

# MINUTES

## Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, February 20, 2020

Location: Nature Center

**Meeting called to order at 9:04 a.m.**

A Quorum was established at 9:20 a.m.

### **EXCUSED ABSENCES**

Brad Dick

### **UNEXCUSED ABSENCES**

Bryan Barnhill

### **PRESENT FOR BIPAC**

Chair, Michele Hodges

Michael Curis

Bud Denker

Rev. Lonnie Peek

Sommer Woods

### **DNR STAFF PRESENT**

Ron Olson, Chief

Michael Terrell

Karis Floyd

Darlisa Rickman

Kimberley Hicks

Shaun Cabral

Matthew Krupansky

Lt. Todd Szyska

### **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Approval of Minutes for January 16, 2020:**

Moved by: Michael Curis

Seconded by: Rev. Lonnie Peek

**Motion to approve excused absence for Brad Dick**

Moved by: Michael Curis

Seconded by: Bud Denker

## **General Updates**

Michele Hodges gave an overview of the Belle Isle Conservancy Advisory board of 7 members. Appointments are made by the Mayor and Governor. Originally the committee was to meet every other month however, the committee decided to meet every month.

### **Ron Olson, Karis Floyd, and Michele Hodges**

Presented the PowerPoint that was presented at the Detroit City Council meeting last week. Reminded people the ownership of the park and the lease and continuing collaboration with MDOT of the McArthur Bridge. DNR law enforcement and Michigan State Police law enforcement would share a collaboration of law enforcement/policing the park. Great Lakes water authority and the water intake on the east end and some other pumping systems that they have for the Detroit water system. To date nearly \$75 million has been invested in operating and improving Belle Isle Park.

## **Park Updates**

### **Karis Floyd, DNR Park Manager**

- Hiring 2 full time rangers and 1 seasonal ranger.
- Promotional agent to be hired to assist in the Events office.
- Interviewing for Janitors this coming Tuesday (2/25/2020).
- Michigan Conservation Officers, how is the relationship – improved 1000% since we've been on the island.
- Reviewed the status of the Okonoka restoration project. Culvert being put in so the road can be rebuilt.
- The procurement purchase of the coffer dam to help flooding going on. \$100,000 investment. The culvert will open up the river into Lake Okonoka. Dam will block the water.
- We had pre-bid meeting for Iron Bell Trail. Hoping to get some good bids back on that project.
- Oudolf Garden work has started to put in the garden.

### **Michele Hodges, Belle Isle Conservancy**

The Belle Isle Aquarium is a catalyst on the island. Its visitorship continues to grow. The old, outdated water slide has been removed and redesigned to become a splash park which is a later phase \$10-15 million project. An early phase of the project is a veranda to eat and drink.

Volunteerism is important to the park. Volunteers involved in cleanup and 4,500 pounds of trash taken out of the canals. Importance of community engagement.

### **Ron Olson, DNR Parks and Recreation Chief**

The state held a high water summit on February 10, 2020 that involved 100 representatives including state departments, Army Corps of Engineers, NOLA, Coast Guard, municipals, township and county associations. The purpose was to obtain updates on the current and projected high water on the great lakes and other related water issues. The projections are for

great lakes water levels to exceed 2019 levels by at least 12 inches. This depends upon winter evaporation rates. The actual levels will be better known by late April and May of this year.

The Lake Okonoka restoration project will conclude. An inflatable “coffer” dam will be installed on the east inlet of the park to block rising Detroit river water and deflect it from entering the park canals. The 3 internal pumping systems will be renovated to insure all are operating at full capacity. The Detroit Grand Prix will donate the repair costs for one of the three pumps. These will be updated immediately.

The new culvert installed on the south side of the park for an outlet to the river for fish passage will not be opened until the water levels recede. These measures are predicted to help reduce the canal flooding. The risk remains that if the main river channel rises sufficiently it could spill over the break walls and could flood areas of the park. More updates will follow as spring approaches.

### **Outreach and Upcoming Events**

#### **Darlisa Rickman, Belle Isle Events Office**

- The following are shelter status due to high water impacts. Shelters that are not reservable at this time:
  - Shelter 1 to be demolished – approval pending
  - Shelter 10 & 11 off due to flooding
  - Shelter 14 & 15 off due to flooding
  - Shelters on woodside off due to flooding
  - Shelters 16,17, 18 were torn down but plan underway to build two new shelters, however, due to heavily saturated grounds construction is delayed
  - Shelter19 was removed and the new shelter has not been built yet and 20 is scheduled to be removed and to be re-built this year
- Four added park spaces are able to be reserved to replace shelter areas closed due to flooding issues.
- The annual vendor open house will be held April 20 from 3 - 5 p.m.
- B.R.AK.E.S. Teen Driving Program April 3 - 5 with Grand Prix for teens.
- Tree Giveaway, April 18, time TBD, Partnership with Greening of Detroit, Detroit Pistons and the DNR (at the White House area).
- Grand Prix will begin their load in on Monday, April 20 at 12:00 a.m.
- Great global clean up on April 25, with hundreds of attendees and volunteers expected from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also celebrating Earth Day’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- June 22 is the Detroit fireworks. Bridge access to the park will be shut down until 2 p.m. for vehicular traffic. Park users can always walk or ride their bikes prior to 2 p.m.
- July 12 is the annual kite festival 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Music on Belle Isle every Sunday at Sunset Point 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. (MOBIG)

## **DNR Law Enforcement Update**

### **Lt. Todd Szyska**

- Attempted suicide involving a 17-year-old male was successfully stopped by Park Ranger, Shaun Cabral.
- A person rode their 4-wheel drive vehicle off road by the wetlands near the light house. The vehicle was towed and individual ticketed. Ground was damaged.
- Preparations for spring operations will increase the staff for season.
- BIPAC members asked about the rescue. Park Ranger Cabral explained the situation and how he stopped the 17-year-old male attempting suicide off the bridge.

## **Belle Isle Conservancy Update**

### **Chair Michelle Hodges**

- Bees are beneficial. Highlighted the importance of pollinators.
- Annual Daffodil Day scheduled for April 15, 2020 at the Yacht Club.
- Happy Little Trees 5K, April 17 – 26, 2020. Sign up online.
- Koi Fest is May 3, 2020.
- Deeper Dive at Aquarium on June 26, 2020.
- Exhibit at Aquarium for Black History Month.
- Metro Detroit Youth Day is July 8, 2020.
- Polish the Jewel fundraiser this year at the Roostertail on October 15, 2020.
- Grand Prixmiere May 29, 2020 fundraiser event by the Detroit Grand Prix.
- Meeting with Director of DNR on Monday.
- Patrick Livingston meet with the Conservancy and will meet soon with the DNR team regarding ideas for the paddock.

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

### **Michael Betzold**

“Here’s some of what I’ll remember besides spectacular sunrises and glimpses of coyote and deer in the five years since I started riding my bike here most mornings. I’ll never forget how the emergency manager over objection of elected city council confiscated Belle Isle for the Republican administration in Lansing. How the state police then began to pull over Detroiters for driving while black and ticket them for not paying entrance fee to a park that had always been free to city residents. How racist supporters of the Grand Prix came to public meetings and characterized this place as a “shithole” until Roger Penske leaned it up. How this committee was constituted almost entirely of those tied to Penske to make sure his will was always carried out. How meetings are run to make sure the public has no meaningful voice in the park management. How the fragile ecosystem of the wet mesic flatwoods was flooded the past year due to a misguided habitat improvement project conceived in ignorance of the water level cycle of the Great Lakes. How the trees have sat in water a

full year because the State didn't exercise careful oversight and good stewardship. How I have come to know the other Detroiters who walk on Belle Isle before dawn year-round. The millions of dollars the State has spent on projects, some of them needed and some of them questionable where things would have been better left as they were, yet the bathrooms somehow must be closed all winter and not even well maintained in the summer. So that those of us who brave all kinds of weather because we love this beautiful place have no place to go if we need a restroom."

Questions: Will any of the park benches be repaired? Karis responded that the DNR is in the process of repairing benches and tables as many have been repaired or replaced.

Where will minutes be posted? Chief Olson responded that the minutes are posted online on the DNR Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee page. Michigan.gov/dnr

Sommer Woods inquired about the status of vendors in the park and the alternatives to flooded gathering areas. Karis Floyd responded they are working with a lot of minority black vendors and trying to get more minority vendors to come out to the park. There are over 25 vendors, many Detroit based.

Bud Denker inquired about status and plans for high water impacts to the park.

Chief Olson said the Happy Little virtual 5K has over 16,000 registrations and will bring in over \$600,000 in funding. Proceeds to go toward tree planting efforts in parks.

**COMMITTEE MEMBER ITEMS**

**Motion to Adjourn:**

**Moved by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Seconded by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Meeting Concluded: 10:47 a.m.**

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING:**

**March 19, 2020**

Belle Isle Nature Center

Belle Isle Park

Detroit, MI 48207

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

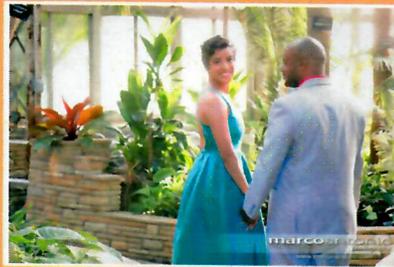
Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Michele Hodges Ronald A. Olson, Chief

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



*You are cordially  
invited to attend an  
Open House  
at the Belle Isle Park Casino*

Belle Isle Park  
Event Office  
99 Pleasure Drive  
Detroit, MI  
48207  
(313) 821-9851



A Recreation Passport\*  
is required for  
Belle Isle Park.

If you are planning a wedding, looking for a venue or in need of wedding vendors this open house is just for you!

Come tour the facility, meet Belle Isle Park staff and talk with prospective vendors:



**Sunday, March 29, 2020  
3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**Reservation Required . . .**

**Go to [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com), search for Belle Isle Park ~ Wedding Vendor Open House and reserve your spot today.**

For additional information, contact Darlisa Rickman at (313) 821-9851 or email [Rickmand@michigan.gov](mailto:Rickmand@michigan.gov).

\*A Recreation Passport grants vehicle access to any Michigan state park, boat launch, state forest campground or non-motorized state trailhead parking. Residents can purchase the Passport for just \$11.00 (\$12.00 effective March 1, 2020) at the time of Michigan license plate renewal through Secretary of State. Forgot to check "YES" during renewal? Residents and nonresidents can purchase a Recreation Passport window sticker during regular business hours at state parks. Learn more about how the Recreation Passport supports state parks, local outdoor recreation opportunities, historic and cultural sites at [www.michigan.gov/recreationpassport](http://www.michigan.gov/recreationpassport).