

MINUTES

BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 16, 2015

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

Present for Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee (BIPAC)

Michele Hodges, chair
Bryan Barnhill
Michael Curis
Bud Denker
Sommer Woods

Excused Absences

Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr., vice chair
Alicia Bradford

Committee chairperson **Hodges** called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She welcomed those in attendance and expressed her gratitude for the partnership with the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. Committee members and **Scott Pratt**, DNR field operations chief for southern Michigan, then introduced themselves. DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief **Ron Olson** was not in attendance due to illness.

Hodges thanked committee member **Curis** and Big Boy for, again, furnishing coffee and refreshments for the meeting

Hodges mentioned the "Symphony in D" project funded by the Knight Foundation, which is a collaborative effort of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra to create a musical portrait of Detroit that best describes the city. She noted that **Tod Machover**, classical music composer and head of the MIT Media Lab's Opera of the Future Group, is capturing unique sounds from all around the city to shape the piece, which is set to premiere at Orchestra Hall at the Fisher Music Center on November 16, 2015. Sounds include everything from cars, to water, to crime and city life...anything and everything. **Hodges** reported the group was recently recording sounds on Belle Isle.

Approval of March 17, 2015, Minutes

Denker made a motion to approve minutes of the March 17, 2015, as submitted. **Woods** seconded the motion, and it passed on a vote of 4-0. Committee member **Barnhill** arrived after the vote.

Approval of Excused Absence

Woods made a motion that the excused absences of **Peek** and **Bradford** be approved. **Curis** seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0. **Barnhill** arrived after the vote.

Overview of Proposed Red Bull-sponsored Event Removed from Agenda

Hodges noted that an overview of a proposed Red Bull-sponsored event on the island needed to be removed from the agenda, because the sponsor representative was unable to attend the meeting.

Progress Reports on Cultural Campus and Strategic Planning Processes

Hodges reported that the Cultural Campus planning process is moving ahead as scheduled for the aquarium and conservatory and that the engineer field work has been completed by the **Albert Kahn Associates** firm. She noted that the association is working with the DNR and **Biederman Redevelopment Ventures** on short- and long-term planning. **Hodges** also reported that the strategic plan being overseen by **Biederman** has been delayed a little but is expected to kick off May 11 and 12.

Review of Planned Community and Park User Survey

Jody Simoes, hired by the DNR in January as a market researcher, presented an overview of an intended survey to be used in planning future improvements and programs on Belle Isle. He indicated that a 2010 survey will be used as the baseline for the new survey. Discussion was held on how to reach out to non-park users as well as those who do use the park or have in the past. **Simoes** said he is putting together a proposal for possible contractors regarding the method, timing and approximate costs for a survey. Methods mentioned were telephone, on-site, paper, and electronic. **Simoes** advised that an on-site survey may have a high cost, but **Hodges** suggested using volunteers. **Sommers** wants to make sure the survey is a good demographic representation that includes seniors, people of color, etc. She also feels using volunteers for an on-site survey is a good idea, because volunteers will have great connectivity to the park. **Denker** suggest asking non-users why they don't use the park. **Curis** proposed having exit interviews to gather information from people who hold events on the island. **Barnhill** recommended that BIPAC also have an accessible online portal for public comments.

Freshwater Transit Presentation

Tom Choske, president of Freshwater Transit Solutions, a partner with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, talked about proposed trolley and water taxi services all along the Detroit Riverfront and on Belle Isle. He said Freshwater Transit has researched experiences all across the United States and offered information on proposed routes and examples of vehicles and water vessels. **Choske** gave a PowerPoint presentation of a transit feasibility study and implementation plan, which was prepared in January 2015 for the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy and included Belle Isle. Financing was discussed as well as hours, fares, branding and marketing, and five-year projections. **Hodges** thanked **Choske** for the presentation and stated that the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee is looking forward to working with Freshwater Transit on the potential services.

Update on Project Grants

Karis Floyd, Belle Isle Park manager, reported that Belle Isle Park was awarded a \$374,000 Community Recreation Outreach Program grant for intercity or urban parks, which is being used for a canoe/kayak project on Lake Muscoday across from the Yacht Club, which will include two floating docks, small restroom, picnic shelter, picnic tables, and recycling bin. He said the grant must be used by December 31, 2015, so work will begin soon.

Job and Vendor Opportunities Updates

Floyd reported that three vendors are already operating on the island, and three others are ready to sign contracts. He added that there are many job opportunities currently available not only on Belle Isle but for Milliken State Park and Harbor and the new Michigan Outdoor Adventure Center on Atwater Street as well. **Floyd** said they are looking to fill 22 more positions on Belle Isle, 10 more at Milliken State Park, and six more at the Outdoor Adventure Center. He said applications are still being accepted.

It was further noted that a one-year commercial use permit was given to Detroit River Sports that allows the vendor to access water around and within Belle Isle Park. The agreement is in response to a complaint by Detroit River Sports regarding the award of an exclusive watercraft rental contract on Belle Isle.

Current Improvement Projects Update

Floyd gave an update summary of current projects and repairs. He said there is a leak somewhere in the Flynn Pavilion and staff are trying to determine where the leak is, whether underneath, in the walls, etc. He said engineers will have to come in to make sure the building is safe before a wedding scheduled for May 2 can be held. **Denker** said the Penske Corporation will fund the engineers and repair of the facility in order to speed up the process.

Floyd reported that work on the Casino building is on schedule with boilers and four hot water heaters installed and that the fire suppression system will be replaced.

Denker reported that the Penske Corporation also is funding road surface improvements and drainage work now taking place on Sunset Drive.

Public Comments

Public comments began at 10:30 a.m.

Capt. Rick Scott, licensed captain for vessels weighing up to 100 tons, commented on the water taxi proposal and offered information on boat captains and size of boats.

Todd Scott, executive director of Detroit Greenways Coalition, said that when the coalition learned MDOT would be making over \$4 million of road improvements on Belle Isle, it was a great opportunity to request more and better sidewalks for biking and walking on the island. However, he feels the Legislature gave the \$4 million to the Grand Prix to improve roads for racing. He noted that MDOT not only failed to build sidewalks that were missing, existing

sidewalks were, in fact, removed, and bike lanes on the west end of the island have been closed off until after the race. **Scott** feels biking and walking are very important on Belle Isle and is disappointed that public access is compromised for a quarter of the year. He believes Belle Isle is a state park for the people first. **Scott Pratt** will follow up with **Scott**.

Donald Green, Detroit resident, said that based on the map furnished by Freshwater Transit, the services would be inoperable five months out of the year. He also questioned the proposed merits of the Grand Prix.

Public appearances closed at 10:37 p.m.

Law Enforcement Update

Sgt. Arthur Green, DNR area law enforcement supervisor in Detroit, reported that things have been very quiet on the island with nothing out of the ordinary happening. He said the DNR will be ramping up from two shifts to three shifts sometime in mid-May. **Green** said some seasonal increase has begun, and the welcome booth was moved to a different location to resolve some congestion at the entrance to the park and alleviate lineups of vehicles.

Upcoming Park Events

Darlisa Rickman, event coordinator for Belle Isle Park, reported that over 100 events and 115 weddings/receptions are already scheduled for Belle Isle Park this season. She noted that she receives between 75-100 inquiries per day. She added that the Casino is booked every Friday, Saturday and Sunday until December, and every Saturday during April-November in 2016. It was also noted that only two shelters are available for dates in July 2015. In addition, **Hodges** announced upcoming events scheduled for Belle Isle include the annual Belle Isle clean-up day and 5K run both scheduled for April 25; the annual koi transfer May 2; Spring Into Belle Isle; 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. 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.

Staffing Update

Floyd reported that a new park ranger was recently hired for Belle Isle, and they're just waiting for the Civil Service process to proceed.

Floyd introduced several park workers who were in attendance.

Hodges noted that the Belle Isle Conservancy has hired a new business manager, and hopes to hire a community engagement specialist by August.

Committee Member/Staff Comments

DNR Director **Creagh**, who was in attendance, thanked the committee for a great year on Belle Isle and thanked **Hodges** and others for the excellent presentation of the annual report to the Detroit City Council. **Creagh** also thanked **Denker** and the Penske crew for helping take care of the emergencies on the island.

Denker thanked the DNR, stating that the state has been involved for only 15 months and the change in Belle Isle is amazing. He noted that the resources brought in by the DNR have made a dramatic difference.

Curis expressed appreciation to both DNR conservation officers and the Michigan State Police for their sensitivity in handling law enforcement on the island.

Hodges reported that she just returned from the City Parks Alliance Conference in California where she also toured the Golden Gate Park and Conservancy. She said it was well worth the trip. She also noted that the National Park Service will be assigning a Fellow to the Detroit area for two years, and the individual should be arriving sometime in July.

Creagh

Hodges announced that the next BIPAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, from 9-11 a.m. at a location to be determined.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by **Denker**, seconded by **Curis**. However, a quorum was not available for a vote. Due to scheduling issues, **Sommers** left the meeting at approximately 9:45 a.m. and **Barnhill** left the meeting at approximately 9:55 a.m., which left only three committee members present. **Hodges** adjourned the meeting at 11:20 a.m.

APPROVED: Date _____

Michele Hodges
BIPAC Chairperson

Ron Olson
DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief