



Allegan County Parks, Recreation, & Tourism

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September 1, 2009

Human Services Building

Spartan Conference Room

8:30am

Minutes of a Scheduled meeting of the Allegan County Parks and Recreation Commission

A scheduled meeting of the Allegan County Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chairman Bruce Culver on Tuesday, September 1, 2009 at 8:27am in the Spartan Conference Room in the lower level of the Human Services Building, 3255 122nd Ave, Suite 102, Allegan, Michigan.

Roll Call showed the following members:

PRESENT:

Kelle Tobolic	Chuck Pullen
Larry Rasmussen	Bruce Culver
Robert Kaarlie	MarylN Langeance
Fritz Spreitzer	Georgina Rozeboom-Doster
Mark DeYoung	

ABSENT: Becky Rininger

Also Present: Kevin Ricco, Parks Director
Ronda Foreman, Parks and Tourism Clerk

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

Kevin requested the Commission's approval to add two items to the agenda under New Business; 11a. Hunger Strike Special Event, and 11b. Budget Update. A motion was made by Kelle Tobolic, seconded by Maryln Langeance to approve the agenda as amended. The motion carried by everyone present.

APPROVAL OF AUGUST MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Bob Kaarlie, seconded by Larry Rasmussen to approve the August 4, 2009 meeting minutes as presented and mailed. The motion carried by everyone present.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Kevin directed everyone's attention to the last page of the agenda packets where they would find tallies for the park entrance fees collected thus far this year. Included is a quick synopsis of the weather for each weekend and as suspected, there is a direct correlation between the weather and the amount of fees collected. The last two weekends are great examples; the weather was cold and rainy with virtually no revenue to speak of. In fact, Kevin contacted all the park attendants last Thursday and told them not to work on Friday and to only show up for the rest of the weekend if the weather improved. The good news is Labor Day weekend is predicted to be warmer, which is the last weekend the parks will have entrance fees. Unfortunately, the lousy summer weather

not only affected the parks revenue but also the campgrounds and the progress for the New Richmond Bridge Park and equestrian trail projects. On the expenditure side of the financial statements, they are in line with where they should be and there is nothing specific for Kevin to point out. Bruce asked how the season pass sales turned out; Kevin stated they are close to what they were last year at this time. A motion was made by Larry Rasmussen, seconded by Georgina Rozeboom-Doster to approve the financial statements as presented. The motion carried by everyone present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NEW RICHMOND BRIDGE PARK UPDATE

Kevin stated he has a couple of updates on the New Richmond Bridge Park project. As of yesterday, the installation of the steel pilings at the boat launch has been completed and the ramp is expected to be done by the end of the week. The majority of the boardwalk on both the north and south sides of the park are done and the parking lot should be paved by next week. For obvious reasons, the project is still behind schedule; APEX Contractors have requested an extension from the BOC that would extend the deadline into the first part of November. Kevin has also requested a 60-day extension on the two grants through the Great Fisheries Trust Fund and the DNR trust fund. He was told there would be no problem getting the extension from Great Fisheries and the request for the DNR trust fund extension must first be presented at their next board meeting for approval. Kevin stated APEX are good folks and nice to work with, and doesn't anticipate the requests being denied. A motion was made by Bob Kaarlie, seconded by Maryln Langeance to approve the extension on the APEX contract contingent on the approval of the extension from the Board of Commissioners and the DNR trust fund. The motion passed unanimously.

Kevin stated there is one more item to report which will require action from the Parks Commission. There is an overflow of water from the drainage ditch on the north side of Old Allegan Road near the entrance to the park and as part of the contract, the contractor will clear out the area by the culvert. However, there is another area near the railroad tracks that has not been addressed where water is backing up and could potentially cause problems for the parking lot in the future. Kevin asked APEX to give him a cost estimate to haul out the sediment from the area so it is free flowing and was given the price of \$680. Kevin recommends this get taken care of before the next flood hits and asked the Parks Commission for their approval. A motion was made by Chuck Pullen, seconded by Fritz Spreitzer to approve the \$680 expenditure to allow APEX to clear the sediment from the culvert near the railroad tracks at New Richmond Bridge Park. The motion carried by everyone present.

Kevin finished his update by saying the park will be really beautiful once completed and believes it will be well used. Recently, while there taking pictures, he saw four groups fishing off the piers even though there was no parking. The canopies that were installed over the boardwalks that are near the railroad for safety reasons turned out looking very nice and adds a unique feature to the park. Bruce asked if angled parking spaces are planned for the road leading up to the park on the south side; Kevin replied that will be left up to the Road Commission and added it would be a plus if they decide to do so.

EQUESTRIAN TRAILS UPDATE

The clearing and marking of the 51+ miles of equestrian trails are moving right along. Kevin stated that despite areas still flooded near Silver Creek, 30 miles are now completed according to Maria who works for the DNR. Bob stated the crew is hoping to finish what they can in Area 3 of Ely Lake with the volunteer crew scheduled for tomorrow morning. He believes the water problem will continue at Silver Creek for some time and the DNR is looking into the problem and may temporarily move the trails onto the road in spots; there have been no flooding problems to speak of in the Ely Lake and Pine Point areas. With enough volunteers Bob stated they can usually mark a mile a day, sometimes only half a mile. Bob met with Bruce LaBrie from the Road

Commission and they took a ride to see where signs should be placed along the roads warning vehicles of the horse trails; signs will not be necessary on the roads with low traffic volume. Larry commented there is no parking for the day riders at Pine Point and Ely Lake campgrounds and asked Kevin if parking will be added next spring. Kevin replied day parking, along with equestrian campsites, is planned and believes it will be a real boon for those campgrounds. Larry also is concerned about the volunteers not having written permits they can carry with them; the police have already been called out to question them on what they are up to. He asked Maria if the DNR could provide a written statement and she said it should come from the Parks office since they hold the lease; Kevin stated he would draft a letter for them. Bruce stated Bob, Larry, and the volunteers are doing a great job and accomplishing a lot on the trails and thanked them for their efforts. Kevin gave kudos to Maria as well; she is doing great keeping everyone informed and pitching in to help mark the trails also.

MASTER PLAN – APPROVE ACTION PLAN

Continuing the discussion from last month's meeting where it was left for everyone to review the action plan for the 2010 Parks Master Plan, Kevin asked the Commission to take action. He reiterated trying to make the five year plan realistic and stated the way the policy was changed to where it's all about the goals and objectives. If an item fits into the goals and objectives, the master plan does not require amending. If anyone has any concerns or recommended changes, they can be discussed now. Mark commented he does not see the second phase for Bysterveld Park on the list. Kevin stated he had two reasons Bysterveld was not included; the first being he applied for the grant but it was not approved and secondly, the project requires an investment with no return. Due to the economy, the County is focused on revenue and that is where our focus should be also. Kevin added, just because it is not listed does not mean we can not add it later. Bruce inquired about land acquisition at New Richmond Park; Kevin stated that would be covered as an action item if the opportunity arose. Bruce also asked if we should put the items in the order of which they should be done. Kevin stated a priority list is not a requirement, although he did list them by year and said the order can always be changed if necessary. A motion was made by Fritz Spreitzer, seconded by Bob Kaarlie to approve the Parks Master Plan Action Plan as presented. The motion carried by everyone present.

NEW BUSINESS

GUN LAKE RAIN GARDENS

Kevin received a letter from Pamela Tynning from Progressive AE, whose firm was hired by the Gun Lake Improvement Board in November of 2002 to develop a management plan for Gun Lake. Currently, they are looking for an area to start a rain garden and have approached Allegan County Parks due to our highly visible public property on the lake, Gun Lake County Park. Included in today's agenda packets are copies of the letter that explains the project, along with maps and rain garden diagrams. They are proposing to place the rain garden in the area between the parking lot and Patterson Road, which is now just a grassy ditch. This project would not cost the county anything and they would do all the work to construct the rain garden. Kevin believes this is a good project that would benefit the park, lake, and lake residents. The only maintenance necessary is the perennials would have to be dug up every two to three years and divided, which is something the public could be involved in. Once the perennials are divided and replanted, anything leftover could be given to the volunteers to take home and start their own rain gardens. Bruce asked if it would interfere with the drain; Kevin stated there would be no affect to the drain or loss of parking. A motion was made by Georgina Rozeboom-Doster, seconded by Kelle Tobolic to approve the Gun Lake Improvement Board placing a rain garden in the designated areas of Gun Lake County Park. The motion carried unanimously. The project will have to go before the Gun Lake Improvement Board for their approval of the funding. If approved, although Kevin was not given a time-table, he expects the project would move forward either next spring, or possibly this fall.

KALAMAZOO RIVER PROPERTY

Kevin drew everyone's attention to a tax map that is included in the agenda packet handout. He was approached by a gentleman who is interested in selling his river front property along the Kalamazoo River, along with an owner of a neighboring parcel. Kevin stated the two vacant parcels, shown in the lower left corner of the map, parcel #s 011-00 and 010-00, are surrounded by DNR property and are great pieces of land

over 20 acres. River access is just off Allegan Dam Road on the west side of the dam and Kevin believes they are prime pieces of property with great potential. The owner conveyed to Kevin the fair market value for his parcel #011-00 is somewhere around \$250,000 – \$300,000; the State would like to purchase the property but only offered approximately \$195,000. Although the owner thought the State's offer was too low, he stated if the County can come up with the fair market value, he might be willing to go less and donate a portion to apply towards a match for a grant. Kevin stated this is about as good as we can get, aside from acquiring property right on Lake Michigan. Since there are currently no campgrounds for paddlers along the Kalamazoo River in Allegan County, this property would be great for a campground and is also a fantastic area for fishing. He doesn't know where the funding would come from, but wanted to present the offer to the Parks Commission to see if they would like him to pursue more information. A motion was made by Bob Kaarlie, seconded by Larry Rasmussen to have Kevin pursue more information on the two parcels located in Valley Township, #011-00 and #010-00. The motion carried by everyone present.

HUNGER STRIKE SPECIAL EVENT

Kevin received an email from the director of a hunger strike group who is requesting a special use permit be granted for an event to distribute food from a campsite at Pine Point Campground on September 26, 2009. Utilizing around four to six volunteers, they would like to put up a tent and a couple of canopies, and would be targeting homeless people advertising only by word-of-mouth. A TV8 news crew had interviewed a homeless couple at the campground a couple of weeks ago and Kevin has a feeling that is why this group wants to hold their event at Pine Point. Kevin stated he found out about the news coverage after the fact and was angry TV8 had not contacted the Parks office first to at least give him a heads-up on the story. Kevin learned the homeless couple had only been at the campground a few days and had prepaid for their site. He stated it is very rare to have anyone who is homeless at any of the county campgrounds, and felt the news story gave the impression there were many. Although he supports the group's mission, he does not think it would be a good idea to hold it at one of our campgrounds. Many members of the Parks Commission felt that there were better locations in the area to hold such an event. A motion was made by Fritz Spreitzer, seconded by Bob Kaarlie to deny the request for a special use permit for food distribution at Pine Point Campground on September 26, 2009. The motion passed unanimously.

BUDGET UPDATE

Kevin reported attending a Board of Commissioners meeting last Wednesday that included all of the department heads in the county that lasted over ten hours. The meeting was to discuss the county budget and how to address the projected short fall of about two million dollars based on the submitted requests. The shortfall is primarily due to the decreasing property values within the county and the anticipated revenue is expected to drop a percentage point next year. Kevin stated every department had to comment on possible cuts in their area; if something had to be cut in his area it would reluctantly be the Tourist Council. The TC is budgeted for \$18,000 annually and Kevin cannot calculate the return on the Council's efforts since tourism can be intangible, but he speculates the revenue generated for the County by far outweighs the costs. If he was pressed for more and had to make cuts from the Parks budget, we would most likely have to close one or more parks. There would be many disadvantages and consequences to closing a park; not only would it go unmaintained and have a loss of revenue, it could affect future grants Parks may receive from the State Trust Fund. Once a park has received a grant, part of the agreement in obtaining it is the park must remain open to the public and be well maintained. The Trust Fund periodically does inspections of the parks that have received a grant, and if they find it either closed or not being maintained, it would be a long time before we could ever receive another grant. Also, after a park is closed for one or two years, it would take more resources to reopen it. One suggestion made at the meeting was to let the park attendants and managers go and have a youth home crew assume some of the maintenance at the parks, and Kevin has great concerns if that were to happen. Those crews are in high demand for other projects and he would have to be guaranteed the crews would be committed to come on a regular basis. He also does not see where the savings would come from; the crew would still have to have paid supervision. Kevin stated the parks have already been holding their own going into this year with cuts and there is no give or leeway to cut any more. Mark asked about the study of the park fees that is being conducted; Kevin's portion is completed and he has not yet received the final report. There may be a couple areas they

recommend for adjustment but based on their earlier figures, we are close to the mark; not way above or below. The campground sites have been at \$10 per night since Kevin has been the Parks Director (eight years); the study may recommend those fees be increased, which he feels would be an appropriate request. He is waiting for them to make their presentation, which could help our efforts. Kevin heard of a county near Detroit who announced they were going to cut funding to their parks and there was an outrage from the public. Also, Muskegon County does not fund their parks, but initially gave millions to get them going to the point they could be self-sustaining; Ottawa County has a parks millage to cover their parks. Kevin is very frustrated at this point and will keep the Commission updated.

NEXT MEETING (PARKS TOUR) – OCTOBER 6, 2009 @ 8:30AM

The next meeting will be the Parks Tour where members from the Allegan County Board of Commissioners and the Tourist Council will be in attendance. Currently, Kevin has a 15 passenger van reserved and he will be the driver. Depending on how many people respond, he can reserve a second van but would need someone to volunteer to drive. He is asking everyone to meet at the front entrance of the Human Services Building and hopes to be on the road by 8:30am to ensure we are able to get to as many parks as possible.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Bob Kaarlie wanted to mention, since the stimulus crew is gone and only volunteers are helping mark the trails, no one has gone home early or is pregnant!

Chuck Pullen asked about the tree that fell at Dumont Lake Park during the last big storm. Kevin stated it was a beautiful day when the storm came out of no where and blew the tree down, blocking the entrance. The park was full and according to the park attendant, some folks started to panic when thankfully a nearby neighbor came to the rescue with his chainsaw. Although it took some time, everyone at the park pitched in to help remove the tree. Kevin got the name of the gentleman with the chainsaw and sent him a thank you note.

Mark DeYoung stated that Kevin's annual report to the Board of Commissioners is on line if anyone wants to look at it.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:23am.

By: _____
Ronda Foreman, Clerk