

Meeting Minutes

Cascade Charter Township
Parks Committee
Tuesday, October 19, 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, Ginny Wanty, Grace Lesperance, and Matt Douglas (arrived at 9:05)
Members Absent (Excused): Alan Rowland, Mike Reese

Others Present: Planner Brian Hilbrands and Township Manager Ben Swayze

ARTICLE 2. Approve the current Agenda

Motion was made by Member Engel to approve the current Agenda. Supported by Member Lesperance. Motion carried 4 to 0.

ARTICLE 3. Approve the minutes of the September 21, 2021 meeting.

Motion was made by Member Engel to approve the minutes as written. Supported by Member Lesperance. Motion carried 4 to 0.

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

Sandy Veenkamp was present as a member of the public, and stated that she was attending to listen and learn.

ARTICLE 5. Strategic Plan Update

Supervisor Lesperance said that there will be a draft/update sent to the board for their October 27th meeting. The introductory questionnaire will be mailed out soon, but not until after the holidays. Chair Wanty stated that before sending out the survey they need to find out why the post office is not delivering questionnaires to Centennial Park and see if there are other areas not receiving questionnaires as well. Supervisor Lesperance says she will speak with Manager Swayze about this problem. Feedback is not going to be collected from citizens over the holidays as there generally isn't as much of a response during that time period. The survey push will begin after the holiday.

Supervisor Lesperance and Chair Wanty explained that they are looking for committee members to write articles to add to the newsletter and Member Engel said he would be willing to do so with some notice.

ARTICLE 6. Responding to Visitors/Public Comment

Manager Swayze stated that Wayne Meulendyk had met with his neighbors as well as with the road commission and Township staff prior to speaking at the committee meetings. Supervisor Lesperance asked if the committee should do anything about the

camera issue in Burton Park and Manager Swayze said that they spoke with the Kent County Sherriff's Department to see what type of calls they had received for all of the parks in the past couple years. There were only three calls in Burton Park and they were all complaints that people were driving through the park as a cut through. This means there aren't currently enough problems to necessitate cameras but, if the Parks Committee wanted to be proactive, they could add them. A Member said they spoke with a Burton Park patron and they said they don't see any mischief occurring at this park, no one is ever there at night, and the only children she sees there are maybe one child a month riding through on a bicycle.

The decision that the committee needs to make is what all does the committee need to address verses what is staff's responsibility in relation to visitors and public comment. The committee would like to pass along the Sherriff's Department's response to Wayne so that he knows his question has been addressed and request that the Sherriff's Department document anything they do in relation to this. The real disagreement is with the right of way in the area and there is a split between residents that want the road paved and those who don't as it would require the cutting down of some trees. Both the Sherriff's Department and Road Commission agree that the road does not need to be paved for safety reasons. Members McDonald and Engel stated that they do not see a need to overrule the answers from the Road Commission and Sherriff.

There was discussion as to how Wayne got the personal email addresses of committee members as they are not shared on the township website. Manager Swayze said that the township is in the process of switching from hosting their own email exchange service to a cloud based one and it hadn't made sense to assign email addresses until the change is complete. Once the transition is made, the board will have a conversation about assigning cascade specific email addresses for different committee members. A single, general information, email inbox was suggested so that each committee have an inbox rather than each person to both limit cost and not require so many members to be checking an additional email address.

ARTICLE 7. Park Budget Discussion

Member Engel asked what was included on the parks committee budget and where they are now/what do they have in terms of a budget. Manager Swayze explained that there are really four budgets inside parks: the cemetery budget (includes basic materials, electric, and rental of equipment for grave digging when the ground is frozen), the building and grounds budget in the general budget (includes building and facility upkeep as well as labor), the parks budget (includes materials, cleaning supplies, fertilizer, woodchips, and a miscellaneous expense allotment of \$20,000 a year to cover problems like the current Oak Wilt situation), and the open space budget in relation to Burton Park and Peace Park (includes maintenance, invasive species removal, and paying towards the bond debt service). There isn't a specific parks committee budget but these are areas in the township budget where the committee can pull for specific projects. Parks projects can also be built into the overall budget. Other than open space fund, the rest of these budgets are part of the general fund. Member Wanty thought it would be

beneficial to see the budget as it has been in the past or to increase transparency as to what the township budget currently looks like.

A member brought up the lots on Thornapple River Dr that were recently purchased by the township and asked how that occurred. Manager Swayze explained that that one of the goals in the previous strategic plans was to have a pedestrian friendly waterfront and, if the township didn't buy this land immediately, it would be purchased by someone else who would build a million-dollar home and the township wouldn't ever have the opportunity to purchase it. The board bought the property without conversation with the Parks Committee and used cash out of the general fund to pay for it.

Manager Swayze said that they are currently working to develop the draft budget, offering to bring budget details to the next committee meeting and go over what they have been working on. He suggested committee members bring any projects to him that they think should be in the draft budget but isn't generally. Member Engel shared with the committee that it is difficult to anticipate what money parks would need to have on the budget to purchase properties or for large projects. Manager Swayze explained that Member Engel is correct, but the budget is a living document that can be amended to include new projects throughout the year so, if the committee doesn't think of a project now that they end up wanting in the middle of the year, they can amend it. There was conversation on the bike path bridge and what happened. Manager Swayze said that it was currently cancelled due to the price being much over what they had estimated it at.

Member Wanty asked who makes decisions on pathways and whose responsibility it is. Manager Swayze talked about a Pathways Committee that had prioritized projects as part of the millage adoption, but the Infrastructure Committee made a majority of these decisions. A member asked about the pathway budget for this year and said he thought he remembered Planner Hilbrands saying the budget for pathway maintenance for this year was either doubled or tripled due to a project that would require extra funding. Planner Hilbrands said that it was generally a \$100,000 budget for maintenance and this year it's a \$200,000 budget. Manager Swayze explained how the pathway budget was set to change over the years and build up enough to replace all of the pathways over time as they reached their end of usefulness and the fund balance is held between years so that portions of the path can be replaced when necessary.

Member Wanty said that she thinks the Parks Committee should be closer to the budget and more planned out and another member came back and questioned if that's really the depth the committee wants to step into. The committee decided to table further budget conversation until the next meeting.

ARTICLE 8. Review of Master Plan Update RFP

Manager Swayze said they drafted the RFP by using the usual language as well as taking the best parts of Ada's RFP and Cascade's previous RFPs. On page four it includes an estimated schedule for procurement activities. If the parks committee recommends the RFP, it will go to the Township Board to be issued on October 27th. If the Township Board approves it proposals will be issued October 28th. Proposals would be due November 19th, giving committee members a chance to look over the proposals during the Thanksgiving break, and hold a special Parks Committee meeting the week after Thanksgiving to decide if they liked the proposals, which ones, and if there were any they wanted to interview. The Parks Committee would need to make a recommendation by December 7th as the last Township Board meeting for the year is December 15th and that gives them a start date of the first Monday of 2022 with six months to go through the process.

Page seven of the RFP leaves it open for the subject matter experts to recommend if more public input should be collected and page ten explains the proposal evaluation subcommittee and that the Parks Committee makes a recommendation to the township board where the Township Board makes the final decision by December 15th, 2021.

Member Engel praised Manager Swayze's RFP writing and asked if the methodology for prioritizing potential property purchases should be included or if it should be a policy outside of the RFP? Manager Swayze said that it depended on if they want the policy to be a part of the Master Plan or outside of it. Member Wanty asked if they could just add a line to the RFP saying that the prioritization of potential properties will be evaluated according to the Park's Committee process, hammering out what the actual process is later; this was the direction the committee decided to go. Manager Swayze volunteered he and Planner Hilbrands to do an initial review of the proposals to see if they meet the requirements, before bringing them to the Committee. The committee will complete a Doodle poll to determine when they can next meet on this.

Supervisor Lesperance made a motion to recommend the RFP as written with the addition of text reading, 'prioritizing potential property purchases in accordance with Park's Committee policy.' Supported by Engel. Motion carried 4 to 0.

ARTICLE 9. Potential Oak Wilt Situation at Burton Park

Chair Wanty said they have discovered Oak Wilt at two sites at Burton Park. Jim McDonald, Cascade Township Building and Grounds Supervisor, and the Forrester from Barry County Conservation District met with her Friday, October 15th, to look at the trees. The forester said that West Michigan Tree has a trencher and that's what will need to be done to contain the oak wilt. Many trees will have to come down and the roots will have to be dug up and it will be incredibly expensive. One of the two sites is right near a neighborhood so the township will need to work with the home owners to dig out any roots that may encroach into their yard. If the tree is just cut down, that won't stop the spread of Oak Wilt.

Member Engel said that he had worked with Oak Wilt before and one of the important things to do is educate the neighbors about it, why it is dangerous, and why it must be removed. Justin Heslinga, Stewardship Director at the Land Conservancy, would be a good person to have come and educate residents about Oak Wilt.

It only takes within one growing season for Oak Wilt to completely kill a tree. Trenching will most likely take place in the spring but the subject matter experts will look further into it and make sure they have all the information on how best to remove it.

West Michigan Tree will be coming to look at the affected area on October 20th. The township will get at least two price quotes for trenching, one from Barry County and one from West Michigan Tree.

Supervisor Lesperance said that she believes Manager Swayze will say that there is money set aside for this already as it falls under maintenance but she also wanted to make a motion just in case Manager Swayze says one is required so that the township can start addressing the situation as quickly as possible.

Another question many members had was as to if the dead wood was considered infected and how it had to be disposed of. The land needs to be trenched 50 ft to 100 ft from the last affected tree.

Supervisor Lesperance made a motion to move forward in addressing the Oak Wilt outbreak in Burton Park based on the direction from the experts that have been consulted and work with other property owners as necessary. Seconded by Member Engel. Motion carried 5 to 0.

ARTICLE 10. Master Plan Survey

Planner Hilbrands said that the newsletter had been sent out last week and there had been 961 responses to the survey thus far. The survey was scheduled to remain open until October 20th, but will remain open a few additional days to catch anyone submitting late. This participation is considered a great response.

The consultant will evaluate the public input and decide if they think there has been adequate involvement from all demographics or if they need to solicit responses from other citizens to get a more representative sample. Planner Hilbrands said he would share the responses with the board once the survey closes.

ARTICLE 11. Prepare for Discussion at November Meeting for 2022 Parks Committee Meeting Dates

There will be a discussion at the November 2021 meeting as to which time and day will work best to hold 2022 meetings. The intention is for meetings to take place February through November. Planner Hilbrands and Supervisor Lesperance will check with

Manager Swayze to see if meetings are sometimes allowed to be virtual or if the open meetings act forbids that.

ARTICLE 12. Old Business

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

The next meeting will take place on November 16th.

ARTICLE 14. Adjournment

**Member Lesperance made a motion to adjourn. Supported by Member McDonald.
The Meeting adjourned at 9:32 am.**

Respectfully submitted,

Joe Engel, Secretary