ASYLUM LAKE POLICY AND MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Minutes
May 11, 2023

Members Present: Pete Strazdas, Chair; Sharon Dever, Vice Chair; Kay Chase, Council Secretary; Tom Sauber, Natural Areas Manager; Tyler Bassett; Duane Hampton; Lynne Heasley; Lauri Holmes; Steve Kienle; John Kreuzer; Silvia Roederer; Paul Scott; Cybelle Shattuck; Mark Weiss

Members Excused: Mark Frever, Dave Lemberg; Keith Pung

Guests: Judy Huxmann

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ZOOM ROLL CALL.
   • Mr. Strazdas called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. EDITING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA FOR MAY 11, 2023.
   • There were no changes to the Agenda, which was approved by unanimous vote.

III. EDITING AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 13, 2023.
   • There were no changes to the Minutes, which were approved by unanimous vote.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT.
   • There were charges of $300 for landscaping, $3,700 for Justin Heslinga (the Land Management Plan), $420 for mowing and $1,235 for tree removal. There were lots of trees down in March because of the storm, and charges were incurred as a result of the clean-up. There will be an increase in charges for mowing and trash pick-up for the month of May. The port o potties have been delivered to the Preserve.
   • There was a question as to why the Council was charged $420 for mowing for the hydrology field course. This should be billed to Geological and Environmental Sciences. Mr. Sauber advised that charge can be changed for the next billing.
   • Mr. Hampton suggested that the financial report should be in a different format to make it more legible. The university is in the process of hiring a new budget analyst. Mr. Sauber offered to work with that person to make changes to the report format.
   • A motion was made to accept the financial report; the motion carried unanimously.
   • A suggestion was made to have the Kalamazoo Community Foundation provide a financial report to the Council. Council requests for funds should not exceed the interest that is available in the account. The account balance should be provided to the Council at the next meeting.

V. OLD BUSINESS.
a. Project Updates and Project Finances.
   i. Storm Water and Research Project.
      • Mark Kieser was not available to attend the May ALPMC meeting and provide an update on the stormwater project.
      • There are three bidders for the stormwater project, but names are not available at this point. The deadline to award the bid is May 15th. The consultant will look at the bids to make sure all necessary details were included and determine who is the lowest qualified bidder.
      • Mr. Kreuzer suggested that the Council should be more involved with the bidding process since they are contributing money to the stormwater project. Mr. Sauber stated that it would be against WMU policy to reveal the names of the bidders at this point. There are rules the Purchasing Department must follow.
      • Mr. Weiss advised that board members would not normally be involved in the bidding process. Mr. Strazdas commented that the Council is the policy maker not the implementer for the project. If someone wants more information about the bidding process, Mr. Sauber can set up a time to meet with Council members.
• Information about the bids cannot be shared until after the public bid opening. Then there will be a qualification process. The low bidder will be interviewed by the Purchasing Department. After the bidder is determined to be qualified, a purchase order will be issued. It will take a couple of weeks to review the bids and award the bid. Mr. Strazdas will ask the low-qualified bidder to participate in the Council meetings and provide updates.

• The Council will see how much money is being spent on the stormwater project and the research project. Updates on the research project will be provided at future meetings.

• Mr. Sauber reported that Jackie Michels is retiring. Nick Cutler will be taking her place in the Purchasing Department.

ii. Ecological Maintenance.

• Mr. Sauber spoke with Dave Mindell of Plantwise Native Landscapes. He is willing to meet Mr. Bassett and Mr. Sauber in the Preserve at the end of May or early June to talk about a five-year fire plan. The opportunity for a burn has been missed for this spring but the Council wants to try and schedule a burn for this fall or next spring.

• Mr. Strazdas reported that the Nature Center has their own burn crew, but they only do prescribed burns on their own property at this point. After they hire new crew members, they hope to be available for burns at other locations. The Council has been hearing there is not enough labor to do the burns. Mr. Bassett stated that the Nature Center burn crew was part of the bidding process before, but they might not have had enough capacity to meet the bid requirements for the Preserve.

• Dave Mindell is working with the Council to ensure the prescribed burns get done. The Council is asking him to be on retainer for five years and decide when and where the burns will happen. The Management Plan will provide him with information on priorities for the Preserve.

• Mr. Strazdas requested that the subcommittee put together a work plan so the Council can authorize funds to get the work done. Mr. Sauber will get the purchase orders.

• Mr. Sauber reported that the arborist took down the Buckthorn in the Northeast quadrant of the Preserve, north of Cherry Lane. That was the biggest stand of Buckthorn in the Preserve. The Council will get a bill for that work. The Arborist has a skid steer with a drum grinder that removes unwanted vegetation. There are still some good trees in that area.

• The Council needs to figure out a plan to deal with the other invasives in the Preserve. There are Phragmites, Purple Loosestrife and Cattails to consider. The Council has $30,000 allocated to ecological maintenance. Bill Schneider of Wildtype can suggest priorities. Mr. Sauber suggested having Bill Schneider come to a meeting and talk to the Council.

• Ms. Chase mentioned that plants with insects were placed in the Preserve to help reduce the amount of Purple Loosestrife. She inquired if anyone had been monitoring that situation. Mr. Bassett commented that it is hard to keep track of all of those details. It would be helpful to have someone who had time to implement the Management Plan and track the projects that are in progress.

• Mr. Sauber will contact Bill Schneider and ask him for a proposal for an annual to-do plan and what that will cost for the next 12 months. Maybe that information can be presented to the Council when things slow down (December, January or February?). The Council needs to vote on that and allocate money for the project. It needs to be on the same cycle every year for the next five years.

• Implementation of the Ecological Management Plan requires the involvement of other people. Ms. Huxmann mentioned the possibility of having a citizen group, similar to the group that was implemented at Kleinstuck Preserve, to help with the management of the Phragmites and Garlic Mustard, etc.

• Mr. Sauber has taken on some of the responsibilities of the Natural Areas Manager but there is too much work for one person to do. The Council will have a hard time implementing the plan without someone in that position full time. Bringing in Wildtype and Dave Mindell is an attempt to have contractors help fill that role.

• The Council doesn’t have enough money to pay a full-time Natural Areas Manager. It might be helpful to form another subcommittee to discuss implementation of the plan, including which projects should be done
first and which consultants should be hired. Once that is determined, the subcommittee can put a budget together to present to the Council.

- A suggestion was made to have the Ecological Management Plan Subcommittee strategically implement the plan. Mr. Strazdas suggested that a consultant generalist could come to the Council meetings to provide assistance. Bill Schneider (Wildtype) and Dave Mindell (Plantwise) are part of the solution.
- Mr. Strazdas will put this topic on the next agenda. He requested that the subcommittee come up with a job description for the Ecological Maintenance Manager and consider who in the community is qualified for that position. The Committee needs to come up with a couple priorities for the Ecological Maintenance Manager to work on.

iii. Sign Committee.
- Ms. Huxmann stated that the signs are made and a few of them have been placed in the Preserve. She can’t install all of the signs by herself. Mr. Sauber has provided some assistance. Council members who are interested in helping with the signs should contact Ms. Huxmann.

iv. Trails Management Committee.
- Mr. Scott was unclear as to whether or not Paul MacNellis wants to be a part of the Trails Subcommittee; he will contact him to find out if he is still interested. Mr. Scott and Mr. Kreuzer are part of the Trails Management Subcommittee.
- There is no budget money allocated for trails this year. The subcommittee can submit a request to the Council for a trails project for the next funding cycle if they can determine which project takes priority.

- Ms. Shattuck will set up a time to meet with Tyler Bassett and John Rodwin.

VI. NEW BUSINESS.

a. Application for Preserve Use.
- Mr. Sauber was not aware of any applications at this time.

b. REPORT FROM ALPA ON THE OPEN HOUSE GATHERING AT THE PRESERVE.
- Ms. Holmes reported that things are going well with the arrangements for the open house at the Preserve, which will be held on May 20th from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m. The ALPA board of directors has been very active in helping organize this event.
- There will be a large tent set up in the Preserve with display tables. Mr. Sauber and Mr. Kreuzer will help direct visitors to parking areas. The port o potties have been set up at entrance to the Preserve and in the woods.
- There will be representatives from the Audubon Society, the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, Western Michigan University, The Stewards of Kleistuck Preserve, Wild Ones Native Plants and Natural Landscapes, Citizens Climate Lobby, Kalamazoo Climate Crisis Coalition, and the Asylum Lake Preservation Association (ALPA).
- Kieser & Associates representatives are unable to attend due to their heavy workload. Bill Schneider from Wildtype sent a poster illustrating what his organization does. They won’t have a representative at the Preserve, just a display table in the tent.
- ALPA is working with the Ardea Youth Climate Coalition, which is part of the National Youth for Climate Emergency organization. Members of that group spoke at a City Commission meeting recently.
- The Audubon Society will have information about Monarch butterflies and about Peregrine Falcons.
- Tyler Bassett will lead a plant tour at 1 p.m. Mark Hoffman will provide information about the history of Preserve at 2 p.m. Donna Keller and Susan Schneider will lead a tour at 3 p.m. to discuss birds in the Preserve.
• Local musicians will provide music for this event. There will be a refreshment table. A crew of neighbors who live near the Preserve will provide snacks.
• There were questions about the guidelines for announcing this event through the media. Ms. Dever will announce this event at the ECC (Environmental Concerns Committee) meeting next week. Ms. Holmes has a flier about the open house, which will be provided to the ECC. The flyer will be distributed to the Council.
• Mr. Strazdas suggested contacting neighborhood associations near the Preserve and other interested groups with mailing lists. The Council is responsible for the Preserve, and it would be advisable to indicate that this event is sponsored by the Council.
• Ms. Roederer mentioned that the tours are not on the flier. Ms. Holmes will add that information to the mass mailing that will be distributed this weekend.

c. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COUNCIL TO THE CITY OF KALAMAZOO.
• The subcommittee worked on the communication from the Council to the City of Kalamazoo regarding the Council’s concerns about the proposed zoning changes. On April 25th, the letter was sent to all Planning Commissioners, City Commissioners and city administrators. At the end of summer or early fall the Planning Commission will make a decision on the proposed zoning changes and then the City Commission will review the proposed changes.
• The City of Kalamazoo removed the proposed CC zoning designation of the former Vermeulen property adjoining the Preserve from the new zoning district map, which was reported in a recent newspaper article.
• Ms. Dever stated that the City of Kalamazoo is planning to do the second draft of the zoning changes. The currently proposed wording of the draft appears to make it easier for a car wash to be developed on the former Vermeulen property, adjacent to the Preserve.
• If the changes to the zoning code are approved, a Special Use Permit (SUP) would no longer be required for a parcel of land that has the Community Commercial (CC) zoning designation. If the former Vermeulen property is given the CC zoning designation, a car wash could be constructed at that location, next to the Preserve, without the SUP public hearing process.
• In January of 2020, the Planning Commission voted against the zoning changes that were being recommended by city staff at that time. Those changes could be brought to the City Commission for review and approval without approval of the Planning Commission. It was the recommendation of city staff to rezone the Vermeulen parcels to Community Commercial at that time. There has been public opposition to the removal of the Special Use Permit process for the CC zoning district.
• The City is also requesting changes to the NFP (Natural Features Protection) language, changing the “intent” of the NFP from “guiding development” to “supporting development.” There were comments against that at the public input meetings. City staff suggested that other language might be a little better, but they defended the proposed change.
• Mr. Kreuzer inquired if WMU received a postcard from the City of Kalamazoo about the proposed changes to the zoning code. No one at the meeting was aware of such a communication.
• The City of Kalamazoo website states that car washes require a special use permit. City Planner, Christina Anderson, has posted the proposed zoning changes on-line. She will come up with a report of all the proposed changes.
• Mr. Scott reported that the ODWNA (Oakland Drive Winchell Neighborhood Association) sent a couple of questionnaires to Christina Anderson regarding the types of zoning the city is proposing.
• Ms. Heasley inquired of Mr. Strazdas regarding the best way to frame the communication to the Planning Commission and City Commission to have the desired impact. Urban sustainability and natural areas are an economic benefit to the community, and she wondered about the wording of communications Mr. Strazdas received when he served on city boards.
• Mr. Strazdas stated that he was on the Portage Planning Commission for ten years and the Portage City Council for twelve years. They are two independent bodies. The Planning Commissioners are appointed not elected; you can’t vote them out of office. The City Commissioners are elected. Elected and appointed bodies have different approaches to issues.
Discussion followed as to the possible influence the current owner of the Vermeulen property might have on the city planning staff. In Calhoun County, the Planning Commission voted against the construction of a proposed battery plant. The City Commission voted in favor of having the battery plant. It is important to consider how much internal influence there might be for changing the zoning code to accommodate the developer’s wishes, which could be beneficial for the developer and the City. The focus of the Council is to preserve the Preserve.

It was mentioned that the Planning Department is also considering the potential tax revenue the proposed car wash would generate for the City of Kalamazoo. The proposed zoning changes could have a serious negative impact on green spaces throughout the City of Kalamazoo.

VII. NEXT ONLINE MEETING.

VIII. COUNCIL/STAFF COMMENTS.

- Mr. Scott reported that there has been some movement on the parking situation by the Winchell entrance to the Preserve. The City of Kalamazoo contacted the Oakland Drive Winchell Neighborhood Association (ODWNA) with a new parking proposal for the section of Winchell between Rambling Road and Winchell Way. The OWDNA concluded that the proposal is compatible with their neighborhood plan. The Winchell neighbors were also in favor of the new parking proposal.

- The city doesn’t want the details of the plan to be revealed at this point. The changes might not happen until July or August.

- Mr. Scott mentioned that it has been a year since the parking spaces were removed from Winchell, and now the City is looking at adding some parking. A number of things were implemented in the Winchell Neighborhood, including bump-outs. They want to slow down the traffic and increase non-auto travel. Those changes are compatible with the neighborhood plan.

- Ms. Roederer inquired about the water level at Asylum Lake. Ms. Holmes stated that the icehouse foundation has disappeared underwater for the first time in several years.

- Mr. Hampton commented that there was a fair amount of rain this spring but not a record amount. The lake levels reflect that. The lake levels should go down in July if we get a dry spell.

- Discussion followed about the beaver deceiver; there was some concern as to whether or not it is working. Sometimes there has been very little water coming through the spillway covert.

- Mr. Strazdas stated that the Kalamazoo Nature Center is concerned about beaver challenges on their property. He told them Mr. Sauber would be willing to share beaver deceiver technology.

- Ms. Holmes will be doing a WMUK radio interview at 6:45 a.m. and 8:45 a.m. and at 5:44 p.m. on May 12th regarding the beaver lodge at Asylum Lake. The program is called Why’s That?

- Ms. Chase stated that Donna Keller and Susan Schneider led a group of people through the Asylum Lake Preserve on May 6th to talk about the birds at the Preserve. Twelve people participated and they observed 36 species of birds, including the Palm Warbler, White Throated Sparrow and the Eastern Meadow Lark. She suggested that this information could be added to the records on the Asylum Lake website.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS.

- None

X. ADJOURNMENT.

- The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.