

Meeting Minutes

Cascade Charter Township
Parks Committee
Tuesday, November 16, 2021
8:00 AM
5920 Tahoe Dr.

ARTICLE 1. Chairperson Wanty called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.
Members Present: Dawn McDonald, Joe Engel, Chair Ginny Wanty, Supervisor Grace Lesperance, Mike Reese, Alan Rowland, and Matt Douglas
Members Absent (Excused): None

Others Present: Interim Planning Director Brian Hilbrands, Township Manager Ben Swayze, and three members of the public.

ARTICLE 2. Approve the current Agenda

Motion was made by Member Engel to approve the current Agenda. Supported by Supervisor Lesperance. Motion carried 7 to 0.

ARTICLE 3. Approve the minutes of the October 19, 2021 meeting.

Motion was made by Member Engel to approve the minutes as written. Supported by Member Lesperance. Motion carried 7 to 0.

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

Ann Cinnamon and Michelle Gordan came to request a port-a-potty be placed near the pickleball court and dog park at Cascade Township Park. They feel the bathroom is too far away from the pickleball court and dog park - particularly for older residents. They said that there were many others that felt the same could not make the 8:00am meeting time. People play pickleball year-round and last year many would play up until mid-December in Ada and Lowell as their nets stayed up and they had heated bathrooms. They also talked to Cascade's Building and Grounds Supervisor, Jim McDonald, about this and offered to help with fundraisers to raise money for specific the park improvements.

ARTICLE 5. Township Staff Response to Public Comment

Cameras in parks: There is an ongoing complaint by a Burton Street resident regarding people at Burton Park when they shouldn't be, including late at night and early in the morning. Manager Swayze and Supervisor Lesperance talked to the East Precinct Sheriff's team and found out they are considering passive cameras (always recording but not actively monitored). They are still in the early stages of this project but if it goes forward the township may be able to participate in the precinct's order for a few cameras. The recordings from these cameras would archive at the Sheriff's office but the township would pay for them and be able to access their footage. The Sheriff's office is looking at this as a Kent County-wide project, but they do not have much in the way of detailed information yet.

With respect to the resident's specific complaint, Manager Swayze spoke with the Sheriff's department and learned that there have only been three calls for potential crimes committed in each of the three parks over the last few years. The topic of purchasing cameras for the parks was tabled until the committee receives cost information from the Kent County Sheriff's department and then the project will be evaluated on terms of utility, cost and policy.

Member Rowland asked about installing a gate at the edge of the parking lot, off to the side of the road. Supervisor Lesperance suggested installing a sign saying the area is being monitored to act as a deterrent. Mr. Wayne Meulendyk expressed his concern about people driving their cars through the park at 5:00am and disturbing the neighborhood. He said he has photographed people driving through late at night and early in the morning on his property cameras. Chair Wanty said that she spoke with the people she sees walking their dogs at Burton Park and they said they only see kids riding bikes there after dark and not people driving through the park. A suggestion was made to find out what the cost would be to purchase and install a gate as well as what type of manpower would be required to open and close it as it would have to be closed every morning and night, most likely requiring a Building and Grounds employee to work late to close it. Member Rowland shared that he feels installing a parking lot gate would be a deterrent because people who would park there and then cause trouble would be afraid of their vehicle being towed if they had to park on the road.

Burton Park is not a 'drive-thru street' and the township has monitored traffic and usage there in the past to see if any measures need to be taken. For most in the surrounding neighborhoods, this isn't a huge issue, but headlights shine directly into one resident's house when a vehicle is driving in the dark. People driving through Burton Park isn't generally a common occurrence as it isn't a shortcut to any other area. Supervisor Lesperance asked the Parks Committee if these are the types of issues they want to deal with or if they think it should be handled by township staff. Member McDonald said that she believed this was the type of issue the Parks Committee should be looking into as it affects resident access to the parks.

Port-a-Potty: Manager Swayze said the township could easily place a port-a-potty near the dog park/pickleball court area, as requested by the two visitors who spoke during public comment. However, concern was expressed about setting a precedent for similar, focused needs of a particular resident constituency. Manager Swayze felt it was more advantageous for the Parks Committee to consider the matter in the context of the overall park's budget. Member Reese said that residents bringing their request to the committee should show them what public sees as top priorities.

Chair Wanty said she would like to bring Jim McDonald into the conversation because he would be able to appropriately optimize placement and use. An informal poll of committee members confirmed support for the temporary placement of a universal access porta-potty, with specific placement left to staff.

Supervisor Lesperance made a motion to rent and place one port-a-potty, centrally located (at the building and grounds discretion,) for the dog park and pickleball courts, at least temporarily. Supported by Member Rowland. Motion carried.

Member Engel moved to table further consideration of Burton Park surveillance cameras until the Sheriff's Department decides how/if they will implement them. Supported by Member Douglas. Motion carried.

Chair Wanty suggested they may want to at least hold off on adding a gate until the heavy machinery to remove the oak wilt has left or the machines may be unable to get into the park. It was suggested staff investigate the cost of a gate and see what would have to go into its purchase and maintenance. Action moved by member Rowland, supported by Member Engel. Motion carried.

ARTICLE 6. Developing Questions to Evaluate RFP Responses
Requested Action: Discussion on how to evaluate RFP responses

Member Reese stepped out due to a potential conflict of interest. Manager Swayze and Interim Planning Director Hilbrands will meet and do a basic evaluation of each RFP to make sure it has all of the necessary information and then send them to the Parks Committee. The Parks Committee will meet on November 30th to decide which companies they want to interview; interviews will take place later that week. During the interviews, each applicant will give a small introduction to their plan and the committee will have time to ask questions. After the interviews, the committee will recommend their decision to the Township Board who will make the final decision.

Chair Wanty said Ada Township focused on one issue they thought was most important and used that as a focus for evaluating all RFP's. Manager Swayze thought it would be better to focus on the whole document when first evaluating RFPs and then the committee could focus on specific priorities. Most members agreed with the latter approach. Interim Planning Director Hilbrands and Manager Swayze will begin looking over RFPs on Monday 11/29 and will email the committee if they find any glaring issues.

ARTICLE 7. Newsletter Delivery Problems
Requested Action: Discussion on if the problems have been addressed

Manager Swayze shared that the newsletter delivery problem is now settled after adding the 800 addresses left off the list due to a BS&A update. The list now has 6800 addresses but still doesn't include apartment addresses. Staff will work to get a list of apartment addresses in the township and add them into the system manually so they can send out information on the survey and strategic plan.

ARTICLE 8. Possibility of Parks Committee Holding Virtual Meetings

Manager Swayze said the Open Meetings Act (OMA), permits township staff and members of the public to attend meetings virtually but committee members must to

attend in person. To change this, he believes they would have to change the bylaws and create a resolution changing the committee from an 'Open Meetings Act committee' to an advisory only committee. Manager Swayze said he would have to talk to the township attorney about how that might work and what type of restrictions it would put on the committee. Manager Swayze said that the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee, the PFAS committee, and other advisory only committees can meet virtually.

ARTICLE 9. Strategic Plan Update

Member Reese gave an update on the Strategic Plan Subcommittee. He said a letter from Supervisor Lesperance encouraging residents to fill out the strategic plan survey will be going out shortly. This will help the committee determine what their priorities will be for the year and act as the basis for starting focus groups.

ARTICLE 10. Master Plan Survey/Property Acquisition Checklist

Member Engel gave an update on the development of the Property Acquisition Checklist. He and Chair Wanty researched what criteria other townships used to make decisions on purchasing property. They broke the categories for Cascade Township down into open space and park space, though many of the areas at least partially overlap. They are looking to create a tool to help the committee prioritize various criteria when deciding what land to purchase. Different criteria will have varying values and, though the content may be different for each property, this basis will give the committee a way to compare different properties. This will also be useful when presenting potential property purchases to the board and residents. Engel noted that Trustee McDonald has a draft policy for potential property purchases which will need to integrate with any acquisition document.

ARTICLE 11. Update on Oak Wilt Situation at Burton Park

Manager Swayze shared that he did pay the retainer for the bore sample consultant. Chair Wanty met with Township Building and Grounds Supervisor, Jim McDonald, Member Engel, West MI Tree, and Bartlett Tree Service to talk about the oak wilt situation. Neither company had a strong background in oak wilt so Chair Wanty contacted the oak wilt specialist for the state parks. They found that Mioakwilt.org has a list of oak wilt experts they could draw from. Cascade has two questionable oak wilt sites. The first one contains one very dead tree and the MSU Plant/Pest Diagnostic Lab usually requires a live tree sample to diagnose oak wilt. They instead had an expert come out and take a bore sample of the dead trees which ended up testing positive for oak wilt. The second site had two mostly dead trees with some branches way up high that were still alive, so a sample was taken from the live branches; those also tested positive for oak wilt.

The township will need to trench around the affected tree roots to prevent the oak wilt fungus from spreading to other trees. Chair Wanty was unsure if the Building and Grounds will be able to do this or if a consultant will need to be hired. Once an infected

tree has come down, it's wood either has to be tarped for a year or fed through a wood chipper. Jim McDonald is not comfortable having B&G staff cutting down the trees so a contractor will need to be hired for that portion. There aren't currently any neighborhoods being affected by these two oak wilt sites but Cascade Farm is getting close. Manager Swayze will share Cascade Farms Homeowner Association Contact information with Member Engel. Member Engel will reach out to Cascade Farms leadership, explaining the Oak Wilt situation and ask about the possibility of entering Site #1 through Cascade Farms. Signage will be added to explain what is happening at the 2 sites. Chair Wanty is checking with the oak wilt experts to see how far the fungus has spread. Red oak is the main type of oak tree that can get this virus. The state has a database sharing information on all confirmed oak wilt sites statewide. There are two residential sites in Cascade Township that are also tested positive for oak wilt as well as a third site recorded but yet to be confirmed.

The committee wants to set up a Forest Management program for Burton Park and Peace Park. Ideally, professionals trained in oak wilt identification as well as other tree diseases would walk through the park a couple times per year and spot check trees so any forest health issues can be caught early and minimized. Member Rowland suggested having the company who is contracted to remove the trees walk through and tag any infected trees once a year and then we pay them to go take down the trees. Member Engel said he'd rather have a strike team, or a non-profit do a walk through once a year to ensure a competent but frugal approach. Chair Wanty said Jim McDonald wants to get some of his guys trained to recognize oak wilt as well. Chair Wanty said the state requires every county Conservation District have access to a forester. Unfortunately, the Kent County Conservation District forester went back to college and has not been replaced. Chair Wanty will call Jessie Schulte at KCD to discuss options.

The committee appreciated the article about oak wilt that Chair Wanty wrote for the township newsletter. They would like to continue adding an article to each issue, starting by introducing the committee members. The committee would also like to get a township email address so that residents can submit questions or concerns. Initial monitoring would likely be handled by Manager Swayze. The Township will need to come up with a specific procedure as to how emails are reviewed and processed.

Supervisor Lesperance made a motion to create a parks committee email address on the township website and develop procedures and personnel as they progress. Seconded by Member Rowland. Motion carried 7 to 0.

ARTICLE 12. 2022 Parks Committee Meeting Dates
Requested Action: Discussion on setting 2022 meeting dates and times

The committee discussed changing the meeting time for the 2022 year but ultimately it was decided that the best meeting time was still 8:00am on the third Tuesday of each month, 10 months out of the year. All future meeting dates will be listed on each agenda.

The only potential meeting conflict that Chair Wanty immediately noticed was that the April meeting would fall on the day after Easter.

ARTICLE 12. Old Business

There was not any old business to discuss.

**ARTICLE 13. Any Other Business
Upcoming Meeting Dates/Topics**

The next meeting will take place on November 30th to go through RFP's and choose finalists for interviews. The group will then schedule the interviews and meet afterwards to discuss the final RFP.

Members should send any agenda items for the January meeting to Chair Wanty.

ARTICLE 14. Adjournment

**Member Engel made a motion to adjourn. Supported by Supervisor Lesperance.
The Meeting adjourned at 9:37 am.**

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Engel, Secretary