this time no request to extend the Grand Prix on Belle Isle has been received. When and if that occurs, an evaluation will be done, and a presentation made at the BIPAC meeting. **Olson** further stated that the track will no longer be stored on the island, and the area will be returned to a usable condition.

The Grand Prixmiere that is sponsored by Chevrolet and others has generated \$1.1 million this year.

**Chair Hodges** can give an overview of how those funds will be allocated.

**Chair Hodges** stated that a very successful partnership on Friday night of the Grand Prix weekend at The Grand Prixmiere with the Penske Grand Prix team and many corporate supporters. That money enables the Aquarium to stay open and free to the public.

The overhead for the Aquarium is about 500,000 annually. The additional money this year will be dedicated to the Scott Fountain as well as many other significant needs on the island.

These public/private partnerships help us protect and advance important resources like Belle Isle. We are wise to the various issues and we know the importance of managing those public/private partnerships and making sure any negative impact is minimized so the positive outcome can be maximized. If there is a proposal submitted, we will evaluate and make a judgement that will be sure to maintain balance. Thank you to our supporters for enabling and empowering us to be good stewards of the island and the park. We had about 600 people present and passionate about the park at The Grand Premiere.

**Committee Peek** asked what was your original projection?

**Chair Hodges** replied that \$400,000-500,000 was budgeted.

**Ron Olson** stated that Chevrolet was a great partner that helped to organize that event.

**Committee Denker** further stated that yes, they are a great partner, it was a great evening with a great spirit for the park. **Denker** explained that it took 6 weeks to get the Scott Fountain flowing this year, but it was a labor of love. We are also grateful for the partnership with DTE, Robert Carpenter is great.

**Ron Olson** shared that Scott Fountain has approximately \$500,000 of immediate repairs needed, which is very basic things essential to the operation of the fountain.

**Scott Pratt** stated that the fountain is off right now and runs from 12:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. It is not in operation if there are high winds.

**Jacinda Bingoff** stated that sometimes the sump pump goes out, so if you don't see it on that may be an issue. If there are thunderstorms it will not be operating at that time either.

**Chair Hodges** shared that during the Grand Premiere tours were given to potential donors. It will take \$5- \$10 million to fully restore the fountain where it is not constantly in crisis mode.

**Ron Olson** shared that our entire budget for Belle Isle is \$1 million for capital improvements, so you can see how impossible it is to take \$500,000 from operations and invest in one project. So, partnerships are crucial.

**Chair Hodges** asked **Ron Olson** to mention anything about the restoration and the move out, so the public are aware of where we are at with that?

**Ron Olson** stated that most is moved out and that the Verizon tower stays here until the fireworks are over on Monday. There are very few remnants left on the island, and currently the process of restoring the turf is underway.

**Committee member Curis** stated that we have everything pretty much off the island faster than we ever have.

**Committee member Peek** asked what the buildup time is?

**Committee member Curis** stated that we got on and off the island in 65 days.

### **DNR Law Enforcement Update**

**DNR Law Enforcement, Michigan State Police and U.S. Border Patrol**

- Memorial Day afternoon closure due to overcrowding. It has been hot, and people flood the beach area and emergency vehicles cannot get through.
- During Grand Prix there were no issues, traffic flow was normal.
- There was media regarding the assault and battery at the beach, but it was the result of the heat and rising tempers.
- If you are parked illegally you are either ticketed or towed.

**Ron Olson** stated that closures are more typical for other parks especially on holiday weekends when the weather is good, it is rare for Belle Isle to close. There were 12 other parks including Belle Isle that had to close. Closures are about safety and capacity.

**Committee member Dick** stated that the paper reached out for a quote and they confirmed that the City has closed the park on several occasions because of overcrowding, it's usually due to heat and overcrowding of the island.

**Lt. Michael Shaw (MSP)** responded that the bridge was closed to vehicle traffic we did still allow foot traffic across the bridge.

**Ron Olson** stated that public transportation, bicycle and foot traffic was still allowed into the park.

**Committee member Denker** asked if this will be the same process for allowing people into the park for fireworks of 2:00 p.m.?

**Lt. Shaw** replied that an officer is posted on the bridge to let in staff; there are a lot of events going on the night of the fireworks.

**Committee member Peek** asked to be talked through the protocol for park closure.

**Lt. Shaw** explained that we close the bridge to oncoming traffic and try allowing cars to get off the island, to better allocate traffic and relieve the crowded areas. Troopers, DNR Law Enforcement and DNR Parks and Recreation staff work together in the park to clear fire lanes and people that parked illegally and allow people to get out.

Once we accomplish that we allow people on the island again. Also, the Yacht Club members if they provided credentials, we allowed access to the park.

**Scott Pratt** stated that the opening on fireworks day will be publicized and further commented that the officers were meeting ahead of time to get a great game plan in place for that day.

**Committee member Denker** - Great Job everybody.

**Ron Olson** mentioned St. Mary's of Michigan, Field Neuroscience Institute, is running a partnership with McDonalds. What they want to do is promote safety by encouraging to wear bike helmets and doing things safely. They provided cards to distribute that are good for a treat at McDonalds, so I wanted to give these to you so if you come across kids who are being safe. Give to kids "Caught doing something right".

**Chair Hodges:** We do continue to get complaints most recently from the Yacht Club about the one-way roads so obviously that has a high potential negative impact on public safety and I would really urge you to address that and get some solutions in place because we keep hearing that concern repeatedly.

***Lt. Molnar, DNR-Law Enforcement (LED):*** We are still working in conjunction with MDOT.

***Chair Hodges*** I just think there is some urgency there so even if there is a temporary solution put in place just to make sure we don't have a loss of life.

### **Park Operations Update**

***Jacob Brown*** provided the following update:

- We are still hiring summer workers to fill the vacancies.
- There are now food trucks on the island and a concession stand on Kids Row
- Summer Youth Employment Programs will begin soon: The Police Cadets, Youth Connection, Healthy Kids and Growing Detroit's Young Talent
- Working on procuring blinds for the Flynn Pavilion to better accommodate users.

***Committee member Sommer Woods*** asked the following questions: Did the food truck vendors go through the same process as other vendors on the island? When were those bids put out? How was it bid out? You just post on the website is that it? I guess that was a question before with the vendors in general. Seasonal opportunities are those listed online?

***Jacob Brown*** responded that there were two solicitations, the first time was in March and then it was put out to bid a second time. We posted it to the website, we had perhaps 15 people show up to the pre-bid meeting to see the brick and mortar building on Kids Row and possible other spots. At that point no one bid on it and then it got sent out again for bid. The vendors are listed online or available at the White House Administrative Office for more information.

***Chair Hodges*** stated that the Belle Isle Conservancy can be helpful in this area, we all have relationships within the community and if these things are shared more proactively at the BIPAC meetings we can forward those opportunities out to our networks.

***Sommer Woods*** further asked if the employment opportunities are on the DNR website or the Friends of Belle Isle Website? I work with over a thousand young people.

***Chair Hodges*** responded yes and on social media.

***Jacob Brown*** stated it is on the Facebook page.

***Rev. Lonnie Peek*** stated he was surprised you all are still hiring, next time just let us know sooner.

***Chair Hodges:*** Karis has brought up hiring in the past I guess it's something we can just act on sooner.

### **Infrastructure Updates**

Update included in committee members packet.

## **Outreach and Upcoming Events**

***Darlisa Rickman*** shared the following:

Belle Isle hosted approximately 250 weddings at designated venues throughout the park. In addition, an additional 150 plus special events were hosted. Other items of interest include:

- June 24, 2018 Music on Belle Isle “MObig” is how they are known. They will be performing a series of concerts on Sunday afternoons. For more information visit their website [MObigmusic.org](http://MObigmusic.org)
- June 24, 2018 At Sunset Point the Ferndale Community Concert Band plays at 2:00 p.m.
  - In the future they will be on the grassy area near the Bandshell and they are raising money to refurbish the Bandshell. Some Sundays 2 groups will play, with the second group performing at 4:00 p.m.
- June 25, 2018 Belle Isle Park opens at 2:00 p.m. for the “Ford Fireworks”
- July 1, 2018 Live concert series starts
- July 6, 2018 Street naming ceremony for Edward Deeb
- July 8, 2018 The MObig concert
- July 11, 2018 Metro Youth Day runs from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- July 16, 2018 Kite Festival from 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
- July 26, 2018 MObig concert
- July 29, 2018 MObig concert

***Committee member Woods*** stated she approves of the diversity that the events scheduled expresses and is curious if there were any public relations done to credit that diversity. ***Woods feels*** there is still a perception of the island that may not reflect the true array of the events that are taking place.

***Chair Hodges*** said she would note that concern and cited Brittany as being aware and that the Conservancy was working on a campaign to address that.

***Darlisa Rickman*** added that she asked if the Grand Prix was the only entity that used the paddock. ***Rickman*** shared that events that are 400 people and up are staged on the Paddock, it is not exclusively for Grand Prix use.

***Committee member Woods*** stated that these are very important points to the diverse quality of life and should be referenced when we think about how we present the park and how we are “branding” the Island.

***Chair Hodges*** asked how many family reunions we’re doing a year?

***Darlisa Rickman*** stated that they have not been tracked, most family reunions take place at picnic shelters and are not considered special events. Shelters are usually booked for the entire season especially Friday, Saturday and Sunday because you need to rent a year in advance or typically you won’t have much luck.

***Chair Hodges*** stated that it’s good to see that tradition continue.

## **Belle Isle Conservancy Update**

*Chair Hodges* introduced the Founder and Chair of the Belle Isle Conservancy Board of Directors, Sarah Earley. Other staff present today were Kate Beebe, Brittany Rhodes and Danielle Jackson.

The Aquarium will hold the “Deeper Dive” on August 16, 2018 from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. with a Congo theme. Also, on August 16, 2018 the Belle Isle Park Advisory committee will hold their evening meeting from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. Other events of interest are:

- September 11, 2018      The Garden Party
- August 11, 2018        Celebration of the Aquariums birthday
- October 11, 2018       Polish the Jewel Luncheon

*Chair Hodges* also thanked Revered Lonnie Peek for featuring the “Keep Belle Isle Beautiful Program” on Live in the D.

*Chair Hodges* stated she enjoyed traveling to Lansing for the Michigan State Parks Advisory Committee, where the Belle Isle Strategic Management Plan was formally adopted

*Chair Hodges* addressed the issue with Channel One, a vendor, due to the potential for legal action she couldn’t comment other than to say we will continue to follow up.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS** (3 minutes each)

**Al Lukas:**                      Heavily in favor of the Grand Prix’s presence on the Island.

**Tommy Doner:**                We are very fortunate to have this world class event in Detroit Michigan. The revenue that this event has brought to the City of Detroit is tremendous. As we all know the City of Detroit was bankrupt. We also need to consider the vast improvements to Belle Isle that continues. Let’s keep this world class event in Detroit. I’m sure many cities throughout the U.S. would love to have this event.

**Donald Green:**                The promotor of the Grand Prix’s donation of funds to purchase public safety vehicles for the City of Detroit is a quid pro quo arrangement for use of Belle Isle as a racetrack. This is a stupid excuse. Public funds used by the Grand Prix of the business improvement zone is unethical.

**Tanagra Weaver:**            Life-long Detroit resident (21 yrs. lower eastside) and user of Belle Isle. As a youth we skated and visited the zoo, beach and aquarium. As an adult I have held 2 family reunions on the island, trained for my first 2 ½ marathons, spent lunchtime from my nearby employer on the island, rode bikes and did snowshoeing with my husband, golfed at the former golf course and volunteered for the Grand Prix 22 yrs. Now being retired I will join Rev. Peek’s workers as a board member for “Challenge the Wind” youth sailing and will be based at the Belle Isle Boat House each July and August.

**Rick Demayo:**                 Supports DNR’s approval of the Detroit Grand Prix Permit.

- Gary Andrusiak:** Pro Detroit Grand Prix.
- Betty Roberts:** For the record: Is a stalwart supporter of the Grand Prix for many of the economic, social and educational impacts. She is a huge fan! Would like to say thank you to the Grand Prix presenters!
- Angela Disante:** Belle Isle is no place for a racetrack! The island is for the citizens of Detroit. Grand Prix attendance does not add money or benefits to the citizens of Detroit or their enjoyment of the park. Feels that the Grand Prix destroys the beauty of the island for almost 2 months every summer!
- Judy Booth:** Grand Prix and Marriott have partnered for years. Would like to see Grand Prix stay.
- Debbie Stefanides:** Feels the venue on Belle Isle is great for the City of Detroit. The improvements that the race has put into the island would not have happened if not for the race. Example: Scott Fountain, the Casino improvements, bridge work etc. Would like to keep the race here feels that it brings in a lot of money for the island and for the City of Detroit.
- Trifun Dimitrijeviski:** Supports the Grand Prix on Belle Isle.
- Ed Weglarz:** Fully supports the Grand Prix.
- Deborah Alrutz:** Wants to keep the Grand Prix on Belle Isle it provides an improved image and financial support of Belle Isle.
- Robert Cleveland:** Through sponsorship and partnership the Grand Prix brings economic success and visibility to Detroit and small businesses; exposing thousands of SE Michigan residents to these benefits. His 15-yr. old son loved the Grand Prix.
- Niquole McNeill:** First year as a volunteer and her mom did it for years before she passed, and she would like to continue to carry on her tradition. Had a very good and enjoyable experience and would like to stay on as a permanent figure for the Grand Prix.
- Ade Oba Abdalla:** Feels very emotional about the Grand Prix being on the island. Suffered through many health issues and working for the Grand Prix helped him to “walk through the valley of the shadow of death”. Only sees benefits to the Grand Prix.
- Kevin Hennessey:** The public/private partnership with the Grand Prix is not the only way that improvements can be made. Would like for the implication that the Grand Prix is solely responsible for all the improvements to stop. 65 days is more than 1/5 of the year but the Grand Prix is here during one of the most beautiful times of the year.
- Armanie Lindsey:** Had a great experience working for the Grand Prix and feels it is an asset. Member of the Detroit Job Corps.

- Gary Callender:** Would like to keep the Grand Prix feels there are too many advantages to Detroit and the island to list.
- Regina Kuper:** The survey done by “Curbed Detroit” shows that more people want the Grand Prix off the island.
- Carol Rhoades:** The Scott Fountain is a historic structure and it should not have been disrespected by the race car driver wading in the fountain. Feels he should be fined.
- Kevin Haynes:** In full support of the Grand Prix, had a great experience with his son. Senate director of the Detroit Job Corps. Had a couple of different perspectives all positive.
- Skip Davis:** A member of Belle Isle Concerned. Concerned about the impact of Grand Prix on Belle Isle. We are not against the race we are against the race occupying and monopolizing our beautiful park.
- Larry Alcantar:** In favor of maintaining Belle Isle as a site for Grand Prix
- Frank Hines:** Does not wish to speak but represents the Michigan Regional Counsel of Carpenters.
- Michael Betzold:** Would like to make a public request for the DNR to reveal their process for evaluating the new contract for the Grand Prix.

## **COMMITTEE MEMBER ITEMS**

- Sommer Woods** For the record, considering being brought into the equation due to a comment during the public comment section. Asserted that she lives across the street from Belle Isle and is clearly a City of Detroit resident and avid user of the island at least 3 to 4 times a week and sometimes every day. In response to the implication that she has been bought out she is unapologetic about being a Detroiter, a woman of color and a park user. In the space of the conversation of the use of the park, it is important to have more than one narrative not just one of privilege.
- Rev. Lonnie Peek** Particularly moved by the narrative of the family aspect of Belle Isle which was very prevalent and the theme of the continuation of legacy. Was not appreciative of some of the erroneous and negative statements that were presented as facts by some of the commenters.
- Bud Denker** Would like to say thank you to everyone for coming out and for the presentation of the Boat House. Would like to thank Jake and Amanda and the staff that give their blood, sweat and tears everyday on Belle Isle. Appreciative of the efforts and support.

**Chair Hodges**

Would like to say thank you to everyone and expressed sympathy for Sommers personal loss. No question that the peers on the panel serve with their intellect and passion, heart and soul. Appreciates having the opportunity to serve with the panel and look forward to future successes.

**Motion to Adjourn**

Moved: Bud Denker

Seconded: Lonnie Peek

Meeting Concluded 11:35 a.m.

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING:**

**July 13, 2018** 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 am.

Belle Isle Park - Belle Isle Boat House

E. Picnic Way

Detroit, MI 48207

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michele Hodges

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ronald A. Olson, Chief

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