SPECIAL TRAILS AND PARKS COMMITTEE
May 8, 2017
Minutes

Members Present:   Sebolt, Maiville, Banas, Grebner, and Koenig (arrived at 6:08 p.m., left at 7:10 p.m.)

Members Absent:   Case Naeyaert and Nolan

Others Present:   Sarah Nicholls, Jonathan Schelke, Cherry Hamrick, LuAnn Maisner, Tanya Moore, Tim Morgan, Liz Kane and others

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Banas at 6:00 p.m. in Personnel Conference Room “D & E” of the Human Services Building, 5303 S. Cedar Street, Lansing, Michigan.

Chairperson Banas introduced the objective of the Special Trails & Parks Committee.

Additions to the Agenda

Commissioner Grebner stated he had an item he would like to add as Agenda Item No. 2. He further stated it had been emailed to the Committee that afternoon and included the email in the meeting minutes.

Chairperson Banas stated she could include those items as part of the discussion in Agenda Item No. 4.

Commissioner Grebner stated he would like it as a separate item, so he could be sure it would be discussed.

Chairperson Banas stated she would put it as Agenda Item No. 2.

Discussion.

Attachments –

Ingham County Trails and Parks Millage-Status Update

Funding breakdown provided by the Parks Department

Email from Commissioner Grebner

Limited Public Comment
LuAnn Maisner, Meridian Township Director of Parks and Recreation, thanked the Committee for the grants awarded to Meridian Township. She provided updates on the status of each project Meridian Township would be completing in the next few years.

Ms. Maisner stated the Trails and Parks Millage Program was a good opportunity for communities within the County to work together and improve the quality of life for their residents.

Ms. Maisner stated she thought it was a good idea to request some type of local match from communities. She further stated that a local match would create some buy-in from communities, and help the millage money go further.

Ms. Maisner stated she was also concerned that smaller communities would not be able to put together the applications.

1. **Status Report: Millage Dollars Distributed; Projects Begun or Soon to be Underway; Other Funds Leveraged Because of Millage Awards**

Chairperson Banas provided an overview of the money that had been distributed through the program up to that date. She further stated that the County had distributed about $3 million, and had generated about $4 million in local matched funding.

Chairperson Banas stated that local matched funding had allowed the County to do more with the millage money, in a shorter period of time. She further stated communities finding other sources of funding dollars and being able to complete these projects was a success story of the program.

Commissioner Koenig arrived at 6:08 p.m.

Tanya Moore, Spicer Group Landscape Architect and Planner, explained the status update spreadsheet distributed to the Committee regarding projects already approved in Rounds 1 and 2 in 2016 by the Committee.

Tim Morgan, Parks Director, pointed out that of the $3.96 million of local match, most came from Round 2 of applications.

Chairperson Banas asked Mr. Morgan to update the Committee about the appropriations made to the Parks Department for County projects.

Mr. Morgan stated that $1,141,247 of the millage dollars were allocated for the Ingham County Parks projects.

Chairperson Banas asked which projects the funds went to.

Mr. Morgan stated the projects included resurfacing the Hawk Island Loop Trail, the McNamara accessible launch matching fund at Burchfield Park, a passport grant and overlook shelter at
Burchfield Parks, and matching funds for a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant Application for Lake Lansing North and McNamara Landing. He further stated that there was also a lot of equipment that had been funded in those grants and there were other grants supplementing them.

Chairperson Banas asked Mr. Morgan to prepare a list of the equipment that was funded to be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.

Mr. Morgan stated it was on their website as the County Park Appropriations, but he could also provide a hard copy to the Committee.

Discussion.

Commissioner Grebner clarified that the actual money expended by the County to date was $1.5 million. He further stated more had been allocated, but only $1.5 million had been expended.

Commissioner Sebolt left at 6:15 p.m.

Chairperson Banas asked Ms. Moore to explain the reimbursement process.

Ms. Moore stated that was the case, in that there had only been $1.5 million in checks written for the approved projects to date.

Mr. Morgan stated communities received 25% of the project cost up-front.

Commissioner Grebner stated the County was not constrained by the amount of money they had on hand because they had collected about $10.5 million, and therefore the allocation of funds could be faster. He further stated the cash dispersal was slower than the approved projects getting completed, so they would not be strapped for funding.

Chairperson Banas asked Ms. Moore if she believed that financial situation would always be the case, moving forward in the process.

Ms. Moore stated that the average time frame for a project was about two years to complete, although some could be completed faster because they were shovel-ready. She further stated that some communities had used the Trails and Parks Millage Grant to leverage other grant money, so there may be a timeline the community had to follow for other grants.

Ms. Moore stated that building bridges was also harder, because there had to be a design submitted and analysis completed before the bridge could be built. She further stated that a two-year window for a project was not unrealistic and it aligned with the Department of Natural Resources’ grant timeline.

Commissioner Grebner stated he was not insisting on speeding up the projects, but that he would like to see more projects approved early on because it took so long to allocate and disburse
money that things were getting held up. He further stated he understood they wanted to keep a large unspent balance, however they were already way ahead of the funds allocated.

Ms. Moore stated Commissioner Grebner’s suggestion was similar to what the Michigan Department of Transportation did with their grants. She further stated that MDOT gave a rolling deadline and then looked at the expected date a project would be completed, and the money would come out of the year of completion’s fund.

Commissioner Maiville stated he thought they would get ahead of the amount for the applications in the coming year. He acknowledged they had allocated $8.6 million now, but in the next round, they would not be disbursing funds until July of 2019 at the earliest.

Commissioner Koenig asked of the $8.6 million allocated for projects so far, how much was local match funds.

Ms. Moore stated in the first round in 2016, only one got a local match.

Commissioner Koenig stated it looked like the projects were coming close to 50% in matched funds. She further stated that the Parks Commission had discussed rolling projects.

Chairperson Banas stated she wanted to have conversations about how to deal with long-term projects in the third meeting of the Committee; however she wanted the current meeting to be more about broad thoughts on what had or had not worked with the millage program so far.

Mr. Morgan stated that the Parks Commission would be doing a final revision to their recommendations before the Trails and Parks Committee met next, so they would have that to reference by their May 18 meeting.

2. Discussion of the Strengths and Challenges of the Trails Millage Program and Rethinking Roles in the Millage Allocation System

Chairperson Banas stated that she would like to combine Agenda Items 2 and 4, to have a larger conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of the program so far. She further stated that Agenda Item No. 3 would be moved to the end of the agenda and changed to be Agenda Item No. 4.

Commissioner Grebner stated he thought it would be most valuable to find clear roles and definitions for entities, as they were currently confusing. He further stated that the purpose of the Special Trails and Parks Committee was to oversee and define roles, as eventually they would disband and would not be available to shepherd each grant through.

Commissioner Grebner stated that one of the weaknesses of their process was that the process was never engineered. He further stated it was not clear who was in charge of what, as he had a feeling that applications were being reviewed by multiple departments and committees, and he thought that the Special Trails and Parks Committee could be more hands-off in regards to specific grant applications.
Commissioner Grebner stated that he thought the Special Trails and Parks Committee ought to figure out the direction, and then the Parks Department staff could address the details.

Commissioner Sebolt returned at 6:27 p.m.

Commissioner Grebner asked if the Parks Department was to do whatever the Committee, Board of Commissioners or Parks Commission needed them to do.

Mr. Morgan nodded his head to indicate agreement.

Commissioner Grebner stated he understood he was wrong about the Parks Department’s role previously.

Commissioner Grebner stated he would also like to define the Parks Commission in a broad way, but limit what they did. He further stated he thought the Parks Commission thought their job was to serve as a gatekeeper to the proposals, but many applications that could be approved were not because of the Parks Commission’s implicit rules that ranked those projects lower.

Commissioner Grebner suggested the Parks Commission’s job should be to welcome every idea and serve it up. He further stated the Parks Commission should go out and grab hold of ideas from both municipalities and organizations, compile the information, and rate proposals.

Discussion.

Commissioner Grebner provided an example of Delhi Township’s proposal where they asked for too much money, and because of that, no money was awarded to Delhi Township. He stated that the Parks Commission should not be worried about the amount, but rather they should try to help the applicant and propose they break up the project into pieces.

Commissioner Grebner stated the Parks Commission should be in favor of every proposal and work to make the proposals as interesting, feasible and attractive as possible to help communities get money. He further stated that he would like to get the Parks Commission out of the business of spending the money.

Commissioner Sebolt asked if it was the Parks Commission’s job to define what a municipality’s priorities were, as he thought it should be up to the community to divide up the proposal if it was too big.

Chairperson Banas stated that some communities did end up dividing up their projects into phases for that reason.

Commissioner Grebner stated the communities should not be penalized and denied projects because they guessed an amount that was too high for the yearly millage allocations.
Commissioner Koenig stated that Commissioner Sebolt's point was well taken, because the Parks Commission could not be expected to know what each community wanted. She further stated that the reason Delhi Township submitted their application that way was because they thought they could use past projects as a match, which was not true.

Commissioner Koenig stated the first few rounds of applications were learning points, as they needed some deadlines and boundaries to make the process work. She further stated that she was not opposed to being more welcoming, but they had needed a starting point.

Commissioner Grebner stated they needed to be more helpful to the communities.

Commissioner Koenig stated the Parks Commission would get there, as they were already talking about making changes to hopefully include more rolling projects and blueways in the future. She further stated it was sometimes hard to compact all of the information and applications, and not all of the ideas were good.

Commissioner Grebner stated that was exactly his point, but he proposed a change to the Parks Commission’s role to welcome all bad, half-baked, and good ideas. He further stated it was not their job to provide funding, because the ranking of each project would eventually eliminate the bad projects.

Discussion.

Chairperson Banas stated that in the plan for the millage program that was adopted, they had prioritized making connections between communities by connecting trails systems. She further stated that by design, the urban core was easier to develop, because there were already trails and new projects underway.

Discussion.

Commissioner Sebolt stated that in their Complete Streets Special Committee meetings, they also included the Parks Department to figure out how they and the Road Department were working across municipal lines, and to make sure projects were not falling through the cracks.

Commissioner Maiiville stated in the defense of the Parks Commission, they looked at mostly repairs and rehabilitation for the first two rounds of applications. This was the first round of applications for both new and rehabilitation projects. He further stated that there was a learning curve, and they would eventually make it work.

Commissioner Maiiville stated that the Parks Department staff was available for guidance and administrative tasks as needed, and the Parks Commission's role was to review applications. He further stated if the proposals were not reviewed by the Parks Commission, they would need to find another place to review them.

Chairperson Banas stated that the Parks Department staff did put together a meeting for potential applicants before the bid deadline to go over the bidding process and answer any questions. She
further stated that some grant-seekers wanted to use millage dollars for blueways and volunteer positions, and many other good ideas were being generated through the process and she thought the Parks Commission had done a good job of welcoming all potential grant-seekers.

Commissioner Grebner stated one other of the implicit rules the Parks Commission had when deciding on projects was that municipalities were the ones who had to propose the projects. He further stated he wanted to define the roles of the public (including non-profits, MSU, and other organizations) and municipal governments, to allow any proposals to be submitted by any entity.

Commissioner Grebner stated he wanted to assemble a range of projects to complete their trails system, which may mean including members of the public rather than just municipalities.

Commissioner Koenig stated Commissioner Grebner was incorrect, because the Parks Commission would be entertaining proposals from anyone moving forward. She further stated it was in the Parks Commission meeting minutes.

Commissioner Grebner stated that had yet to be decided.

Commissioner Maiville stated that he recalled they had received confirmation from the County Attorney that others could apply. He further stated that he had a feeling completing the trail from Delhi Township to Mason would have to be a group effort because so many entities were involved, and they may need a non-profit or someone else to help champion that effort and maintain it.

Chairperson Banas stated the Parks Commission had needed a place to start, so they started working with municipalities because they were already in existence and they owned the trails they built. She further stated it had made sense to work with municipalities to get them connected, but as they moved forward with the millage program and saw that small communities may not want to get involved, they could then find other entities to be involved to complete trails.

Chairperson Banas stated they needed to be mindful of the ownership of the trails, because the County may not want to own all of the system. She further stated their job was to work together with communities to make projects happen, and over time they could look at how to include other organizations.

Commissioner Grebner stated he was not ever saying the County should take over the trails system and own it in fee. He further stated that no one had ever proposed that, so arguing that had nothing to do with what had been raised at the meeting.

Commissioner Grebner stated that in the future, critical trails connections projects may need to be managed by the Parks Department or a non-profit in order for them to be completed. He further stated that earlier in the meeting he had said the Parks Department staff would do whatever was needed, and he thought everyone was in agreement on that.
Commissioner Grebner stated the public and municipal governments ought to be proponents and making suggestions, even though municipal governments were better served to write contracts and oversee public money. He further stated the Parks Commission should be listening for ideas that were short of a proposal to go forth and pour the concrete.

Chairperson Banas stated the Parks Commission had done that.

Commissioner Grebner stated he would then like to see the Parks Commission put together their own proposals to explore how to connect some critical links in the trails system.

Commissioner Grebner stated he would also like to redefine the role of the Board of Commissioners and standing committees. He further stated he wanted to see the Parks Commission welcome proposals, rate proposals and possibly make recommendations, however it should ultimately be the Board of Commissioners’ decision on how the money was spent.

Commissioner Grebner stated in the case of rolling projects, it should be the Board of Commissioners’ job to make those determinations, not another entity’s.

Commissioner Maitville explained how they had used a similar model to the Farmland Preservation Board because that was the best model they had to work with. He further stated he knew a tremendous amount of work had been put in by the Parks Commission to work on proposals and recommendations.

Chairperson Banas stated she was hopeful those projects that did not get approved in the first two rounds would reapply.

Commissioner Koenig questioned the idea of having the Board of Commissioners rank the projects because she doubted how many of them would actually do the work.

Commissioner Sebolt stated he had voted on spending proposals, so it would eventually come to him. He further stated that proportionally on the Board of Commissioners, there were seven commissioners who represented Lansing, and if those commissioners wished, they could easily find another vote and keep all of the millage money for projects in Lansing.

Commissioner Sebolt stated at the state level, they let MDOT review and accept proposals, so legislators did not politicize the process. He further stated that was the model they should follow on the County level.

Commissioner Koenig stated the process at the County level had become less political over time, however there was a lot of angst in the beginning because of politics.

Chairperson Banas stated they needed to support everyone’s projects if they were good, because the program was a collective. She further stated they needed to create projects that would make a difference countywide, and they now had a system of people concerned with being fair and doing the right thing in the process.
Chairperson Banas stated she wanted the Committee to look at how to improve aspects of the program, and possibly incorporate rolling projects, or look at how to service smaller communities that need funding.

Commissioner Grebner stated he understood things were difficult in the beginning, but this process could be seen as an overreaction to that. He further stated that the Farmland Preservation Board was a bad example, because a lot of that money was already set in stone and they could not move the ranking around, but rather just accept or deny the proposals.

Commissioner Grebner stated he thought Commissioners would do the work to review and choose applications, because the Parks Department staff would send a complete list and rank the projects. He pointed out the discrepancy in funding, where the least populous third of the communities in the County had only received four thousand dollars out of the first two rounds of the program, even though they had paid their share of a third of the total millage money into the program.

Commissioner Grebner stated it would be a bad idea, when it came time to renew the millage, if they had not paid attention to part of the County. He further stated he was not saying funding needed to be dollar for dollar across the County, but they did need to pay attention to the smaller communities as well.

Discussion.

Chairperson Banas stated that was part of the process, and at the Parks Commission they had spoken genuinely about how to better involve smaller communities. She further stated the suggestion had been made to set some of the millage money aside for communities below a certain population level.

Chairperson Banas stated she believed some communities were not ready for big projects quite yet. She further stated she did not believe they were deliberately shutting people out in the first few rounds of the application process, but while there were many trails that needed to be repaired, they had also made money available for new connections between trails.

Chairperson Banas asked the Committee to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program so far.

Commissioner Maiville stated the strengths of the program included the fact that bridge and trail repairs were addressed early on. He further stated they should take inventory of what they had in the County as they were moving forward.

Commissioner Maiville stated he was glad to hear Commissioner Grebner speak about the neglect of the smaller communities, and he thought it may be a challenge to include them because trails were not as big of a desire as they were in more urban areas. He further stated that when they got to making regional connections and connecting to other counties, it could be a challenge because the rural communities would need a champion to make those projects happen.
Commissioner Maiville stated the trails system in Delhi was pretty new and it did not need funding for repairs that was available in the first rounds of the project, but they still needed some connections made and he hoped they could receive funding eventually. He further stated he was disappointed that when he had encouraged his township to apply, they had looked at the application and said they would not bother.

Chairperson Banas asked why they did not want to bother with the application.

Commissioner Maiville stated he was not sure, but he guessed they decided that was not the direction they wanted to go. He further stated they were applying for funding through DNR and eventually they would love to have an ADA-approved kayak launch, but he was not sure if they would ever see that funding.

Mr. Morgan stated Onondaga could use the DNR grant as leverage when applying for the trails and parks millage, as something similar was done with the McNamara project.

Chairperson Banas stated that DNR favored communities who worked together, so it might be in Onondaga’s favor to apply for both grants.

Discussion.

Commissioner Sebolt stated he had heard from constituents that there were concerns about the collection of funds from the taxpayers and the lack of allocation of them to communities. He further stated that this program was similar to the Complete Streets dilemma they had, where they would love to see every municipality participate and guide them through the process, but they could not force them to participate.

Commissioner Sebolt stated the strengths of the program included all of the hard work that went into creating the process. He further stated he would possibly like to see an adjustment to the timeline of approving applications.

Commissioner Koenig stated one of the strengths of the program was the physical and symbolic representation of bringing the County together and making those new connections. She further stated that smaller and more rural communities had started to talk to the Parks Commission, and they felt like they had something to be a part of.

Commissioner Koenig stated they had to start with rigid guidelines for the program because they did not know where it was going. She further stated that some of the things that came out of the program, like taking inventory of County trails and parks, were very well received because they had not known what they had and what shape they were in.

Commissioner Koenig stated that change was sometimes difficult and starting programs came with their own challenges.

Commissioner Koenig left at 7:10 p.m.
3. Parks Department's Survey Results From Municipalities

Ms. Moore went over the survey results that were provided to the Committee. She stated that most people agreed with the questions.

Sarah Nicholls, Parks Commission Chair, stated that in general, people were relatively happy with the current application process.

Chairperson Banas stated the survey had been done to get input from applicants to see where the process could be improved.

Announcements

Commissioner Maiville stated that another one of the strengths of the process was that they had all come together and were talking about making improvements to their County. He further stated that it was an evolving process that could improve over time, but he hoped a lot of good things would come from the program.

Commissioner Grebner stated he did not hear the Committee say they were not going to take into consideration the points he made.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

[Signature]
BARB BYRUM, CLERK OF THE BOARD