

MINUTES

BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

March 17, 2015

Dossin Great Lakes Museum
100 Strand Drive
Belle Isle, Detroit, MI 48207

Present for Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee (BIPAC)

Michele Hodges, chair
Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr., vice chair
Bryan Barnhill
Alicia Bradford
Michael Curis
Bud Denker
Sommer Woods

Committee chairperson **Hodges** called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. She welcomed those in attendance and expressed her gratitude for the partnership with the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. Committee members and DNR staff members then introduced themselves.

Approval of February 19, 2015, Minutes

Denker made a motion that minutes of the February 19, 2015, meeting be approved as submitted. **Bradford** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Excused Absence

Woods made a motion that the excused absence of committee member **Peek** be approved. **Curis** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. **Peek** later arrived at the meeting.

Resolution in Support of DNR Applications for Trust Fund Grants

Ron Olson, chief of the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, explained the applications for three Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants. **Olson** said the process was put into place many years ago by voters to offer grant money from royalties on mineral and gas extractions to enrich public outdoor recreation activities. **Curis** asked what the likelihood was of Belle Isle being awarded a grant. **Olson** noted that three grants were applied for last year, and one was awarded. He added that the Legislature receives recommendations in December, and the appropriated funds, if awarded, would be available in mid to late 2016. **Curis** made a motion that the Resolution in Support of the Department of Natural Resources Submission of Three Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Applications be adopted. **Bradford** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Report on Fact-finding Trips to New York City and Philadelphia

An overview of a fact-finding trip to New York City and Philadelphia was given by **Hodges**, who reported that she and three other Belle Isle Conservancy staff members met with **Doug Blonsky**, the **Central Park Conservancy** president and CEO and park administrator, and his entire executive staff. She said it was a great learning experience to aid in restoring, improving and managing Belle Isle. **Hodges** stated that she and the other staff members also met with **Adrian Benepe** while in New York. **Benepe** is the senior vice president and director of city park development for the national **Trust for Public Land** and offered more great information. In addition, **Hodges** advised that she and the Belle Isle group were able to meet and secure a contract with **Biederman Redevelopment Ventures** to help with Belle Isle strategic planning. She said that one of Biederman's greatest successes is Bryant Park in New York City, which is an international model of urban revitalization and among the most actively used parks in the world.

Hodges also reported on a visit with the **Philadelphia Horticultural Society**, which sponsors an annual flower show, featuring the very best in floral and landscape design. She noted that the society offers consulting, and the Belle Isle Conservancy is in the process of securing a cost proposal for custom consulting on the World Cup of Gardening event.

Hodges said the next trip is to San Francisco to attend the City Parks Alliance conference, *Greater & Greener 2015: Innovative Parks, Vibrant Cities*, April 11-14. The conference highlights the latest innovations in urban park creation, management and stewardship.

Hodges thanked the **Knight Foundation** for the funding that made these trips possible.

BIPAC Strategic Planning Implementation

Olson gave a progress report on a survey that's being created for implementation of the strategic plan for Belle Isle. He distributed a project summary of the research, which included, among other things, information on the current status of the survey project, intention of the project, and timetable. **Olson** asked committee members to review the report and added that he thought a BIPAC subcommittee is needed to work on the project and report back to the full committee.

Cultural Campus and Strategic Planning Processes

Hodges gave updates on a Cultural Campus Plan with a focus on the aquarium and conservatory, as well as a strategic plan for the Belle Isle Conservancy. She said the Conservancy chose **Albert Kahn Associates** of Detroit to lead the cultural campus planning. **Hodges** added that discussions are currently underway to also hire a consulting firm to help with the Belle Isle Conservancy strategic planning process. **Bradford** asked if the master plan of the city was incorporated in the Belle Isle strategic plan, and **Hodges** answered yes. **Barnhill** asked if there was a timeline for both planning processes, and **Hodges** said approximately six months.

Michigan Activity Pass Opportunity

Olson provided a written summary of the Michigan Activity Pass (MAP) program and explained how it will work. He said the pass, available beginning May 19 in libraries across the state, will offer free or discounted entry into more than 100 historic and cultural destinations in Michigan. He noted that the MAP program, combined with the Park & Read Program, which allows Michigan library card holders to check out a free, one-day pass good for any Michigan state park, makes it affordable for everyone to experience lots of the great natural and cultural resources Michigan has to offer.

Upcoming Park Events

Scott Pratt, DNR field operations chief for southern Michigan, and several others present, highlighted a few upcoming events scheduled for Belle Isle, including the 6th annual Daffodil Day fundraiser luncheon April 15; the annual Belle Isle clean-up day and 5K run both scheduled for April 25; the annual koi transfer May 2; Chevrolet Grand Prix auto-racing May 29-31; Metro Detroit Youth Day set for July 15; and an overnight camping experience for intercity youth Friday, August 21. **Pratt** also noted that Belle Isle Senior Days will be held every Wednesday beginning July 8 and added that the Outdoor Adventure Center in downtown Detroit officially opens in July. In addition, **Hodges** reminded everyone of the annual koi transfer May 2. **Peek** said the second annual Praise Fest is tentatively being scheduled for July 19.

Olson added that he is asked a lot about whether there will be a campground on Belle Isle, and the overnight camping experience for youth was discussed further. The issue was raised that there should also be an overnight event for adults as well. **Olson** advised that last summer, a camp for adults was held at a couple state parks where partners furnished all the camping equipment. **Peek** suggested the camping issue be on the agenda for the April 16 meeting.

Public Comments

Public comments began at 10:09 a.m. and included:

Garrett Dempsey who has worked with young people to engage them in the outdoors, offered for review a training binder on how to run an effective youth camping trip. He thought the book may be of some assistance in organizing camping opportunities for youth on Belle Isle. **Dempsey** said he previously worked with a youth services organization in San Francisco, and over 10,000 youth participated each year in the camping program there.

Mark O'Brien, Friends of Detroit Rowing, said he thinks Belle Isle is on the verge of becoming great again, and the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee is extremely influential in moving forward. He suggested that members think ahead 10-12 years and keep an eye on what's needed to host an Olympics in the future. He thinks Belle Isle can be a worldwide showcase and perfect to host Olympic Games on the island.

Public appearances closed at 10:16 p.m.

Law Enforcement Update

F/Lt. Mike Shaw with the Michigan State Police reported that he is acting lieutenant for the 2nd District Headquarters until **F/Lt. Ken Dilg**, currently with the Detroit Metro Post, takes over those duties due to the reassignment of **Lt. Nathan McQueen**. **Hodges** expressed appreciation for **Lt. McQueen's** past services. **Shaw** noted that the general road patrol is now in the hands of Detroit police, not the MSP and said there would be no change in bicycle patrol, four-wheeler patrol, etc. He reported that the first year on the island was very successful with no major incidents. **Shaw** mentioned a peaceful Selma commemorative march across the bridge March 8 that included approximately 100 walkers.

Sgt. Arthur Green, DNR area law enforcement supervisor in Detroit, reported on an incident involving three individuals who fell through thin ice on the canal between the golf course and the water plant on the east end of Belle Isle March 8. He said the victims were eventually rescued and administered first aid; however, even though they were showing signs of hypothermia and going in and out of consciousness, once placed in the ambulance, refused to be transported to the hospital. **Green** said the life-saving rescue was an excellent example of various agencies working together, including DNR officers, Detroit Fire Department, U.S. Coast Guard, and Michigan State Police troopers.

Staffing Update

Mike Terrell, district supervisor for the Metro Detroit District, said there are more than 40 summer positions available in the Detroit area, and at least 25 of those are to fill a wide range of jobs on Belle Isle, including an assistant to the event coordinator, promotional agent, and operator positions. He noted that short-term summer worker jobs can lead to full-time employment. **Olson** added that DNR staff member **Dan Lord** was promoted within the DNR, and a position description for a new urban planner will be out soon. Discussion was held as to where individuals can find information on the available jobs, and it was noted that the state website has a listing and a link to www.belleisle.org, and a DNR press release is scheduled to be distributed Wednesday, March 18. **Peek** asked for a copy of the listing, and **Olson** said he will provide a copy to all committee members.

Current Improvement Projects Update

Pratt and **Terrell** highlighted some of the improvement projects currently underway, including work on renovating the fishing piers; crews removing fallen trees and cleaning up canals; heating units being repaired or replaced in the casino, conservatory and aquarium; new shelter roofs, etc. They reported also on repairs made to the Flynn Pavilion due to flooding caused by frozen pipes bursting and repairs to be made to a broken water main at the golf course. **Terrell** said there is a building assessment ongoing on the island to determine what work is needed. **Barnhill** asked for an update on the status of the boat house. **Olson** said that the building is a big challenge and a topic for further conversation in the future. He indicated that the estimate for renovating the boat house is \$20-40 million. He noted that the rowing club does the best they can to maintain the facility. **O'Brien**, with Friends of Detroit Rowing, added that the rowing club is 176 years old, the oldest in the country and second oldest in the world. He said the facility has great potential for banquets, business retreats, weddings, reunions, etc.

Grand Prix Update

Charles Burns, general manager of the Chevrolet Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix, gave an update on the Grand Prix race, which is scheduled for May 29-31, 2015, and said work will begin in the next two weeks to ready the island for the event. **Carrie Warren** with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) explained that work on island roadways is funded by the Grand Prix; however, MDOT will oversee the work. **Burns** indicated that the Grand Prix, DNR, MDOT and MSP are all working together to keep the park open until the race. He said there has been some discussion about bringing camping to the island during the Grand Prix. **Warren** noted that MDOT will be installing signboards with traffic patterns, lane closures, etc. within the next week.

It was noted that the event has an enormous economic impact on the area each year and generated over \$46 million in total spending for the metro Detroit region in 2013. In addition, the organization has made millions of dollars of lasting improvements to Belle Isle, including installing new concrete for road improvements, repairing damaged lighting and drainage systems, contributing to renovations of the Scott Fountain, casino, and the Belle Isle Boat Club, as well as adding new concrete for parking and community events and activities year round.

Committee Member/Staff Comments

Woods asked what restrooms were open for park visitors during the winter. **Olson** said only two restrooms were heated during the cold weather – one at the Casino and one at Shelter 7. **Woods** also asked if guests attending weddings on the island are required to have Recreation Passports and was told yes.

Denker asked about the best way to distribute 1,000 free Recreation Passports donated by the **Penske Corporation**.

Barnhill commented that the senior activities on the island are very important and wondered how better to get the word out to the senior population about the events. Mentioned outlets were the Agency on Aging, Senior Advisory Committee, churches, etc.

Barnhill also asked about a bus stop on Belle Isle. **Olson** said getting a public bus on the island is in the works, and details are being discussed as to where the stop will be located, how far in on the island the bus will go, etc.

Peek asked about holding a celebration on Belle Isle for the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, which is coming up in August 2016. **Olson** agreed that Belle Isle would be a great place to showcase something, and announced that more information will be coming in the future on a “Find Your Park” movement being launched by the National Park Service to highlight the many ways the American public can connect with history and culture, enjoy nature, and make new discoveries. **Peek** said as Detroit continues to grow and the world is watching, a celebration event would be great.

Curis commented that the city of Detroit and the BIPAC are lucky to have **Bradford** because of her experience, hard work and commitment. **Hodges** added that she thinks all BIPAC members are exceptional.

Hodges announced that the next BIPAC meeting is scheduled from 9-11 a.m. Thursday, April 16, at the Dossin Great Lakes Museum on Belle Isle and thanked **Curis** and **Big Boy** for providing the coffee and donuts.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by **Bradford**, seconded by **Curis**, and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 a.m.

APPROVED: Date _____

Michele Hodges
BIPAC Chairperson

Ron Olson
DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief