

Cascade Township Parks Committee Notes

April 20, 2021

8:00 am Virtual Zoom Meeting

ARTICLE 1. Planner Brian Hilbrands called the meeting to order at 8:02 am.
Members Present: Matt Douglas, Dawn McDonald, Alan Rowland, Mike Reese, Ginny Wanty, Joe Engel, and Grace Lesperance.
Others Present:

ARTICLE 2. Approve minutes from March 17, 2021

Motion was made by Member Engel to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2021 meeting. Supported by Member Wanty. Motion carried 7 to 0.

ARTICLE 3. Park Discussion Items

1. Park and Recreation Plan Update

Planner Hilbrands stated that a park and recreation plan update is typically done every five years, and although there is no strict deadline, the plan is due for an update at this time. Planner Hilbrands stated that it's important at this time to discuss options on how to gain public input, and a timeline for gathering this information. Some ideas discussed have been surveys, open houses, community events, direct communications, and outreach at local parks and libraries.

Member Wanty stated that she believes it's helpful to have the plan updated before public input/interest is gathered.

Member Reese states that he believes public input is important to have before putting together a draft or updated plan, and believes that looking at past park plans and other past Township plans can help shape how public input surveys are put together.

Planner Hilbrands stated that the first stage may be updating internal numbers, second stage would be gathering public input, and then using both of those to form goals and objectives moving forward.

Member McDonald stated that during public input, she believes it would be good to have "idea boards" available to the community to offer ideas of things that other communities may have, and that may be of interest to residents of this community.

Member Engel asked if this would be a digital board, Member McDonald stated that a digital board would be good as the pandemic is still limiting gatherings, and a digital board would be efficient at presenting ideas and leaving room for suggestion.

Member Reese stated that he agrees that a digital board would be a good idea at this time. Planner Hilbrands agreed that a digital board combined with a physical board (when possible) would help gather as much input as possible.

Member Engel asked if there would be a possibility to partially update the parks plan for the next 5-6 years, and then attach that to a digital board that would provide an opportunity for the community to see where we are currently, and also be able to suggest plans they would like to see in the future.

Member Douglas asked if this is an overall plan for all parks in the Township, or one specifically. Planner Hilbrands stated this is an overall plan for both parks and pathways.

Member Douglas asked if direct mailings letting residents know there is a virtual board available to add comments to is an option, Planner Hilbrands stated that mailings have been done previously, and can be done again in some way if desired.

Member Reese stated that social media has seen the most success in response over the last few years, but the DNR requires public meetings and engagement for compliance with park plan guidelines in order to be eligible for some grants.

Planner Hilbrands states that surveys or meetings can be promoted through the Townships Facebook page.

Member McDonald stated her thought that a “how did you hear about this” question on a survey may help decide how to gather public input in the future.

Planner Hilbrands asked what questions Members would like to see on future surveys. Member Wanty stated she would like to know how community members use parks (how often do you use parks/trails, etc.). Member Rowland stated he would like to know how many parks residents have visited (do they know how many are available?). Member Engel stated he would like to know what people want from the park systems (priorities, needs, ranks, etc.). Member Reese stated that a ranking system would be a good idea to focus on overall priorities and/or individual amenities (fields, playgrounds, etc.).

Member Engel stated that he believes offering a number of available options to choose from/rank would gather a good response. Member Reese agrees and thinks that an option to provide open feedback (the “other” box) would also be helpful.

Member Wanty asked how it should be asked if the public would like to see current Township properties (parks) be added to or updated, or the possibility of new properties acquired.

Member Lesperance stated that it could be asked “how important are parks and greenspace compared to other Township projects”.

Member Reese stated that funding mechanisms such as a new Parks Millage should be considered, Member Lesperance stated that she will pursue it at the Township Board level if survey results favor a millage.

Member McDonald stated that asking for a millage puts a value on a space, and it would be good to see how the public responds to that.

Member Wanty stated that other items such as hiring a Parks Director or expanding recreation programs can also be considered. Member McDonald stated that programming has been discussed in the past.

Member Lesperance asked if Members are interested in electing a Chair, Co-Chair, etc. for the Parks Committee as the By Laws state that can be done. Members agree that can be added to the next Meeting Agenda for further discussion.

Planner Hilbrands asked if there is any information Members would like to see included in the Parks and Rec Plan. Member Douglas stated that he would like to see the percentage of both greenspace and useable greenspace located in the Township. Member Engel states that he believes that information (or similar) is in the former Parks and Rec Plan in terms of assets, however it may need to be converted into a percentage.

Member Reese states that the National Park Service has recommendations for how much open space and green space an area should have based on the population, and suggests this can be used as a baseline for the new plan. Planner Hilbrands stated that information from the Michigan DNR has previously been used.

Member Lesperance asked when the last time a park was purchased by the Township, and asked if there was a way to get a list/timeline of when parks were acquired or created in the Township. Member McDonald stated that linear segments would also be included on that list.

Member Lesperance believes that residents have park space as a high priority as a “want” in the Township, and electing officers to help prioritize park space would be beneficial. Member Engel stated that residents don’t always know what is already available for their use.

Member Wanty asked about the latest census data and its impact. Member McDonald stated that results are currently delayed, however the census can help inform the Township which areas are becoming more dense and where new parks may be an option, or what areas may be underserved.

Member Wanty stated that she would be willing to lead nature hikes through Township parks to help with community exposure.

Member McDonald asked if the Township has the technical ability to link a survey to a QR code posted at a park as most people have smartphones with them.

Member Rowland suggested there be specific questions to cover all demographics (age, number of children in the household, etc.) of people answering survey questions.

Members discussed taking the survey first themselves to make sure it isn't too long, and will encourage residents to respond accordingly.

Member Reese stated that documenting how the survey is spread (word of mouth, Cascade Connections, social media) may help determine the demographic of survey responses.

Member Engel asked if Member Reese would be willing to head a small subcommittee to add new comments and ideas to the original parks survey to review at the next meeting. Member Reese stated that he would be willing to do that and coordinate with other Members and Planner Hilbrands.

2. Discuss and Consider Virtual or In-Person (Hybrid) Meetings

Planner Hilbrands stated that the Township now has the ability to hold in-person/virtual hybrid meetings, so he would like to know how the Parks Committee would like to hold future meetings.

Members discussed the convenience of meeting virtually at this time, and decided to revisit this decision at a later meeting.

Member Reese asked when the next scheduled meeting date is. Planner Hilbrands stated that it isn't until September 21st, however he anticipates scheduling one before then as the Parks Plan is in the process of being updated. Member Douglas suggested possibly meeting outdoors at a park.

Member McDonald suggested setting a meeting date now for June; Members decided that June 8th, at 8:00 AM would work best for everyone.

Planner Hilbrands asked Member Wanty to review the upcoming Garlic Mustard pull planned for Peace Park. Member Wanty reviewed plans for that day (May 15), and stated that she would be willing to help organize other pulls that community members would like to organize. Member Wanty also reminded Members there will be a dumpster for pulled garlic mustard located at the Thornhills Fire Station May 7th-31st.

Member Reese asked for an update on the possible purchase of the Wycliff property for a new park. Member Lesperance stated that one of the owners met with Township representatives and discussed preferring the Township to buy the property for a park, but stated that they do have an investor who is antsy to get the property sold in general. Member Lesperance stated that he did offer a non-binding letter of interest option with the Township putting down five to ten thousand for a period of 45 days while the Township performs due diligence to collect information.

Member Lesperance asked if the Parks Committee would feel comfortable moving forward with this, Member Engel stated “no”, as he doesn’t see this property being moved on in 45 days. Member Lesperance stated that the current Pathway fund has money in it that may be available to use if the Wycliff property is used as a trailhead park. Member Reese stated that he believes this would be a great project and use as a trailhead, but he agrees with Member Engel that 45 days is too little time to plan, and the price is still too high.

Member Lesperance stated that she will put together information requested by both the Township Board and Parks Committee.

Member Douglas asked if the time period for the letter of interest deposit can be extend past 45 days, Member Lesperance stated that she can ask the owners.

Member McDonald also stated that she believes the 45-day time frame is also too little time to plan, and that price would need to be significantly cut in order to justify the purchase to voters.

Member Engel stated this discussion shows how a survey of Township residents “wants and needs” will be helpful, and that although opportunism and flexibility are great, the plan needs to be well thought out. Member Reese stated that the census may help shed light on the value of this parcel versus other parcels in the Township.

Member Douglas asked about the possibility of the parcel being split and developed, Member Lesperance stated that a split has not been requested yet, but it is possible.

ARTICLE 4. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 am.