

PARKS, RECREATION AND FORESTRY COMMISSION

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2007 – 7:30 PM

NOVI CIVIC CENTER – COUNCIL CHAMBERS

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM with Commissioner Schwarzlose presiding.

ROLL CALL: Dooley (Present), Goyal (Present), Kristock (Absent), Policicchio (Present), Radcliffe (Present), Schwarzlose (Present), Staab (Present), Wingfield (Absent), Zyczynski (Present).

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

It was moved by Commissioner Zyczynski, seconded by Commissioner Radcliffe to approve the agenda with an amendment to add a report from the Novi Parks Foundation.

Voice Vote **Unanimous**

CITIZEN COMMENTS: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Approval of November 8, 2007, meeting minutes.
Moved by Commissioner Zyczynski, seconded by Commissioner Radcliffe.

Voice Vote **Unanimous**

TEAM REPORTS:

A. ADMINISTRATION – Randy Auler, Director of Parks, Recreation and Forestry

1. 2007 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Land Acquisition Grant

Director Auler said that he was happy to report that the Department has received a grant award for 16 acres of land, although it is not approved officially until the state legislature appropriates the money (usually in June or July). The Department will have one year from the date of the project agreement (probably September) to complete the acquisition. Mr. Auler summarized that “the good news is we got a grant for about \$31,000 that’ll add about 16 acres of land to our already existing park land in the south west quadrant of the community, at 253 acres making us roughly a 270 acre park site.” He added that there was a great team effort led by Steve Printz. Steve managed the process, with Councilmember Mutch heavily involved, and Senator Cassis spoke before the board on behalf of the grant application. He noted that there were 45 projects submitted.

2. 2005 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Land Acquisition Grant

Director Auler said that this grant is for 51 acres at Villagewood Lake and Orchard Hills Subdivision. We have had an extension on the grant, which expires January 31st. Included in the packet were copies of a series of letters and supporting information to the DEQ and DNR. The DNR has not approved the Department's application to move forward towards the acquisition of this project. He reported that they feel "we should obtain an amendment, modification of the existing conservation easement of the property on the west side of Meadowbrook Road. The DEQ has not been willing to do that to date. They want a formal yes or no in a letter that I can send to DNR. We have requested that letter. If we get a yes from DEQ, then we'll modify the easement and continue to proceed with this. If we don't get approval from the DEQ, we'll go back to the DNR and see what else they would like for us to do. My opinion is that we have done everything we can do. We have overcome some of the challenges that have been in front of us, as it relates to assessed values of properties, as it relates to accessibility, tried to include that in that packet as well. I'm trying get this thing done, I just think we'll be asking for another extension, meanwhile the property owners are becoming very frustrated with the process. If we get to the point where DNR says no again, we may have to go back to the MNRTF board and present our case. The DNR staff will present their case, and then we'll see what options the MNRTF board says".

3. 2008/2009 Budget Preparation

Director Auler said that he would add an additional year, to include 2009-2010 in the budget preparation. He said that he included the budget calendar in the packet, noting that the most pressing date is January 7th, which is when the Department's Capital Improvement Budget proposal is due. He explained that this is a six year plan for Capital Improvements, which the Department is currently working on, the information should be available for the next meeting. Although the Commission typically only is included in the Capital Improvement Budget process, he explained that the Operating Budget process is potentially going to a two year budget. Consequently, the Department needs to indicate any significant initiatives it has for 2009-2010. Director Auler summarized that he will bring the Commission a six year Capital Improvement Program for their consideration and approval. He noted that he can make any adjustments and submit them by January 7th.

Director Auler added that the following Monday evening at the meeting of City Council, staff will ask Council to authorize a request for proposals for the Fuerst Farm property. He explained that since the library proposal passed, the construction of the new library may require the Township hall to be relocated. If it becomes necessary to move the building, it makes sense to look at what is the best public use for the Fuerst Farm property in terms of a whole green campus concept. He explained that a study was done in 2000 outlining what could be done, but given that the plan is seven years old, he said that the issue needs to be revisited and that it makes sense to look at it all like it's one package. He explained that once a firm it chosen, a very public process would begin to help determine the best use for the property.

B. Recreation Services – Nancy Cowan, Superintendent of Recreation

1. Ringing In The Holidays

Superintendent Cowan reported that Derek Smith did an excellent job leading the team for this year's very successful event. She explained that he worked diligently to get businesses, community members, and sponsors involved this year more than ever. She added that Superintendent Wiktorowski's contributions on the operations side were crucial to the event. She summarized that it was a great team effort and thanked the Commission for their efforts in building a float.

2. Community Assessment Survey for Older Adults

Superintendent Cowan reported that the Department has been working very hard to get the assessment results to the Commission. She added that the charge for the assessment was led by Senior Services Manager Rachel Zagaroli, without whose efforts it would not have been possible to be delivered in such an organized manner. She explained that Dr. Miller of the National Research Center presented a report to City Council on November 26th. The packet that the Commission received contained that report and it is also available on the City's website. She explained that the report contained a lot of information the Department already knew and additionally some new information. The areas that were identified as areas that needed work included offering a broader range of services and opportunities and looking at marketing and educating the community on what is offered in new and innovative ways. She summarized that much of the information was used to develop the Senior Services Strategic Plan.

3. 2008/2011 Senior Services Strategic Plan

Superintendent Cowan said that the process to develop this plan was quite lengthy; including doing focus groups with community stakeholders, looking at local and national research, as well as looking at departments in the area. She pointed out that the group looked at the following:

- look at where we are now
- assess what we're doing well
- what we can do better
- what we need to do to get there

Ms. Cowan said that the group set the following five major priorities:

- connecting with the community
- broadening of services
- establishing a volunteer opportunity list
- continuing to enhance the transportation program
- fiscal management

Commissioner Zyczynski commented that communication is one of the most frustrating things – how do people that don't have access to newspapers or the internet know about the programs the Department offers. She said she thought the newsletter would be valuable if it could be targeted to households with members 60 and older. She has been advertising our programs to her subdivision's homeowners association via email. She summarized by saying she was glad to see that "connecting with the community" was a high priority.

Commissioner Dooley asked what the commission members could do to help.

Superintendent Cowan replied that the commission members could make presentations at homeowner's association meetings; the Department could put together a template version of the services offered – highlighting senior services as a larger part of that. In addition, this could be highlighted with commission member's contact throughout the community, keeping in mind that "seniors" covers a really broad range. She added that the Department is always open to ideas on how to communicate with the public. She explained that Tracie Ringle is currently working on a standardized template to present to the public, if any member is interested in making a presentation.

Commissioner Policicchio commented that commissioners wear two hats; one as a champion for the Department and one as a citizen that is a tax paying recipient of the services the Department offers. He said that people were always wondering what they were getting for their tax dollars and noticed of the five major priorities two of the categories promote only the Department (connecting with the community and establishing a volunteer opportunity list) and don't necessarily offer a service to the tax payer. He added that although some people have said they wanted to volunteer, he felt that the vast majority of people just want to receive something for their tax dollars. He pointed out that of the five major priorities, only the category of "broadening services" actually addressed programming for the community. Commissioner Policicchio said he felt that the community needed to be engaged in discussions in a quorum situation, on a more ongoing basis. He doesn't think the old demographics can be used. He was surprised to read that a lot of our community has a family income of under \$25,000, something he would have never guessed. With that in mind, he thinks that transportation and basic services are going to be needed. He thought that from a resident's standpoint, what the Department needs to address is "what is the infrastructure that is going to make my quality of life as a baby boomer living here, going to make me want to stay here?" He said that he wants to sound an alarm before the presentations begin, that the Department needs to offer more. For example, he feels that "fiscal management" is a given and simply expected, but the Department needs to communicate to people what they are getting for their money.

Director Auler replied that those comments are the types of things that the Department talks about through the Strategic Planning Process and setting the stage for the Five Year Community Recreation Plan. We want to have one message going out to the public, which is why a template is being created to educate the community on what they are getting for their tax dollars. We know we have an economic impact on the community, that we promote a healthy and active life style, and we protect the environment. We need to do a better job connecting and positioning ourselves within the community, so the community can understand what benefits they are receiving. There will be a lot of community focus groups, public meetings, as well as community surveys in preparation of developing the Five Year Community Recreation Plan. Director Auler summarized that he thought that the discussion was excellent and said that these are the types of discussions the Department is having internally. He said that community input is important, through the survey we learned that 80% of the community does not know we exist. He said he thought that those results indicate that maybe the senior center may need to relocate or expand services to other locations, maybe the hub is back at the Civic Center.

Commissioner Schwarzlose thanked everyone involved in the formulating and a presentation of the Senior Services Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Staab commented that the Commission needs to work with the communication department of the City and communicate that they are available to make presentations to the various homeowner's associations and set dates to do this once a month. He pointed out that the associations will be at the Civic Center for the State of the City Address, which may be a good opportunity to kick off the program. He thought it would be a good opportunity to not only make presentations, but to get community input.

Commissioner Zyczynski said that she attended this month's meeting regarding pathways/greenways. She said that she thought it would be nice to include a report on the project in the template that is being prepared. She noted that if people don't get the Novi News they might not be aware that some segments of this long term project are complete.

Student Commissioner Goyal said that she thought people do not read reports and felt that a flyer with concise information would be more efficient.

C. Park Operations – Matt Wiktorowski, Superintendent of Parks

1. Extreme Mountain Biking with Lila Lazarus of Fox 2

Superintendent Wiktorowski announced that one of the Department's most successful partnerships is with the Michigan Mountain Bike Association. Recently the organization was able to attract the attention of Lila Lazarus, who did a short TV spot on Extreme Mountain Biking in the woods at Lakeshore Park. Mr. Wiktorowski played the clip from the "Extreme Lila" segment of the news for the Commission. He commented that the MMBA had a great time doing the interview and filming, adding that it was great exposure for the park. He added that the activity was one of many healthy alternatives for the community, noting that one member has lost over 100 pounds on his mountain bike.

2. 2007/2008 Capital Improvement Project Update

Superintendent Wiktorowski gave an update to the Commission regarding the 31 Capital Improvement Projects currently being worked on. He reported that of those projects currently 51.6% complete, which is right on schedule to be complete by the end of the fiscal year. In addition, 16% of those projects are over 90% complete. He commented that the community will notice a lot of progress, supported by funds allocated by City Council with the Commission's recommendations.

Mr. Wiktorowski reported that regarding the Power Park lighting project, the project is out to bid and he will be making a recommendation to City Council soon. He hopes that the lights will be up by spring of 2008.

Superintendent Wiktorowski also reported that the Community Sports Park maintenance facility has been through the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and has recently been sent back by the Building Department with a couple of modifications. The consulting firm has begun writing the specs for the building and we anticipate that the building will be up and functioning by the end of May, although he's hoping for the end of April.

Superintendent Wiktorowski reported that the Council Chambers seating project, which was to take place over the holidays, will be pushed back to February due to a carpet installation glitch.

Superintendent Wiktorowski announced that earlier that day, the Novi Beautification Commission hosted the quarterly meeting and a luncheon for the Beautification Commission of Southeast Michigan, which is made up of the beautification commissions of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. There were approximately 100 attendees that discussed green alternatives and general business. It was great exposure for the City of Novi and he reported that the Commission did a great job.

D. Novi Parks Foundation Report

Commissioner Staab reported that the Foundation has approximately \$90,000 of total funds available as of November 28th, of which \$54,917 is unrestricted. The gala event was a success November 9th, where the Foundation received the Naming Rights Award from ITC in the amount of \$100,000 a year for the next 5 years. He said he would defer any other event reports to the next meeting.

Commissioner Dooley reported that the Foundation will send out a questionnaire to see what people liked or disliked about the first annual gala, to find out how to make the event bigger and better for 2008.

MATTERS FOR COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION:

A. Discussion and consideration for approval of the 2008/2011 Senior Services Strategic Plan

Director Auler announced that if the Commission feels comfortable tonight, he requests their approval of the adoption of the 2008/2011 Senior Services Strategic Plan. He added that if the Commission is not comfortable with that, the Department can bring it back at the January, 2008 meeting.

Discussion:

Commissioner Policicchio said that he would approve, with the understanding that the plan will be the framework, which will be continually invigorated by public input. He would like to see the plan be a living document that encompasses additional programs and evaluate programs that the community may not want, this is not something written in stone.

Director Auler replied that this is a guide, a fluid document. The Department will continue to seek public input to improve services to boomers and seniors.

Commissioner Policicchio said that the Department surveys participants for feedback on the programs that it offers. He feels it is equally, if not more important, to survey those that do not participate and find out why. He said that when you survey participants that like the programs, they'll want you to keep offering the same things over and over. He said that he wasn't up on the internet, but thought a blog might be a good way for the Department to receive feedback.

Director Auler replied that the team concurs with those statements.

Commissioner Zyczynski said she thought that a newsletter should be sent to the people that participated in the survey that formulated the 2008/2011 Senior Services Strategic Plan and maybe continue to send them newsletter updates.

Commissioner Radcliffe said that she only had the opportunity to review the plan that day. She thought it looked comprehensive, but she wasn't prepared to vote to approve it at that night's meeting.

Student Commissioner Goyal said that she agreed that a blog was a great idea. In school every club has a blog, where people could ask questions and gather information.

It was moved by Commissioner Dooley, seconded by Commissioner Zyczynski to adopt the 2008/2011 Senior Services Strategic Plan as written. Motion passed 5-1.

Roll call vote Yeas: Commissioner Dooley, Policicchio, Shwarzlose, Staab, Zyczynski.

Nays: Commissioner Radcliffe.

8. Citizen Input – None

9. Commissioner Comments:

Commissioner Policicchio – Commended the Department for all the good work and wished everyone a good holiday season.

Commissioner Dooley – Wished everyone peace in the New Year.

Commissioner Staab – Said he attended the holiday concerts of the Novi Choralaires and all went very well. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and asked everyone to keep our soldiers in their prayers.

Commissioner Radcliffe – Said that she had the opportunity to attend several Parks, Recreation and Forestry events this month. She commented on the crowds at the Ringing in the Holiday Event, despite the weather. She went to the Choralaires concert, saying it was very enjoyable.

Commissioner Zyczynski – Thanked Derek for all of his help with the Commissioner’s float for the Ringing in the Holiday Event. She said the event was very enjoyable. She also attended the Novi Theatre’s production of “It’s A Wonderful Life” and said how good it was. She wasn’t sure what to expect; she said that she had never seen it done as a musical. She was very pleasantly surprised. She also wished everyone a happy holiday.

Commissioner Schwarzlose – Said that he too had attended the Ringing in the Holiday Event and was surprised at the turnout despite the weather. He said it was a great event. He also attended the production of “It’s A Wonderful Life”, said it was great and encouraged the audience to attend a performance the following weekend. He too wished everyone a happy holiday.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson Schwarzlose at 8:36 PM.

Date Approved: _____

Signed, Reagan Schwarzlose, Chairperson

Signed, Karen Zyczynski, Vice Chairperson