

Minutes of January 24, 2023 Special St. James Board Meeting  
Beaver Island Community Center | 26215 Main St. | Beaver Island, MI | 4:00 pm

**Present:**

Cole, Fingerroot, Gillespie, McDonough, Welke

**Absent:**

None

**Others:**

Others present include:

Shelby Harris, Administrative Assistant, St James Township

Twenty members of the public were present.

Matt Biolette, Rick Stout, and Lori Hansen of Fleis & Vandenbrink (F&V), the consultant engaged to develop the township's 5 Year Parks & Recreation Plan, participated in the meeting via zoom.

A total of 26 people were present in person and 29 participated in the meeting.

Audience member Joe Moore streamed the meeting to his News on the Net website. Four members of the township's Harbor, Parks, and Recreation Committee were present.

**Public Hearing**

Supervisor Welke called the Public Hearing to order at 4:04 pm on January 24, 2023, 2022. Supervisor Welke presented information via a power point presentation that covered introductions, the agenda, the 5 Year Plan purpose, grant programs, plan content, and public comments and questions. Officials from F&V were responsive to some of the technical questions where necessary.

**Public Comment**

Community members asked questions and/or made comments regarding the five-year plan and recreation in general. Comments, questions, and answers covered:

The pending acquisition of the Karnes Beach Property through a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and its future park development (as the Edward B. Wojan Park) via a plan and grant proposal in collaboration with the existing Jewell F. Gillespie Park and a to-be-purchased private beach lot. Possible improvements could be a restroom, a picnic pavilion, a performing arts site, a trail, a rain garden if we are able to move the storm sewer retention system from the Gillespie Park to the Wojan Park, and a new ADA launch site for the water trail. These options, and more, will be considered with the development of a master plan. The recreation options that the Happy Paddle business offers was acknowledged as an important service and such amenities need to be provided to the public. It was pointed out that other recreational rental sites do exist.

After a question, the method of payment for the Karnes Beach Property was shared with the public.

A request was made to add to the plan additional information regarding recreation safety for the outer islands as well as information about access to and use these



islands. Township officials responded with an in-motion plan to make an outer island access and use ordinance which would allow enforcement if poor behavior occurred. In addition, it was acknowledged that the outer island access expectations could be posted at the launching sites and on flyers at the Trail Head (Beaver Island Community Centers) and through the recreation equipment rental businesses. Ms. Harris pointed out that multiple organizations would prefer that the outer islands not be discussed or referenced as 'recreational' in this plan.

An audience member asked if the plan discussed other recreational opportunities. In response Ms. Welke referenced current page 61 of the plan and its capital improvement plan section. Multiple projects are being considered over the next five years, including, subject to available funding and confirmation of priorities:

- Benches at township green spaces around the harbor (in a later question from the public, the Font Lake landing site would be added to the list of sites needing a bench). *Post meeting note: PSJA is working to place a bench at Font Lake.*
- Work, such as new docks and a boat washing station at Marina North are a need as is a master plan for both marinas to understand what is needed at both facilities.
- The extension of the Donegal Bay Bike Path is listed. It was noted that if the Airport Commission is able to implement their current 5-year plan, an Asphalt plant would be needed to be brought to the Island and various projects could be undertaken.
- The need for a fishing pier was discussed. This discussion included an option of where to place it – in collaboration with the Beaver Island Historical Society.
- Building the campground bathhouse is listed as a possible future project.

In response to this "limited" list, members of the audience questioned/suggested:

- A question regarding constructing additional parking at Font Lake was asked. On-going negotiations with the Port St James Association continue.
- A request to consider the opportunity to complete the trail (close the loop) around the north beach (Pine St area) was made. The township is concerned about the strong opposition on the part of private property owners for this portion of the 'loop'. Furthermore, it was shared that the township is focusing on the portion of this 'loop' that would connect the LTC's Petritz Nature Preserve with the township's Gull Harbor Park. The only open portion of this "loop" is on the public portion of the beach. This higher priority route requires discussions with multiple property owners. A major portion of the so-called existing route between Petritz and Gull Harbor is on private property without permission and another location/ permitted solution is needed.

It was pointed out to the audience that the plan is a living document, while it will continue to be edited before its submittal and in the future (refer to page 3).

A question was asked about the posting time for this public hearing. The reply affirmed a 30-day notice as published in the newspaper, for the township this notice is published in the Petoskey paper and via postings at public buildings throughout the area and within our website. The newspaper posting was done on December 15, 2022. The



changed date (Jan 19 to Jan 24 due to extreme weather) was publicly posted, albeit, not in the newspaper.

A request was made to include Dark Sky language given its economic benefit for the Island. It was pointed out that there were two sections discussing Dark Sky, likely there only needs to be one and there is a goal with objectives and a series of action items specifically discussing Dark Sky.

An audience member brought up interest in having a ball toss machine that users could rent for the tennis court. The township would like to consider this request. The purchase of such a machine is less an issue than the logistics for where to store it/mobilize it from.

The property owner of the Big Birch Tree, a significant cultural and natural resource on the island was willing to offer the property to the two townships and/or another appropriate entity. Little Traverse Conservancy may be an interested party. Further discussion is necessary to consider this generous and appreciated offer. It is understood another party owns much of the driveway area and would need to be involved with such a plan.

It was suggested that the basketball court at the school needs work. It was acknowledged that this is a school issue, not a township issue. However, we are cooperating with the school to encourage their development of a five-year capital improvement plan (especially given the timing of an asphalt plant on the island, something that happens infrequently; the last time a plant was here was 2001/2002.). We are working on such a plan for the Transfer Station and Recycling Center.

A member of the public asked if an indoor pool could be included in the township's recreational considerations. Others in the audience supported this request. Ms. Welke responded that given the concerns with funding such a project, plus the costs associated with maintaining and operating a pool that benefactors would have to be involved in funding all aspects of such a facility.

There were no further comments or questions.

Moved by Welke to close the Public Hearing at 4:49 pm with McDonough providing support.

**Motion Carried-Unanimous**

### **Special Meeting**

Supervisor Welke called the Special Meeting to order at 4:49 pm.

Discussion regarding the comments and questions from the public were well received and appreciated. The 5-year plan document and intentions of the board, within funding availability, to deliver on the public's expectations were understood.

**Resolution 2023.01.24.23 #1** authorizing approval of the St James Township 5-Year Park & Recreation Plan 2023-2027. Resolution by Fingerroot and seconded by Cole. Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Five

Nay: None

**The Resolution was declared adopted by Welke with Gillespie charged to certify the Resolution.**

**Resolution 2023.01.24.23 #2** authorizing that an application be submitted for a Charlevoix County Parks Millage Grant to fund the purchase of benches to be placed on Township Property throughout the harbor area and at Font Lake. Resolution by Gillespie and seconded by McDonough. Roll Call Vote.

Ayes: Five

Nay: None

**The Resolution was declared adopted by Welke with Gillespie charged to certify the Resolution.**

#### **Motion #1**

**Moved** by Cole and seconded by Welke to engage Fleis & Vandenbrink at total cost of \$15,000 to 1) create a Master Plan for the development of the Edward B Wojan Park and the Jewell F Gillespie Park in the amount of \$9,500 (refundable via an awarded grant) and 2) create an application for a grant to provide this development via the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' SPARKS Grant, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, Passport Grant, as applicable, in the amount of \$5,500. No further board members comments.

**Motion Carried-Unanimous**

#### **Motion #2**

**Moved** by Welke and seconded by Fingerroot to engaged Fleis & Vandenbrink to perform an evaluation and initial assessment of the Township's Sewer (Septic) System in the amount of \$3,906.

Board Members Comments: McDonough is concerned about spending this money. She reports that the engineer's annual reports document the sewer is operating appropriately and all due monitoring is completed by the township's maintenance director.

Fingerroot asked Fleis and Vandenbrink how this assessment would be completed? Matt Biolette of F&V responded that the two grinder and pump assembly would be inspected to determine a life expectancy, that the lift stations, septic tanks and field would be assessed. There would be no unnecessary camering of the system. The evaluation would consider the operations of the system, recommendations would be made. This would be a health and wellness check.

Fingerroot responded that this is a very important action to take, as any failure would result in catastrophic consequences.

Cole described that the operations of the sewer system was one of the most important responsibilities of the township.

Welke reported that there was an older five-year plan for the sewer that needs to be updated so we have a new plan moving forward. She reported that the Sewer Fund will pay for these services. In addition, she shared that there were ELGE issues that need to be addressed.



Gillespie shared her concern with the township funding this cost.

**Motion Carried-4 to 1 vote**

### **Public Comment**

A member of the audience noted that properly managing the township sewer was step 1, that the next step would be to extend the sewer around the harbor to protect Lake Michigan from water and septic issues. Welke responded that the township board has yet to consider the future of any sewer extension but given its major cost for construction and operation, that establishing regulations associated with private property septic systems needs to be considered first, to protect Lake Michigan and Font Lake as well as our ground water and soils.

An example was shared that would be to require mandatory inspections of the septic system when a home is sold rather than use the current 'preference' system. Harris shared that EGLE officials are determining when they could come to the island to test the water quality of the harbor. We should know more about this schedule in June.


A member of the audience asked for confirmation that taxpayers would not be responsible for this cost. Welke responded that the Sewer fund is an enterprise fund, with all property owners who use this sewer paying monthly fees to operate and maintain the sewer. *Post meeting note: The sewer ordinance describes that the users are to cover most of the costs associated with the sewer – implying that they are not responsible for all of the costs.*

No further comments were made.

**Moved** by Fingerroot, supported by McDonough to adjourn this Special Meeting at 5:09 pm.

**Motion Carried-Unanimous**

Submitted by:



Julie Gillespie, Clerk  
St. James Township  
COUNTY OF CHARLEVOIX