

MINUTES
City of Alpena Planning Commission
Regular Meeting (Council Chambers and Virtual)
September 12, 2023 Alpena, Michigan

CALL TO ORDER:

The regular meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order at 5:59 p.m. by Randy Boboltz, Planning Commission Chairman.

ROLL CALL: PLANNING COMMISSION

PRESENT: Wojda, Peterson, Boboltz, VanWagoner, Gilmore, Moses, Kostelic, Sundin

ABSENT: Kemp

STAFF: Rachel Smolinski (City Manager), Montiel Birmingham (Planning, Development, and Zoning Director), Kathleen Sauve (Recording Secretary)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Agenda was approved as printed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Meeting August 8, 2023, minutes were approved as printed.

PUBLIC HEARING AND COMMISSION ACTION: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS: City of Alpena Recreation Plan – Birmingham explained that NEMCOG has been working on past grant funded project Post Completion Forms; visiting, documenting, and photographing all public parks (including barrier-free rating); reviewing current plans, CIP, and Budget documents. She also informed them of other upcoming meetings in relation to the Recreation Plan. She noted the City of Alpena is a year ahead of schedule for when this plan is due because [the City] is doing recreation planning with the entire County (Alpena County and all the Townships) at the same time so they can all be aligned with goals, and it gives them an increased opportunity for coordination and cooperation. Going forward it will be every five years. Birmingham said that the City's Rec Plan will still be a separate document so in case they want to change something they still can without having to coordinate with the County and the Townships.

Next, Birmingham reviewed the Alpena County Recreation Plan Survey Results with the members, which was provided to them in the meeting packet. She reviewed the results from each question on the survey. Sundin thought that some of the park use survey results needed to be broken down into more categories to get a clearer picture of how much they really are

being used. Birmingham said that she has that data and will forward. Boboltz said in some cases it may not matter what the number is, but in other cases it may.

Birmingham reviewed Question 6, the favorite local parks and what people thought should be improved. Boboltz asked why Ossineke beach was not included in the parks. Birmingham said it is included in Sanborn Park (Lake Huron). Kostelic expressed concern about weeds growing in between the large boulders on the shoreline along Bay View Park and said it does not look very pretty. Sundin said summer help used to take care of those but is unsure if they still do and that rather than coming up with new projects, [the City] should maintain what they already have to a higher level. He also said that newer vegetation that is planted needs to be maintained before it becomes an eyesore. Peterson said she was concerned about the water encroaching on the Willow trees at Bay View Park because once we lose those trees, they can't just be replaced, and people want shade trees. Moses said that he did see shade mentioned quite a few times in the survey. Boboltz mentioned that the lack of bathroom facilities and fresh water was mentioned a lot in the survey as well. Birmingham said that the new bathroom facility that will be built will service the Marina and Bay View Park. She also said that bathroom facilities everywhere is not feasible and Sundin replied that they are also very expensive to build and maintain, and questioned how many people are actually going to use them. VanWagoner said he knows it is not the most popular opinion, but he would rather see Port-a-Jons because they are cheap, economical, and they are facilities that can be used. He said the City cannot afford to have someone standing there cleaning it all the time.

Next, Birmingham discussed Culligan Plaza with most comments about the fountain and shade trees. With the downtown parks, most comments reflected the need for restrooms. A lot of good feedback was received about the kayak launch at Duck Park; more picnic tables were requested as well as the need for bathrooms. Birmingham said that the bathrooms are in the works through the Thunder Bay River Center and Wildlife Sanctuary Board; grant funding was received and will be constructed in 2024 along with a pavilion. On Island Park, fishing platform repairs were requested, along with better educational and directional signage. There were concerns regarding lighting at McRae Park. At Mich-e-ke-wis Park, parking improvements and playground equipment were noted several times, but there was a positive theme of keeping it natural and not overdeveloping it too much. Boboltz mentioned that some people would like a sledding hill, while Kostelic mentioned bringing the outdoor ice rink back. Birmingham said that it consistently came up in the survey from a few years ago as well. Moses said a swimming pool came up a lot in the survey as well. Birmingham moved on to Starlight Beach saying that there were comments in the survey about the tables and playground equipment. Moses said that the drive into the park is in rough shape. Smolinski said that the equipment at Mich-e-ke-wis is going to be replaced when the volleyball courts are moved. She said that the grant from the DNR will determine when; the City has two budget years to match that so it will happen next year. She said a lot of the things that came up in the survey are already in progress; the bathrooms are very expensive, with the new one at Bay View projected to cost \$1,000,000, of which they have obtained a \$300,000 grant. They have had to take a couple years to pull together matching funding through the ARPA funds. Cleaning costs also have to be considered. She said that the paving at Mich-e-ke-wis is part of the overall project when the volleyball courts are moved, hopefully next year. Boboltz suggested that [the City] make people aware of how expensive it is to build bathroom facilities. Smolinski said that there have been discussions

about putting signs up that outline the funding sources and how many general fund dollars are put into it to give the public an idea of how much these facilities cost. Birmingham continued with the Splash Park saying that there was a lot of positive feedback. Kayak launches were requested at Sytek Park, and improvements were requested at the Riverside Skate Park. The Dog Park had comments about needing trees and shade while Thomson Park had mostly positive feedback. A larger pavilion was requested at Washington Avenue Park and more fishing platforms at Rotary Island/Mill Park. Birmingham said that there were a lot of comments about the Apex, to which Sundin said that parking is a big issue. On Survey question 7, Birmingham reviewed the least favorite parks and comments. Sundin asked why Woodward Avenue Trailhead was listed under 'Other' rather than 'City'. Birmingham said that it a City facility in that [the City] maintains it, and that there is information in the Rec Plan about that relationship. Smolinski said that the City built it and maintains it but it is outside of the City limits. Birmingham went on about the Bi-Path and that there were comments about dangerous areas along Bagley Street. Smolinski said that the section that needs to be completed is a decision that needs to be made in coordination with the road commission. Court conditions at Bay View Park were brought up in the survey. The City of Alpena Marina modernization came up quite a bit, and traffic issues at Culligan Plaza. Birmingham said that the overall theme of comments for McRae Park and Mich-e-ke-wis was that they are generally run down and that Mich-e-ke-wis could be utilized in a better way. Thomson Park and Washington Park concerns were with parking options. Question 8 review explained how important select recreation items were to them; overall, hiking trails, bicycling trails, and wider paved shoulders were most important. Other things that came up were safety concerns with the Bi-Path along Bagley Street to Long Rapids, safe access to cross US-23, and maintaining public access to waterways. Question 9 asked what improvements people would like to see at trailheads. Overall, Birmingham said most people said they would like more signage, maps and safety. Question 10 asked what recreational facilities people would like to see in the Alpena area. Birmingham said this one was hard because there were so many Ad Hoc comments, it was hard to group them although she tried her best to do that. Bathroom comments, community type facilities, general park comments, and pool comments came up a lot, trails in general, water access, winter sports (outdoor skating rink, sledding hills, snowshoeing, and general winter sport type facilities) were some others. Kostelic said she thinks Alpena has a good thing going if they wanted to market snowshoeing and cross-country skiing since the west side of the State has hills, and [the City] has awesome trails. Birmingham said some people suggested publicizing the parks as they didn't even know some of the parks existed. Question 11 asked if people would like to see scheduled recreation programming in the parks. Birmingham said that over 60% of people said yes, over 20% said they were not sure or neutral, and the remaining said no. Question 12 asked what recreational activities individuals and/or families enjoy. These results were ranked in order of most selected to least selected. Some of the most selected activities were walking, concerts, movie theaters, festivals, bicycling, camping, swimming, kayaking, and hiking. Question 13 asked what improvements people would like to see at specific recreational facilities. With there being a lot of comments that were hard to summarize, Birmingham said

she just let the comments state themselves. She said there were a lot of comments that were in line with what was mentioned earlier.

Birmingham concluded the report by asking the Planning Commission members to visit each of the parks in their free time to familiarize themselves with them prior to the next meeting date in October. She asked the members what date would work for them for the joint meeting with the Planning Commission and the Recreation Advisory Board. They asked her to send an email with date suggestions.

COMMUNICATIONS OR REPORTS: Birmingham gave an update on the Bingham School Project. She said that at the last City Council meeting, they approved the PILOT to be extended until December 31, 2024; they are very close to getting their financing together and closing on that property within the next six weeks. The school will be transformed into senior housing of 35 units for people over the age of 55. Birmingham said that the addition to the building has been shifted slightly, which is not an issue, but there was a condition put on the approval that the exterior be brick. Looking at the overall financing with a valuation of over \$10,000,000, which is significantly more than their original estimated cost back in 2019, they are re-evaluating all cost components and trying to reduce wherever possible, with the brick being one of them. She said their architect is supposed to be coming back to her with an updated design for the exterior which will have to be approved by the Planning Commission at a Public Hearing. Sundin asked if the Council would also have to approve. Birmingham said she would confirm if the ordinance requires it. She also said that there are a lot of different pieces going into the funding of this project which is why it is taking so long to come to fruition.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: The board was provided with an MSU Exchange Article: Zoning Moratoriums to review at their leisure.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

MEMBERS' COMMENTS: None.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m., by Boboltz, Planning Commission Chairman.

Clayton C. VanWagoner, Secretary