

MINUTES

BELLE ISLE PARK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

October 23, 2014

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

Absent for Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee (BIPAC)

Alicia Minter – excused
Rev. Lonnie Peek, Jr. - excused

Present for Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staff

Ron Olson, chief, DNR Parks & Recreation Division
Scott Pratt, chief, Southern Michigan Field Operations, DNR Parks & Recreation Division
Jason Fleming, chief, Resource Management Section, DNR Parks & Recreation Division
Mike Terrell, Metro Detroit District Supervisor, DNR Parks & Recreation Division
Lt. Nathan McQueen III, Michigan State Police
Arthur Green, DNR Law Enforcement Division
Joe Hall, park operations
Karis Floyd, acting park manager
Darlisa Rickman, event outreach coordinator
Other department staff

Committee chairperson **Hodges** called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. She welcomed those in attendance and introduced **Bob Bury**, executive director and CEO of the Detroit Historical Society and the Dossin Great Lakes and Detroit Historical museums. **Bury** gave a brief history and highlights of the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. He noted that there have been three to four times more visitors to the museum this year than the past two years, including weddings, parties, and social gatherings. **Hodges** thanked **Bury** for hosting the BIPAC meeting and for being such a great partner. Hodges also thanked committee member **Michael Curis** for furnishing refreshments for the meeting.

Approval of September 25, 2014, Minutes

Denker made a motion that minutes of the September 25, 2014, meeting be approved as submitted. **Woods** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Excused Absences

Denker made a motion to excuse the absences of committee members **Minter** and **Peek**. **Curis** seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Strategic Planning Process

Hodges provided a brief overview of the strategic planning process for the BIPAC. DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief **Ron Olson** announced that **Joseph Wynns**, urban strategist consultant and retired director of parks and recreation for the city of Indianapolis, Indiana, will serve as the facilitator during the planning session scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, December 16, at the Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit. **Olson** explained the purpose of the session, i.e. to identify priorities and goals for the next 12 months, including funding and working on alignment with partners, stakeholders, the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Belle Isle Park Conservancy, etc. to make the park great for everyone. **Olson** said more information will be available in the next few weeks.

Law Enforcement Update

Michigan State Police **Lt. Nathan McQueen** gave a law enforcement update, reporting that they assisted at several events on the island, including the Michigan Humane Society Mega March for Animals October 12 and the Detroit Free Press/Talmer Bank Marathon October 19.

Belle Isle Conservancy Projects

Hodges reported that the Belle Isle Conservancy is working on a Belle Isle billboard along the Woodward corridor, as well as working on a strategic plan for the conservancy and an island stewardship program to blend with DNR programs.

Recent Road Improvements Update

Olson gave a brief update on recent road improvements on the island, saying that some projects have been completed, and others are on schedule to be completed. **Scott Pratt**, chief of the DNR Parks & Recreation Division Southern Michigan Field Operations reported that work continues on roads around the island. He gave a brief overview of work in the area of Sunset Point, including more angle parking being added and more road structure for bikers and walkers. **Pratt** noted that lanes will be clearly marked for walking, biking, and parking. **Olson** finished the update by saying that a part of the drainage system where culverts have been plugged in the past has been fixed and that the goal is to reduce or eliminate storm water flowing into the big sewer system

Fall Festival Update

Karis Floyd, acting park manager, reported on the inaugural fall harvest festival held on the island October 18. He said over 500 people attended the daylong event that included hayrides; pumpkin decorating; candy stations for trick-or-treating; face-painting; games; food; costume contests for kids, adults, and family pets; and roasting marshmallows over a campfire. **Floyd** said turnout for the event was great and that more days may be added for next year's festival.

Staffing Update

Floyd noted that the summer season is winding down, and some short-term, seasonal workers are gone. **Olson** added that an end-of-the season, appreciation luncheon is scheduled in the Flynn Pavilion after today's meeting.

Job and Vendor Updates

Olson presented a brief update on concession opportunities on the island, stating that the goal is to offer opportunities but to make sure it's not overdone. He said a system is being developed to re-engage existing vendors and that some of the new vendors being considered are paddleboard and bicycle rentals. He also noted that bids are currently out for the golf operation. **Denker** asked what the timeline for golf operation bids was, and **Jason Fleming**, chief of the resource management section in the DNR Parks & Recreation Division said that bids need to be in by December and results will be announced in the spring. **Fleming** added that interested vendors must attend a mandatory, pre-bid meeting related to the concession service they wish to provide. He said during the December meetings, information will be provided regarding the bidding process, bid packages will be distributed and questions answered.

Planning for Future Island Partners Update

Hodges asked committee members to think about and recommend presentations they would like from either island groups or outside groups to help in future planning for partners. **Barnhill** mentioned that he thoroughly enjoyed the meeting held at the Belle Isle Boat Club and learning the history of the club.

National Special Park Districts Forum

Olson noted that the National Special Park Districts Forum will be coming to Michigan June 8-12, 2015. He explained that the international forum draws park and recreation professionals from the United States and Canada and is an excellent opportunity to learn about other park models and obtain information on related programs and services. He advised that Oakland County Parks, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources will serve as host agencies for the forum. **Olson** said that one day of the forum will be spent showcasing parks and recreation in the city of Detroit, including the new Outdoor Adventure Center, William G. Milliken State Park, and Belle Isle. He said it's a unique chance to showcase the redevelopment of Detroit's parks and recreational opportunities. **Olson** said more information will be furnished as the date gets closer.

Outdoor Adventure Center Update

Olson reported that the new Outdoor Adventure Center in downtown Detroit is not open to the public yet but the process continues and, hopefully, will be accessible by spring 2015. He noted that when it is completed, the center will give visitors a chance to experience first-hand Michigan's great outdoors and the natural and cultural resources found in Michigan. **Olson** said future BIPAC meetings also could be held at the center.

Public Comment

Helen Gentry, Detroit resident and member of Women Creating Caring Communities, said that since the state takeover of Belle Isle, and since she's been coming to the BIPAC meetings, she hasn't heard anything about the development of the wooded areas on the island. She indicated there are many trails in the woods she would like to be developed for bikers and hikers, etc. She also said she believes that Central Park in New York said no to hosting the world landscaping convention; she feels Belle Isle should decline as well.

Donald Green, Detroit resident, commented on road projects in the western part of the island, saying they should be last on the list of improvements. He stated further that public funds should not be used and that there is a greater need for the funds in other areas. He feels the widening of the roads on the island is really for the race and not the benefit of the park. **Green** also commented on the noise and fumes emitted from cars during the Belle Isle Grand Prix.

Richard Bell, director of rowing operations with the Detroit Boat Club, representing Friends of Detroit Rowing, asked about access to the island once the snow flies, in particular, what is planned for snow removal on Belle Isle roads. It was noted that the Michigan Department of Transportation has a contract for plowing roadways on the island, and the DNR will handle internally other snow removal, such as a sweeper, brine spreader, shovels, etc.

Jerry Comfort, vice president of Lake St. Clair Walleye Association, indicated the association has been asking for island boat access for a number of years. He said the only one is in bad condition and has no security. He asked if there was any progress for a boat launch.

Ryan Kingsley of the Detroit Boat Club said he rows in the morning with the masters and helps coach the juniors. Because of his experience with the Detroit rowing club, he learned discipline and dedication and was accepted to every college he applied to. He eventually attended the University of Wisconsin where he was a member of the rowing crew. He expressed a hope that the opportunity for junior rowers remains.

Gary Balduc of Livonia, former fish curator at the Belle Isle Aquarium from January 2012 to June 2013, thinks the aquarium is a disgrace. He said the facility looked really good when he was there and offered to help bring it back.

Committee Member Reports/Comments

It was noted that Friends of the Belle Isle Aquarium was one of four organizations that merged to form the Belle Isle Conservancy. **Carol White**, conservancy volunteer who was present at the meeting, was recognized for her diligent work to keep the aquarium up and running. It was also noted that improvements to the facility continue.

Hodges announced that *Light Up the Aquarium*, a holiday fundraiser to support the Belle Isle Aquarium, will be back for its second year December 5. She explained that the aquarium is the only volunteer-run aquarium. **Hodges** also mentioned that a donation from **Randy** and **Trayce Fenton**, in loving memory of their son, was used to restore two skylights

that have been shuttered since 1954 as well as the renovation of the small tank alcove in the rear of the building to bring a fish exhibit back to the aquarium. In addition, **Hodges** reported that a grant will be used to paint the aquarium and replace windows, and that additional applications for further grant-funding are being submitted.

Hodges reported that November 8, volunteers transferred koi from the lily ponds outside the aquarium to the lower level of the aquarium; the fish spend the winter indoors.

Hodges thanked all the volunteers who work so hard to keep the aquarium viable for everyone.

Woods asked if a vendor spreadsheet is available and what the status is of the community engagement plan, including opportunities and a timeline. She mentioned that some friends ran the marathon on Belle Isle and spoke very highly of the park and its law enforcement.

Denker reported that the Penske Corporation installed 13 benches on the walkway near Scott Fountain, installed 20 picnic tables in the spring and developed an “adopt a bench” program to help raise money for the Belle Isle Conservancy.

Curis said he would like to see information on the vendor workshop, including how to bid, what to improve, etc.

Hodges announced that the Belle Isle Nature Zoo will host its sixth annual “Boo at the Nature Zoo” from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. October 24 and 25 and that the Belle Isle Holiday Stroll is scheduled for December 12 from 5-8 p.m.

Hodges reported that the woods on Belle Isle have not been forgotten and that volunteers come out the third Saturday of every month to remove invasive species and clean up the area, and the garden club is working in the woods as well. She said work will continue and was grateful for the support of the community.

Denker mentioned the possibility of the World Cup of Gardening event coming to Belle Isle in mid-June 2015 and how it might benefit the island. **Olson** reported that staff has met a number of times for general discussion about finalizing the deal. He said they want to make good decisions for the people’s park.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by **Barnhill**, seconded by **Curis**, and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

APPROVED: Date _____

Michele Hodges
BIPAC Chairperson

Ron Olson
DNR Parks and Recreation Division Chief