

Florence Township Park Commission

Meeting Minutes – February 18, 2013

Attendance: Brad Stone, Ron Knudsen, Julie Karlsrud, Dean Nelson, Bill Siewert, Joe Ellingson and 2 guests

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Park Activity Applications - no new applications received & 1 pending

Old Business:

Ron will be checking with the Sentence to Serve crew to see what their availability is for buckthorn cutting. Once dates are set there will be a walkthrough for the Park Commissioners, Township Supervisors, and residents, of the area to see where to start/continue with this project.

Brad attended the Township budget meeting and reported that the proposed budget for the park commission for 2014 is \$10,000 with a separate line item of \$5,000 for initial park design. Currently there is \$5,200 in the park fund. The budget items will be presented for Township approval at the township annual meeting on March 12th, 2013.

Joe reported that the county is working on the GIS measurements for Frontenac Station and Old Frontenac.

Park manager report – the lawn mower will be taken to Powers in Lake City for a tune up and blade sharpening.

Park Business:

Wakondiotia – Roof over bleachers – spring project

Frontenac Station – Playground equipment – in process

Community Center – Sidewalk repair - pending

Valhalla – dock repairs – spring project

Steamboat Landing – nothing new at this time

New Business:

Gary Johnson, Department of Forest Resource Service from the U of M made a presentation of the U's capabilities to develop and implement a park design for Valhalla Park. He has known Mary Vogel, a University of MN colleague who presented last month, for years and stated that he could work well with her. In

working with Florence Township, his goal would be to promote the natural beauty of the area by working with community volunteers engaged in the project on both a short term, and long term basis, to implement and maintain a design for a healthier, better managed park. He would use different community groups and see what areas the volunteers are interested in, then have them volunteer for the projects best suited to their interests. The best volunteers he has found are the ones who are 20 year residents of the community.

Gary commented that Buckthorn emits a chemical that suppresses surrounding plant growth, and that it thereby contributes to, rather than inhibits, erosion.

Gary suggested starting in one small area and eradicating the female buckthorn trees. This would inhibit buckthorn reproduction – seeds can last in the ground for 7 – 8 years. He suggested talking to Norm Erickson from Rochester known as the “Buckthorn Buster”. He also mentioned Janet Larson as a helpful resource in our battle with invasives. He also suggested that as we eradicate invasives we coordinate the introduction of low-growth indigenous species as part of our strategy to manage Valhalla.

Gary thought the use of goats in managing invasives was an interesting idea, but that he hadn't worked with them before. He also mentioned that other ways to inhibit buckthorn growing back after it has been cut (in addition to Garlon) are, placing tin cans over the stumps, borax, salt, and brushing on a solution of 25% Roundup Weed Killer.

Gary also suggested that we work with the state park and offer to donate campfire size pieces of buckthorn for campers to burn. It would help us get rid of it and would provide a nice community service for those camping in the area. He also suggested that we contact the area woodcarver's organization and donate box elder wood to them for carving as it became available.

Gary also recommended applying for grants through the Water Quality Grants, Clean Water Grants, Mississippi River Basin Grants, several different conservation groups as well as others. Grantors favor matching in-kind donations like volunteer hours. A volunteer's hourly wage equivalent is \$20.90 per hour and these hours need to be logged on all projects. Some of the grants are based on the monetary value of in-kind volunteer hours. He is also aware of the birding community and would like to include hiking trails in the plan.

He suggested getting some articles in the area newspapers to inform the public of what is being planned or of meetings to get volunteers and the community involved.

Discussion was had as to what our next step should be in working with an organization to help with our parks. The following factors rose to the top as key criteria in making our decision:

1. Landscape Architecture and Forestry. An organization with success in designing and creating ecologically sound, aesthetically pleasing, and culturally sensitive landscapes.

2. Accessibility. An organization with the capacity and willingness to focus on our project and be responsive to our needs.

3. Local presence. An organization with strong working relationships with local organizations in Southeast MN to partner with us in our project, e.g. Audubon in Red Wing, the Goodhue Soil & Water Conservation District, and the Goodhue Land Use Management Department.

4. Grant writing. An organization and the resources and commitment to help us secure grants to financially support our project.

5. Community. An organization with the ability and commitment to engage, unite, and educate our community in our township's project.

After extensive discussion, the commission decided that McGhie Betts Environmental Services, Inc. in Rochester, MN best met these criteria. While the U of M met many of the criteria, we were concerned that they lacked the resources to be as responsive as a local firm, and that they would not be able to be as engaged in our community building, and as supportive in our grant application process. The commission expressed gratitude for the University's participation in our selection process.

A motion was made, and seconded, to have Brad contact Jeff Broberg, and Bill Bleckwenn of McGhie Betts, both of whom presented to the commission at our January meeting, to see what they would suggest our next steps should be and to give us an idea of what it would cost the township to work with them.

Bill will send out an email to the township supervisors and park commissioners to set up a Saturday a.m. to meet and walk the park properties.

Park Commissioners contact information:

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Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted – Julie Karlsrud