ASYLUM LAKE POLICY AND MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Minutes
February 10, 2022

Members Present: Pete Strazdas, Chair; Sharon Dever, Vice Chair; Kay Chase, Council Secretary; Tom Sauber, Natural Areas Manager; Bonnie Alkema; Tyler Bassett; Mark Frever; Lauri Holmes; John Kreuzer; James Penner; Paul Scott; Cybelle Shattuck

Members Excused: Steve Kohler, David Lemberg, Marnie Twynham

Guests: Judy Huxmann; Paul MacNellis

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ZOOM ROLL CALL.

- A quorum of members was present, and Mr. Strazdas called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

II. EDITING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA FOR FEBRUARY 10 2022.

- There were no changes to the Agenda.
- Mr. Scott, supported by Mr. Frever, moved approval of the Agenda as submitted. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

III. EDITING AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 13 2022.

- The following changes were requested: Under old business, the ecological study was done in 2018. Mr. Bassett did the study while he was an employee of Native Connections. Under Item 6, 3rd bullet, remove the second sentence. Change “gone by the middle of May” to “Mr. Bassett will be very busy by the middle of May, limiting his involvement.” Under New Business, Oak trees and beavers, “care and capacity” should be “carrying capacity”.
- Ms. Holmes, supported by Ms. Alkema, moved approval of the Minutes as amended. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT.

a. Five-Year Budget Recommendation.

- Mr. Frever referred to the daily operational costs. There is a regular trash routine, snow plowing of the parking lots and sidewalks. The paved emergency entrance across from the Gibbs Farm gets plowed up to the woods. That charge should be on the next financial report.
- Mr. Sauber reported that two trees came down. One of them was over the trail and it was reported under trails management. The other tree was on a fence.
- The Operating Financial Report shows transactions that happen every month. Projects are shown as a separate category. There are approximately five months remaining in the current budget year and there is just under $20,000 dollars ($19,097) remaining for that time period. The Council can either vote to spend that money or carry it over into the next fiscal year.
- Ms. Huxmann, Mr. Sauber, Mr. Frever and Mr. Strazdas are on the subcommittee for the five-year budget plan. The proposed plan shows an annual operating amount under assets. The idea is to budget high and spend below that amount. Recurring projects are shown with a double asterisk. The balance ($40,000) of the $100,000 annual budget would be for new projects the Council wants to do.
- There are three categories in the five-year plan: recurring operating expenses, recurring projects and new projects. The subcommittee is recommending for the next fiscal year, that the Council budget $100,000. If there is any excess from the current fiscal year, that will be extended into the next fiscal year. The plan was calculated with a three to four percent increase for each year in the budget. The five-year plan provides a target for consistent spending.
- Ms. Huxmann reported that there is nothing going on with sign subcommittee right now. They can look into putting up signage to let people know they need to stay off the areas where there is new growth in the springtime.
- Mr. Frever mentioned that the format and the numbers in the current five-year plan aren’t much different than the plan from 2016 when he started with WMU.
- Ms. Alkema, supported by Mr. Scott, moved approval of the proposed five-year budget plan. The motion passed unanimously.
- Mr. Hampton commented that it is discouraging to see such a large amount of money budgeted for what Facilities Management does on site ($36,465). He suggested that maybe the Council could work with volunteers from ALPA and other organizations to shrink that number. Mr. Strazdas stated that the actual expenses for Facilities Management is projected to be about $20,000 for the current fiscal year, keeping in mind that the objective is to spend lower than the budgeted amount.
It was suggested that the subcommittee and the Council could identify priority projects for each year of the five-year plan. That could be discussed in more detail at a strategic planning session of the Council. The needs and wants that come out of the Land Management Plan could also be discussed at a strategic planning session. Each year, $40,000 to $50,000 could be dedicated to specific projects identified in the plan.

V. OLD BUSINESS.

a. Project Updates.

i. Storm Water Project.

- Mr. Strazdas stated that the subcommittee will meet in the near future to determine how long to wait for grant money versus when this project should be put out to bid. Bidding the project out when there is snow on the ground would yield the best value versus bidding it out in good weather when the contractors are busy.

ii. Ecological Study.

- Mr. Sauber advised there is $6,000 to cover the cost of the ecological study. Mr. Bassett initiated e-mail contact between Orbis and Mr. Sauber so the contracts can be signed, and the project can proceed in a timely fashion.
- Mr. Sauber spoke with Jackie about sole sourcing. He can provide her with information about what the Council did previously.

iii. Ecological Maintenance.

- Refer to Garlic Mustard pull.

iv. Garlic Mustard Pull.

- Ms. Holmes advised that Mr. MacNellis is willing to help with the garlic mustard pull. It was scheduled over two weekends last year, and they would like to do that again this year.
- On April 30th, there will be a large gathering in the Preserve to honor Tom Small, and the intention is to not interfere with that event. Sunday, May 1st would be the first day of the Garlic Mustard pull. May 7th and 8th would be the second pull. Mothers’ Day is May 8th and it was suggested that would be an appropriate day to take care of “mother earth”. If it rains on any of those dates, the Garlic Mustard pull could be done on May 14th or 15th.
- There will be a program of schedules and sign-ups available to the Council in the near future. This project was well-received last year, and there are plans to have it more widely publicized this year. The hope is to make this a yearly event.

v. Install Memorial Tree.

- There was a brief discussion about who the memorial tree was for. Ms. Holmes suggested that it was for Pat Klein, who was one of the first people involved in the campaign to create the Preserve. The memorial tree for Arthur Falk died and will be replaced.
- Mr. Sauber will review the minutes to get more details and report back to the Council.

vi. Land Management Plan Committee.

- Mr. Bassett stated that Justin Heslinga is waiting for the contract, and then he will get back into the project. Mr. Heslinga is hoping to visit the site this month; the subcommittee will meet with him on site. Council members can let Mr. Bassett know if they would like to attend the on-site meeting.
- Maybe the Orbis report could be used to update the Land Management Plan, but it was unclear if the report would be done in time for that to happen. The Orbis report from 2018 was just a plant list. There could be a discussion at a strategic planning meeting as to which projects in the Land Management Plan can be done in each year of the five-year budget plan.
- Mr. Sauber will talk with Jackie Michels about the contract for Mr. Heslinga.

vii. Replace Dead Memorial Tree.

- The Chinquapin Oak is a good choice to use as a memorial tree. Discussion followed as to the location where the second memorial tree was to be planted. Mr. Sauber has approval to have the arborist purchase the replacement tree and plant it in the spring.
- Mr. Sauber will facilitate getting the tree. Mr. MacNellis volunteered to help plant the tree and create a watering schedule.
viii. **Sign Committee.**

- Ms. Huxmann advised that there is nothing going on with the Sign Committee right now.

ix. **Trails Management Committee.**

- Mr. MacNellis needs to review the billing from Fulton with Mr. Sauber. The original bid on installing the trail was about $5,000, then it looked like the cost would go up to about $8,000.
- The trail off Drake Road by the lower parking lot is still under consideration.
- Mr. MacNellis met with Paul Warnick of O’Boyle, Cowell, Blalock, and Associates, Inc. (OCBA), and asked him to do some estimates for the preliminary design and budget for a couple of projects, including the expansion of the Parkview parking lot and work by the spillway.
- Mr. Kreuzer heard that Mr. Warnick is no longer working with OCBA and suggested following up to verify who the Trails Committee will be working with.

x. **Water Quality Testing with WMU Class.**

- Mr. Kohler was not present to provide an update.

b. **Maintenance Update.**

- Refer to conversation under Five-Year Budget Plan.

c. **Beaver Deceiver Update.**

- Mr. MacNellis suggested extending the pipe into the bay when the ice melts. Ms. Holmes stated that the water level did rise sharply in the fall, but it isn’t rising so much now. The culvert should be extended by someone who does that type of work professionally.
- The University has a contract with Alan from Fulton contractors. There is concern that more issues will occur as the water levels rise from spring rains.

d. **Parking on Winchell Ave.**

- Ms. Holmes reported that Mr. Kreuzer, Ms. Holmes and Mark Hoffman of ALPA met with Mr. Scott and Pete Kushner, Chair of the Oakland Drive Winchell Neighborhood Association to discuss the concerns of ALPA about the ban on parking at the Winchell Ave. entrance to the Preserve.
- The concerns of ALPA are that while the original intent was to calm traffic on Winchell, this has not happened at this end of Winchell. The unintended consequence of the ban is to make the Preserve less accessible to the population of the whole city, including residents of the Winchell Neighborhood who live more than a short walk from the entrance.
- A detailed description of both groups’ concerns was shared in the meeting, and Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Kushner are going to schedule a meeting with the City Traffic Engineer to discuss possible solutions.
- Mr. Scott stated that this was an accurate description of the meeting and expressed a hope that some parking spaces could be designated at the entrance. He also pointed out that there has been extensive discussion of the shortage of parking at both the lots on Drake and the one on Parkview Ave.
- Mr. Strazdas suggested that the topic of expanding parking lots could be part of the strategic planning process.

e. **Oak Trees and Beavers – Tree Wrap.**

- Mr. Sauber, Ms. Holmes, Mr. Holmes, John Kreuzer, and Judy Huxmann surveyed the trees along the south shore of Big Asylum Lake recently.
- Tom Holmes has been measuring and wrapping significant Oak trees to protect them from the beavers, and this project continues with the approval and financial support of the Council.
- Ms. Holmes recently put an entry on the Asylum Lake Preserve Facebook page explaining the problem and the project and, so far, it has received 17 positive comments and 147 likes. The public appears to be in support of this project.
- Most of the trees taken down by the beavers were soft wood trees. One Oak is down, and a couple have been gnawed on.
- Mr. Kreuzer mentioned that one thing the group agreed on is to not protect all the trees that could be impacted by the beavers, but the ones in the process of being chewed on. They only looked at the south shore, from the spillway to the beaver lodge.
We need to be observant regarding beaver activity on hardwood trees, such as the Oaks and the Hickories. If there are issues, we should take action to prevent the hardwoods from being chewed down. Deer eat Oak seedlings, not the middle-aged Oaks that the beavers have damaged.

Ms. Holmes inquired if Kleinstuck Preserve has an Oak nursery where Oaks are trying to grow. Mr. MacNellis advised that Kleinstuck does not have an Oak nursery.

Mr. Bassett mentioned that a deer enclosure would be good to have in the Management Plan. It could be set up close to the trail so people can see the impact that deer have on the environment.

Ms. Holmes stated that about a dozen trees have been wrapped so far, approximately another dozen would be wrapped in the future. The chicken wire works well for wrapping the trees and protecting them from the beavers. The beavers get their food for winter during the fall, so there is not as much activity now.

VI. NEW BUSINESS.

a. Application for Preserve Use

No applications were received.

b. Land and Boundary Mark Survey.

Mr. Strazdas shared a quote that was received for $11,100. There should be legal monuments placed along the north property line of the Preserve. The Council needs assurance of where the property line is to avoid issues in the future.

Mr. Hampton, supported by Mr. Scott, moved to have the boundary at the northeast corner of the Preserve surveyed. The survey would include marking every corner point on the northeast corner of the Preserve and extra markings long the north line of the Preserve.

It would be helpful to have the survey done before there is a dispute. Mr. Bassett inquired if the Council should pay for the survey or if WMU would pay for it. WMU owns the property. Mr. Strazdas mentioned that the Council has the resources and the fiduciary responsibility.

Mr. MacNellis inquired if the corner markers would include metes and bounds on the north. There are seven or eight different corners on the north boundary line. Mr. Strazdas confirmed that every defined corner point would be marked.

The boundary line east of Little Asylum is above the highwater mark. Mr. MacNellis questioned what the property owners around Little Asylum Lake should do. Mr. Strazdas stated that the markers will be installed in the ground and then any consequences will be dealt with afterward.

Mr. Scott mentioned that Mr. Tehrani, owner of the former Vermeulen property, had his property surveyed. He inquired if anyone was aware if markers were already placed on the north boundary. Mr. Strazdas mentioned that there are different types of surveys. Mr. Tehrani might have done a survey on paper.

The survey needs to be done before the storm water project begins. Mr. Hampton mentioned that, even though the Council has financial resources, WMU has resources too and it makes sense for the property owner to pay part of the expense.

Mr. Hampton, supported by Mr. Scott, amended the motion to have the Council pay 51% of the cost for the survey, and have WMU pay the remaining 49% of the cost for the survey. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Holmes commented that the north boundary and east boundary might be an issue at some point. It might be helpful if WMU contributes to the property survey. Mr. Strazdas will talk to WMU Vice President Van Der Kley about the motion.

c. Support for Oshtemo Twp. Fruit Belt Trail Grant Application.

Ms. Alkema contacted Karen High, Parks Director, at Oshtemo Township. Oshtemo Township is considering connecting a trail from Parkview by going down Atlantic Ave., across the highway and down to Asylum Lake Preserve. Oshtemo Township is a neighbor of the Preserve, maybe they would support the Council regarding a grant.

Mr. Bassett mentioned that there is a bridge over the highway. There is a park in Oshtemo that is full of native plants.

Mr. Bassett, supported by Mr. Scott, moved to empower Ms. Alkema and Ms. Chase to write a letter in support of the Oshtemo trail project. The motion carried with unanimous support.

A draft of the letter will be done by the first of next week. Mr. Strazdas will ask his assistant to forward the letter to the Council for review.

Ms. Chase mentioned the relationship of the railroad grade to the preservation of native species. The railroad used to do a good job of burning along the tracks, which is good for native plants.
• The Fruitbelt railroad ran from downtown Kalamazoo to South Haven. The railbed is visible behind Discount Tire on Stadium Drive and on the former Vermeulen property. There was a historical prairie where Trader Joes is now, and also by Mystic Estates off 4th Street and O Avenue.
• Ms. High advised that the goal is to connect the trails and make a 70-mile trail that would connect with South Haven and Mattawan.

VII. NEXT ONLINE MEETING.
• Mr. Strazdas will be in Grand Rapids on March 10th. Options for the Council are to cancel the meeting, reschedule it or have someone else chair the meeting.
• The consensus was to cancel the March meeting.
• Ms. Holmes mentioned that April is a busy month for Earth Day, Arbor Day and the garlic mustard pull. Information can be reported to the Council via e-mail if there is anything they need to know in March.

VIII. COUNCIL/STAFF COMMENTS.
• Mr. Strazdas acknowledged Mr. Scott and Ms. Holmes for finding a resolution to the Winchell parking situation, and other committee members for the work they are doing.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS.
• None

X. ADJOURNMENT.
• The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.