

MINUTES

Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, August 20, 2020

Location: Teleconference

Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m.

A Quorum was established at 6:04 p.m.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Brad Dick

Approval of excused absences:

Moved by: Bud Dunker

Seconded by: Michael Curis

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

Bryan Barnhill

PRESENT FOR BIPAC

Chair, Michele Hodges

Lonnie Peek

Sommer Woods

Michael Curis

Bud Denker

DNR STAFF PRESENT

Ron Olson, Chief

Karis Floyd

Scott Pratt

Amanda Treadwell

Michael Terrell

Darlisa Rickman

Barbara Graves

Mia Moore

OTHERS PRESENT

Bill Shreck, MDOT

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of Minutes for July 16, 2020:

Moved by: Bud Denker

Seconded by: Sommer Woods

Michele Hodges called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

GENERAL UPDATES

Ron Olson, Chief, DNR-PRD

We are still under the governor's Executive Order that has been extended to September 5. Event requirements remain in place; no events over 100 people, and if less than 100 people require an adherence to social distancing guidelines and a COVID plan. There have been unprecedented high day use attendance numbers throughout the state park system, in particular at Belle Isle. Overcrowding has caused some closures. The Army Corps of Engineers believes the water levels around the state will peak in September and expectations are that the levels will start to drop all around the Great Lakes next spring. The state went through budget adjustments for the current fiscal year 2020, which ends September 30. The good news is that the Belle Isle general funding was not cut in the current round of reductions, so we were able to restart necessary projects. We were granted an exemption to hire 1,300 short term workers statewide and were able to fill 83% of the vacancies, however, some staff are now leaving to go off to college. We are working on things to try to help the system itself, and with Belle Isle we are working on some alternative ways to make sure we can keep the park maintained. Littering has been a problem statewide but as gotten a little better. We had quick action and great teamwork from staff who saved an individual who was suicidal.

Karis Floyd, Park Manager, Belle Isle and Milliken

We are still in the process of hiring staff to get through the remainder of the season. A proposal was submitted to Healthy Kids and if approved would provide about 12 – 14 individuals to help with litter pick up, mowing and restrooms. We have 14 staff currently and have lost a few folks due to concern with COVID-19. There is a new vendor in place at the athletic complex who are doing a great job of mowing and getting it ready. The coffer dam was completed within two days and they are very happy with it. The pumps are running daily and so far, so good. The Scott Fountain has some electrical issues and an electrician will be sought to fix it. Thank you to the MDOT crew who have completed the splitting of Riverbank which is working nicely with traffic flow. The new supervisor, Darren Swan, will start on Monday. Darren comes from Island Lake Recreation Area and has been a long-time ranger. He will be working out of class until the position is filled on a permanent basis.

Chair Hodges said that Darren will be filling the position that was vacated by Jacob Brown who went to the western side of the state to be closer to family. Jacob was a part of the original Belle Isle team and was very proud of his position. He will be a great loss. She would like to invite Jacob to a future meeting to acknowledge him and thank him for his service.

Amanda Treadwell, PRD Planner, Southeast Michigan

Belle Isle Infrastructure Update (attached). The coffer dam was installed as of last Friday. With flooding under control several construction contracts may continue, including road maintenance contracts, Lake Okonoka Habitat Restoration and the Wet-Mesic Flatwood restoration and recreational improvements. The Sawmill roof replacement is to begin August 24, 2020. Project completion scheduled for October 2020. The Iron Belle trailhead and trail development project

is anticipated to start this fall with Phase 1 completion in April 2021. The Mesic Flatwoods restoration project pre-bid walk through was this week and main restoration activities scheduled for completion from March 2021 – December 2021. Contract will include invasive species monitoring. The 50% physical assessment of the band shell was reviewed this week and in September they will have cost estimates for that building. The Conservatory ADA garden access construction documents are to be completed by the end of this summer. The Oudolf Garden project is moving along, and the planting beds will be ready for planting the last week in August. The Aquarium geothermal feasibility study report was reviewed in April. The final HVAC feasibility report is due August 28. The consultants will review ventilation needs with the report. The Stewardship unit put together and submitted a package to the State Historic Preservation Office requesting that we remove the newsboy shelter. Historic pieces will be salvaged, if possible.

Belle Isle Conservancy Update

Chair Hodges introduced Ayo Thomas, who has been with the Conservancy for a year and has really made a wonderful contribution and is working to ensure a lot of the initiatives stay solid and in line, including the events they have had to pivot due to COVID. The Garden Party will be held virtually September 15. Polish the Jewel luncheon will be October 15 in a virtual setting. She thanked the Grand Prix for their sponsorship. Sommer Woods will host the event and she thanked Sommer for her ongoing commitment. They continue to expand their programming. They have partnered with Great Lakes Now to hold Facebook live programs. They are working on an after Labor Day reopen date for the Aquarium. They will be organizing “Trash Talks” for September, composed of a panel of park experts throughout the city to discuss mitigating the littering issue realized statewide. Jefferson East Inc. has released their master plan; details are on their website. The Dossin will be doing a ribbon cutting on August 29 for its new campus. Palmer and Rouge parks are doing some great on-line content, including butterfly walks. Belle Isle has been given the honor to host a memorial ride on August 31 to honor those who have lost their lives from the pandemic. At 8:45 a.m. on that day, the community is being asked for 15 minutes to ring bells, and for the first time ever the Dossin bell will be rung.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Michael Betzold - Under the terms of its lease, the DNR should be insuring Detroiters access to all of Belle Isle all year long. Belle Isle and Milliken State Park are the only state parks in this majority black city. Thousands of citizens depend on Belle Isle daily for their physical and mental health. Throughout this pandemic, Belle Isle has become even more essential to the public health of Detroiters than it's always been. But this summer, when this vital refuge was needed more than ever, much of the island has been inaccessible due to flooding. Many of the park's restroom facilities have been closed. Trash is everywhere. Parking spaces are scarce. During the last five months, I've visited many other parks in southeast Michigan—state parks, metroparks, county parks, city parks. At all of these, trash was picked up and the bathrooms were clean and open. Some of the parks bordered Great Lakes waterways and tributaries, but they were not widely flooded despite the record high water levels. Let's look at the DNR's record as steward of Belle Isle. During the initial years of the lease, Detroiters for the first time had to pay a fee to visit this park. They were too often stopped for the offense of driving while black on the

same island where for generations they'd held family reunions. Many Detroiters simply stopped coming and have never returned. This summer, many folks who tried to visit Belle Isle found the island was closed because parking spaces were filled on hot days. When the park was needed the most as a public health resource, it was not available. Why? Because the state never monitored the federal grant that allowed the opening of Blue Heron Lagoon and Lake Okonoka to high water pushed by east winds off Lake St. Clair. Even a cursory overview of that project would have raised concerns: it's no big secret that great lakes water levels are cyclical. Throughout its stewardship, the state has continued to allow access to the park to be curtailed for months each spring so a billionaire can hold an auto race. This use of the island directly violates the DNR's own stated mission. The CEO of the billionaire's company sits on this "advisory committee." The salary of the committee's chair and the budget for her stewardship organization that runs the park's popular conservatory and aquarium are both ransomed to the billionaire's demands. Park users have no seat on this body and no say in what happens here. The only possible conclusion from this record is that the health and well-being of Detroiters ranks far down on the list of priorities for the park's leaseholder. Why is that the case? Why can't the state do the basic work of maintaining this park for the public? Our governor has declared systematic racism a public health crisis. Is there another plausible explanation for the state's performance other than putting the interests of the rich and powerful above the interests of people who desperately needs this precious space as a refuge? The current contract allows the DNR to extend the Grand Prix for two years after 2021 without a public hearing. If the contract is extended after all that's happened this year, you all share responsibility for further irrevocable damage to the public health of Detroiters.

Gordon Didier – Wants to thank Scott, the DNR and the MDOT staff for their very responsive implementation of the two-way traffic on Riverbank Road.

Amy Greene, Belle Isle Nature Center – Thanks staff for the Riverbank Road arrangement. The Belle Isle Nature Center has been in communication with others on the island and they do not have a reopening date yet either. They were invited by MSU to participate in a statewide Bioblitz where people could take pictures with their phone of all the living things they saw. It was exciting because it is the first time Belle Isle has been asked to participate. She is happy to report that they came in first place. They had to celebrate their annual Bee Fest virtually. You can enjoy these events on their website.

Via e-mail from **Stanley Kempista** - I'm disappointed that the DNR is removing handicapped parking spaces. The latest being the two spaces next to the handicapped accessible fishing pier by shelter #9. Now, those of us that are disabled are expected to park in the designated spaces closest to the Dossin museum and travel across the parking lot? This is ludicrous and unacceptable. Stop treating disabled visitors like second class citizens! I want to support the state's efforts on the island but actions like this make that impossible.

Chair Hodges clarified that the DNR did respond to Mr. Kempista's comments with an explanation that the ADA accessible spaces were not removed, but rather required maintenance to refresh the paint for the parking spaces and that signs will be replaced with new ones.

Via e-mail from **Kevin Bingham** - Hello, I want to express my dismay at the way that trees have been treated at Belle Isle since the DNR took over operations. There are hundreds of trees that have had their roots dug up and trenched up by the electric renovation, leaving these trees at high risk of decline and death. This comes immediately after the Virgin Woods of Eastern Belle Isle were flooded and the water was allowed to stagnate there and killing hundreds if not thousands of old growth forest trees dead. Also completely mismanaging the Oak Wilt situation on the island. I am disgusted by the blatant disregard for the asset of the most importance on the island, the trees. The emphasis is clearly on car races and infrastructure projects and not on the most important aspect of the Emerald Isle. If the State leases an island, sinks it and kills all the trees, does the city get a new island?

Chair Hodges said that hopefully with the discussion on the trees earlier helps address this concern as well.

Rev. Peek said the officers who saved lives should be acknowledged. Scott Pratt said they will be presenting awards at the NRC, BIPAC and on Belle Isle.

Bud Denker thanks Amanda and Karis for their updates. He said that we are faced with unprecedented times this year with what has hit us with the pandemic, as well as environmentally. He wants his comments to go to Karis, Darlisa, Scott, Mike and Amanda. He said it is easy for them to receive negative comments from people, but as stewards of the community we don't give them enough credit for what they do. He thanks them again.

Michael Curis and Rev. Peek concurred.

Michele said she is very proud to serve with all of them and the DNR team.

Meeting concluded: 7:27 p.m.

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING:
September 17, 2020**

Approved: _____
Michele Hodges Ronald A. Olson, Chief

Date: _____



Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update

August 20, 2020 Detroit, MI



Project Status Overview

- **12 Grant/Private funded Projects approved to restart by DNR Executive since 4/22/2020**
- **12 Projects with State General Funding submitted 8/12/2020 for restart**
- **Coffer dam was installed Friday, 8/14/2020
Park staff is running pumps and monitoring water levels.**
- **Oudolf Garden has finished much of site work and preparing for planting at the end of the summer**



Cofferdam Installation

- E.C. Korneffel Co. hired to install coffer dam
- DNR has partnered with the Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix. DBIGP has contracted E.C.Korneffel Co.
- Installation began Thursday, 8/13/2020
- Park staff will begin operating pumps Friday, 8/14/2020 to lower Lake Okonoka & internal island water levels



Cofferdam installation progress Thursday, August 13, 2020

Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020



Lake Okonoka Habitat Restoration

- Installation of stop-log on culvert complete
- Paving and shoreline restoration underway
- The Strand scheduled to be open 9/10/2020
- Woodside Drive scheduled to be open 9/30/2020



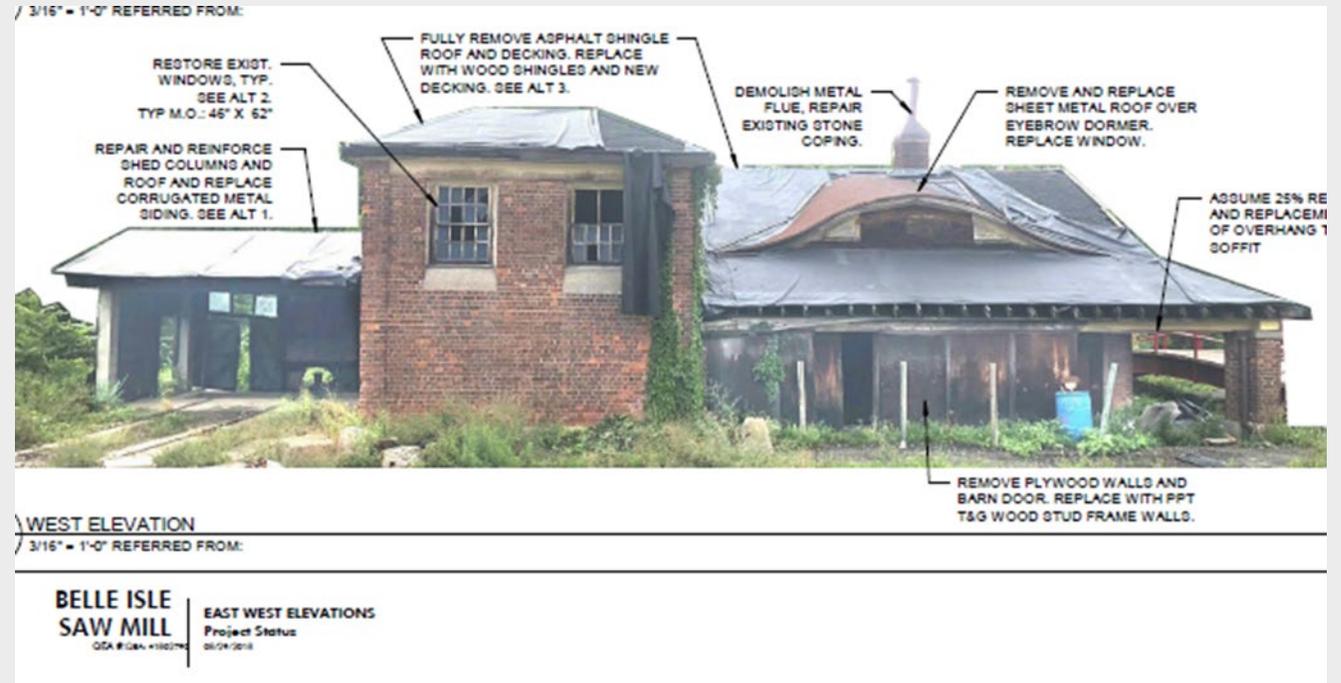
Stop log structure is in and final shoreline grading is underway

Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020



Sawmill Roof Replacement

- Lead paint abatement complete
- Contractor currently working on material submittals to architect
- Project completion scheduled for 9/14/2020



Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020



Band Shell

CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT REPORT



BELLE ISLE MUSIC SHELL
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

- **50% Physical Assessment submitted 8/12/2020**
- **90% Physical Assessment and Cost Estimates for Repair 9/9/2020**
- **Final Report submission 9/29/2020**
- **Physical Assessment funded by the MoBIG group (Music on Belle Isle Group)**

Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020



Wet-Mesic Flatwoods



Series of Ditches, swales and water control structures will improve hydrologic flow in flatwoods

- **Pre-bid walk through 8/18/2020**
- **November 2020 - Notice to Proceed for Contractor estimated**
- **December 2020/January 2021 – Mobilize to site. Complete prep. work as possible in winter**
- **March 2021 – Nov/Dec 2021 – Main restoration activities completed – all plants/trees planted**
- **May – October 2022 – Vegetation Establishment Period**

Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020



Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory ADA Garden Access

- Construction Documents to be completed by end of summer 2020
- Estimated Construction cost \$185,000

MATERIAL PALETTE

1. ACCESS WALKWAY

- BROOM FINISHED CONCRETE
- EXPOSED AGGREGATE CONCRETE

BROOM FINISHED CONCRETE

EXPOSED AGGREGATE CONCRETE

WTA ARCHITECTS

Preliminary Plans and materials for ADA access

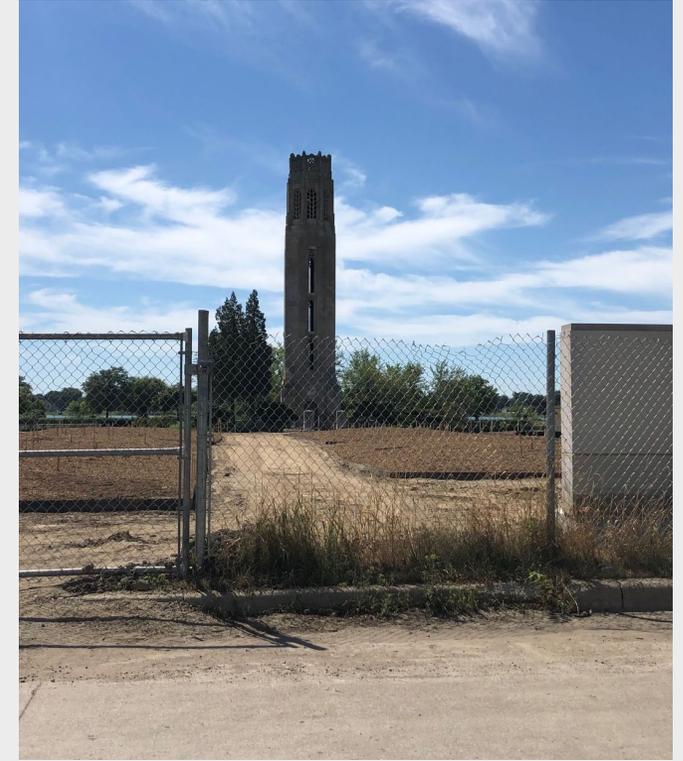


Oudolf Garden

- **Planting beds will be ready for planting the last week in August**
- **Due to Covid 19 the fall planting will not be completed by volunteers as planned**



Raised beds for Oudolf Garden





Belle Isle Aquarium Geothermal Feasibility Study

- DNR and BIC team reviewed preliminary report in April
- Final HVAC feasibility report due 8/28/2020.
- Consultants will review ventilation needs with report.

Belle Isle Aquarium
Department of Natural Resources
Mechanical System Feasibility Assessment

March 20, 2020



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Belle Isle Park Infrastructure Update, August 2020