

Meeting Minutes
Cascade Charter Township
Parks Committee
Tuesday, September 21, 2021
8:00 AM
5920 Tahoe Dr

ARTICLE 1. Chairperson Wanty called the meeting to order just after 8:00 am.
Members Present: Alan Rowland, Mike Reese, Ginny Wanty, Matt Douglas, Joe Engel,
and Supervisor Grace Lesperance
Members Absent: Dawn McDonald

Others present: Planner Brian Hilbrands, Ada Parks Director Mark Fitzpatrick, Township
Manager Ben Swayze

ARTICLE 2. Approve the current Agenda.

**Motion made by Member Engel to approve the agenda as written. Sported by
Supervisor Lesperance. Motion carried.**

ARTICLE 3. Approve the Minutes of the August 10, 2021 meeting.

Member Engel pointed out that in article 8, 'gauge' is misspelled and the committee
isn't looking at property 'in' the river, but rather, property 'on' it.

**Motion was made by Supervisor Lesperance to approve the August 10, 2021 meeting
minutes with Member Engel's edits. Supported by Member Reese. Motion carried.**

ARTICLE 4. Acknowledge visitors and those wishing to speak to non-agenda items.

Wayne Meulendyk, brought back concerns about Cascade Burton Park that he had
previously spoken to the committee on. He was advised that it may be a few months
before they had any action on his requests. He sent statistics to the committee
members for their review post-meeting. He also found the answer to whether there
was electricity on the street to put up a camera, as that had been a point of interest
during the previous discussion. Meulendyk said that there must be electricity along the
street in questions as there are street lights along the path.

Mark Fitzpatrick, the Ada Parks Director, attended the meeting to talk about how Ada
Parks and Cascade Parks can work together to collaborate and improve the recreational
areas in both townships. He stayed for the rest of the meeting to provide insight on
how Ada Parks is succeeding and how Cascade Parks can use some of the same ideas.

ARTICLE 5. Park Master Plan

The decision on the table was whether or not the parks committee wants to consider
developing an RFP for services to assist with the Master Plan update. Previously,
Director Peterson and Planner Hilbrands were going to prepare the Master Plan update
internally, but as Director Peterson is no longer a member of staff and Planner Hilbrands
has recently had a large number of tasks and responsibilities added to his workload,
staff handling the update may no longer be a viable option. RFPs over \$25,000 have to

be bid out to companies per township policy; there need to be at least three bids. The cost of an RFP isn't so much as a monetary cost as it is the cost of people's time and time for the RFP to process through the system. It would be at least until December for the physical project to get underway. The people's time cost would be 8-10 hours to get the RFP finalized and written and another 8-10 hours for it to be reviewed. The review would then go back to the committee for approval. The project's barrier is mainly the 15-20 manhours of staff time, with committee assistance, or more if the committee does not want to be directly involved; committee members may be able to spread their time across the project to fill in gaps.

Member Rowland thought that the committee could take Ada's RFP and use it as a mold for Cascade's new RFP. Director Fitzpatrick explained that Ada's RFP is specifically set around the processes and timelines Ada Parks follows such as when bids are due based on dates and times of committee meetings. Ada Parks fee structure also guides their RFP and builds out the scope of their projects. He shared that if you can narrow the scope of service and make the timeline very clear, the fees and price can be more negotiable.

Manager Swayze shared that Cascade Parks has a \$20,000 fund that they set aside specifically for special projects that come up or pieces of land the board wants to acquire. Member Rowland stated that they really need to develop a budget breakdown and purchase criteria as there aren't currently any documented requirements. He believes that there should be a set amount budgeted for special projects but the board should still have final approval.

Member Wanty asked if there were specific dates that either the county or state require information by that parks committees should be aware of when building the timeline for a project. Director Fitzpatrick stated that the DNR requires the master plans in order to be eligible for state grants and the grants are due by the end of March. This means that, by the first of February, the master plan has to be in place in order for the committee to be eligible to apply for state grants; this applies to all of the DNR grants. Ada and Cascade require their RFPs to have a 30-day public notice ahead of a public hearing before acceptance; this pushes the timeline further back. If the grant isn't going to be applied for by this spring, the timeline doesn't matter as much. Neither Cascade Township nor Ada Township have had much luck in applying for grants in the past.

Speaking on DNR grants, Director Fitzpatrick shared that a lot of them follow very traditional DNR activity. They are mainly targeted at increasing the accessibility for anyone who is interested rather than just adding features. They want to increase availability and accessibility to recreation.

Township Manager Ben Swayze believes that 8 to 10 staff hours is doable and the best route as staff have done a lot of RFPs lately and have the experience and knowledge necessary to put out an RFP. He does not believe it is worth it to push the RFP through as quickly as possible to apply for grants as the township has not had a lot of success in receiving grants in the past. He thought it would be better to take the time to make sure the master plan is done well rather than quickly.

Member Wanty asked if there could be a motion to approve the creation of an RFP but talk about the related finances at a later time due to the number of items still to be covered during this meeting.

Planner Hilbrands said that he and Manager Swayze would work on a timeline and try to have it ready for the next Parks Committee meeting but the committee said that they didn't have to rush it that much as they wouldn't be trying to get it in on time to meet grant requirements. It was decided that if the RFP could be done in short order, the committee would review the RFP applications at the January meeting and get started in the second quarter. This would also work well as Cascade Township is currently working on an overall master plan and this would allow the parks committee and the township at large to share their priorities and fit their plans together.

Motion made by Member Rowland for staff to begin drafting the RFP to have ready for the next Parks Committee meeting. Supported by Member Lesperance. Motion carried.

ARTICLE 6. Soccer fields at the airport

Planner Hilbrands was able to circulate the study that West MI Sports Commission had done on Multi-use Square Field Projects. Supervisor Lesperance and Manager Swayze met with Mike Guswiler from the West Michigan Sports Commission about developing a square field project. Manager Swayze said that they were working on another project currently but they are very interested in working on a square field project and the two sites they were looking at for the project are Cascade's airport site and the former Christian Sports Complex on 36th Street in Kentwood. The Kentwood site is getting a lot of community attention but may not be able to include enough fields to fill this need as they are also talking about putting in camp grounds, a small golf course, and other amenities. Though it does not sound like an expensive project, doing it right to attract regional tournaments, including ones from outside of Michigan, would likely cost between \$20 and \$30 million.

Mike Guswiler's company previously worked on the Meijer project where they raised all the funds as well as own and operate the facility. This time they're looking to help raise money on the front end but for a community partner to own and operate the facility. They aren't just looking at this as a chance to build their facility in Cascade, but also to have Cascade Township really work with them and be a partner on the project. The biggest struggle is finding up-front money to build the facility. A priority would be ensuring that these fields wouldn't just be for the Sports Commission to use and prioritize their teams, it would be open to the community and also blocked for local leagues and larger tournaments.

Another important consideration is the time it will take to manage reservations and someone being there late at night to lock up as well as run tournaments during the day; it will also require more custodial staff to handle the upkeep. The master plan needs to consider all of these pieces including project financials, staff hours, operating costs, and any fundraising needed to complete a project of this scale.

ARTICLE 7. Responding to Visitors/Public Comment

Topic was moved to the next meeting's agenda.

ARTICLE 8. Presentation

Ada Parks Director Mark Fitzpatrick spoke to the work that can be done between Ada parks and Cascade parks. Member Wanty spoke to how beneficial it would be to have Director Fitzpatrick in on these discussions as he can see what is working in parks outside Cascade. Director Fitzpatrick has worked for Ada for 14 years and was director of Blanford Nature Center for 6 years before that, as well as being contracted by the National Wildlife Association for 10 years. While at Blanford Nature Center he worked with Kent County Parks, City of Grand Rapids Parks, and all of the local schools. He also worked with the land conservancy of West Michigan during this time and served on adjunct at western Michigan universities. This gives him a big picture perspective and he considers himself a Great Lakes ecologist. He sees stewardship of the watersheds as one of the most important practices as it will protect the ecosystem and is the biggest way to attract visitors. It isn't helpful for the watershed if the township works to create little green spaces but keeps adding pollutants such as phosphates to the water.

Supervisor Lesperance brought up the tax that was levied to spray for weed control and a woman who has come to both Ada and Cascade Townships as she believes that how one association is treating the weeds is making it worse and the milfoil is encouraging the algae, causing a decline in the health of the river.

Director Fitzpatrick emphasized that if you can find a funding source, you can start channeling some of that money into stewardship so that it takes care of itself and promotes a new land management model. This is done through a land conservancy strategic conservation plan and helps point to what areas are considered priorities, making sure the current township standards match the priorities.

Member Wanty said that one of their big questions is how to decide which properties they want to purchase and which ones fit their needs. Director Fitzpatrick said that it all fits together with climate resilience because it has a huge impact on parks and waterways. This has been evident recently due to the large storms and flooding. Along the Grand River, Grand Rapids has been modifying the landscape for flood plain overflow and water management rather than solely for aesthetics and recreation purposes.

In Ada Township, the merging of millages that cover all of parks, recreation, and land preservation has caused the merging of some committees and the splitting of others. This change has been monetarily beneficial but still has some organizational snags to work through. They now have it set so that committees are regularly meeting to focus on their much narrower scopes of business. Ada Township has created a trails millage to both create new trails and fund the upkeep of current ones; the inclusion of upkeep was very important in their latest millage. Another very important part of the trails sector is that it isn't just paved trails that need to be the focus; there are also unpaved trails, water trails, and associations that focus on their use.

Ada Township is working to have public planning sessions and a park survey similar to what Cascade Township is in the process of completing. Some of the committee members believe there should be more focus on trails going forward. Member Engel believes it is important to find a way to cross the highway to connect to Kentwood's trails but the lack of infrastructure to allow this has been a major barrier. This is a topic

that will warrant more discussion at a later meeting. Member Engel believes that the connectivity of trails should be an important point of interest in Cascade's new RFP.

Director Fitzpatrick spoke to a committee being pulled together at Kent County Parks that has representatives from different areas of Grand Rapids. This committee will focus on trail connectivity and Cascade does not currently have a representative on that committee. Member Wanty will work on getting a Cascade representative on the committee. Supervisor Lesperance volunteered to be Cascade's representative if no one else will but she doesn't believe she has the correct background to be beneficial.

Director Fitzpatrick said that their trails committee used to be part of their parks committee and, before the latest committee merging and splitting occurred, Ada Township had 28 different committees. Supervisor Lesperance stated that Cascade has the opposite problem. Cascade has staff but they don't necessarily live in the area and Cascade needs more local interest and engagement.

Director Fitzpatrick shared a key point that he sees as a problem is the definition of recreation services. Some consider it to have two sides: active, such as having staff to teach tennis lessons, and passive, like having hiking trails residents can explore at their own pace. Many people don't see that creating a nature preserve, hosting fourth of July parades, and lighting off fireworks for the holiday are also all recreation services.

Staffing is a problem when it comes to active recreational services. Cascade isn't providing active recreational services as there are recreational facilities doing that in the schools and places such as the YMCA and MVP. Ada is instead focusing on outdoor recreation like triathlons, yoga in the park, community festivals, soccer games, and more; these are all still considered recreation services. The way Ada Township has worked on changing this perspective is by listening to the desires of local business owners and not only charging fees for these services, but also allowing companies to sponsor events. This not only allows the township and its patrons to participate in a free or low-cost event/activity, but the business is also able to spread its name with a positive connotation for marketing purposes.

ARTICLE 9. Strategic Plan Update

Member Reese said that they've been meeting every other Friday and will have the results of the survey in the next few weeks. They are working to make sure all groups in the township are aware and represented. Focus groups and more detailed targeted surveys will be executed in some populations of the community.

ARTICLE 10. Parks Survey

Planner Hilbrands says that 830 participants have answered the survey thus far. Member Wanty said that she has yet to receive the parks survey letter that was sent out the first week of September and other members of her condo association are saying the same thing. It was mentioned that the survey is set to be in the Cascade Township newsletter and the best option to receive more responses would be to find out what day the newsletter is going on and close the survey two weeks after that. Planner Hilbrands said he will check with Assistant Township Manager Stephanie Fast to find out when the newsletter is going out and set the deadline for two weeks after that.

Motion was made by Supervisor Lesperance to extend the parks survey two weeks after the newsletter has been sent out. Supported by Member Engel. Motion carried.

ARTICLE 11. Michigan Trails Magazine Advertisement

Cascade has historically taken out a small 8th of a page ad to showcase Cascade's parks and it is now the time of year for discounted early renewal. The Michigan Trails staff drop off quite a few magazines at the Township Hall and the township staff pass them out. Michigan Trails Magazine is considered by many to be the best trail magazine in the state. Ada and Grand Rapids Townships purchase the same size ad in the magazine. This also increases local business due to people visiting the area for trails they see in the magazine and exploring local businesses while they are there.

Motion was made by Supervisor Lesperance to renew the same 8th of a page ad in Michigan Trails as Cascade has done in previous years. Supported by Member Reese. Motion carried.

Article 12. Old Business

Supervisor Lesperance brought up a piece of natural wooded land that is currently for sale as the owner has died. She believes that may be a good piece of land for the township to acquire. Member Wanty said that the township needs to get their standards and requirements for what properties they may purchase in line before making any quick decisions; she said that this may be discussion better fit for a subcommittee. Supervisor Lesperance said that she brought up this piece of land because she realizes this process may still not be in place for many months and didn't want the township to miss out on the opportunity. Director Fitzpatrick offered his knowledge and for Cascade Township to see the process Ada Township has written up for property acquisition to use as a base to develop their own.

Planner Hilbrands has not heard anything about the Renucci property.

Member Engel asked about Wycliff, wondering if anything had changed and Supervisor Lesperance explained that nothing had changed as of yet.

Article 13. Any other Business or Announcements/Upcoming Meeting dates

One of the Parks Committee guidelines is that all meeting dates for the following year are scheduled by the November Parks meeting. Planner Brian said that this was something that could be discussed and completed at the November meeting.

Next meetings are October 12 and November 16.

Article 14. Adjournment

Motion by Member Wanty to adjourn. Supported by Supervisor Lesperance. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Engel, Secretary