



Oakland County Trails Advisory Council
Oakland County Parks and Recreation Administration Office
2800 Watkins Lake Road, Waterford, Michigan 48328

DRAFT Minutes

October 26, 2011

The meeting was called to order by Kristen Myers, Chair, in the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission Room, at 9:09 a.m.

PRESENT:

John Zalewski	Clinton River Trail
Mimi Zwolak	Friends of the Clinton River Trail
Jenny Frederick	Highland Township
Kristen Bennett	Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Andrew Mutch	City of Novi
Stephanie Loria	Oakland County Parks and Recreation
Kristen Wiltfang	Oakland County Planning & Economic Development
Merle Richmond	Oakland Equestrian Coalition
Mindy Milos-Dale	Oakland Township
Taylor Reynolds	Orion Twp. Safety Path Advisory Committee
Kristen Myers	Paint Creek Trail
Janet Waters	Road Commission for Oakland County
Terry Croad	City of Southfield Planning Department

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of minutes from August 24, 2011 was moved by Kristen Wiltfang and supported by Kristen Bennett. The motion passed on voice vote.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

No additions were added.

TRAIL NETWORK UPDATE

Paint Creek Trail – (Kristen Myers)

The Paint Creek Trail held their 6th annual Labor Day Bridge Walk, The Friends of the Paint Creek Trail are trying to raise 75,000 towards the \$320,000 needed to replace bridge along the trail, and with the suggested donation they were able to raise \$1,050, which was a great kick off to the fundraiser. They will also be looking at private foundations and other possibilities, and will continue to work with the city of Rochester to get it done hopefully within the next couple years.

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Polly Ann Trail – (Juliane Bagley)

Report not available from Juliane Bagley.

Clinton River Trail – (Mimi Zwolak for Brian Marzolf)

The Friends of the Clinton River Trail had their 7th annual Fall Classic Bike/Walk event on Sept. 17, which raised \$18,000. A high tech molding company in Rochester Hills has donated \$20,000 towards a vault toilet at Leach Road. It will be installed in the next few months. This will be similar to the one at Veterans Memorial Point at Avon and Livernois Roads. The Friends group is also continuing on with their “Look and Feel” project.

West Bloomfield Trail – (Dave Burley)

Report not available from Dave Burley.

Headwaters Trail Inc. – (Merle Richmond)

The Shiawassee River Trail (a water trail) is almost finished with signage. They are going to start working next on the trail that will connect Rose Oaks and Highland Oaks, and this will involve working with Oakland County.

On Sept. 29 six of the ladies that ride at Rose Oaks met with Oakland County Parks and Recreation at Independence Oaks to test out riding horses on the boardwalks. Part of developing the trails in Rose Oaks and Highland Oaks will be to build boardwalks. OCPD wanted to know if there was a lot of sway with the horses on the floating boardwalks. The group gave some suggestions, walked horses across long boardwalk at Independence Oaks, it was agreed by most of the group that they would probably walk their horses across a boardwalk that long, which would involve placing a mounting block at each end of the boardwalk. On the shorter boardwalks they were able to ride the horses across and the motion did not seem to bother the horses at all. Merle would recommend that there be railing going across the shorter boardwalks. Everyone enjoyed their ride and would love to see equestrian trails at Independence Oaks.

I-275 Metro Trail – (Julie Edwards)

Report not available from Julie Edwards.

Woodward Corridor Trail – (Todd Scott)

Report not available from Todd Scott.

Huron Valley Trail – (Chris Doozan)

Report not available from Chris Doozan.

OTHER COMMUNITY TRAIL AND PATHWAYS:

Director of Planning for the City of Southfield – (Terry Croad)

Currently The City of Southfield is conducting a non-motorized trail and transit plan to include some trails that are away from the roads in the city. They have a good working relationship with Lawrence Tech University, and will be working with the University’s Masters of Urban Design Program in the spring on an internship. The City

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of Southfield will be doing a detailed study on the River Rouge Corridor and will be incorporating the work of the student interns. Terry will be back to give additional updates in the future on their master plan.

City of Novi - (Andrew Mutch)

Andrew had a chance to go to Grand Rapids last week for the Michigan Association of Planning's Annual Conference. Novi was awarded the Planning Excellence Award for best practices, given for their Non-Motorized Master Plan. Andrew noted that judging was done by planners from the state of Indiana, so it was nice that folks looking at it from out of state recognized the value in it.

The City of Novi is working on addressing winter maintenance issues with their sidewalks. They are looking at contracting out snow plowing of all the major sidewalks and bike paths. As they have expanded their system of bike paths and sidewalks, a lot of people are using them even during the winter months. Another issue, as trails have extended into residential areas, people are concerned that they will have to shovel a path in front of their house. The city felt the best way to address this was to contract out the clearing of the school routes and bike paths. Novi will issue an RFP and get some private contractors to bid on that. Price-wise, initial estimates were lower than expected (\$50,000 to plow 15 miles of bike paths/sidewalks), and were less than the cost of the city staff maintaining the paths, so this could actually save Novi money. =The city has a dedicated millage for road maintenance, so the cost for clearing the paths will come primarily out of that. The city has also discussed this with the unions, and they feel comfortable they can move forward. The city workers can focus on plowing the streets and avoid excess salting. Residents are really looking forward to having regular pathways clear. Andrew will share more information as it becomes official.

Orion Safety path advisory committee - (Taylor Reynolds)

The Orion Safety Path Advisory Committee has struggled with annual maintenance; they are currently tackling the wet leaves. They do not conduct snow removal.

The Bald Mountain Connector Archeological Study will be wrapping up in the next month. This is a limestone mountain bike path that will connect The Paint Creek Trail, through Bald Mountain property, up to a subdivision in Orion Twp. The archeological study was needed to make sure there was no historical significance before it was begun, and there was nothing found during the study.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission – (Stephanie Loria)

OCPR is moving forward with its Addison Oaks Connector Trail. A grant was received in 2007 from the MDNR Trust Fund for development of the trail. This trail will connect Addison Oaks East with the main park, and provide connections to Oakland Township's Cranberry Lake Park. Part of this trail will be in the road right-of-way, but most of it will go in through the parks. This limestone trail will be approximately 2.6 miles long.

Lakes Community Trail – (Kristen Wiltfang for Deanna Magee)

The Surface Transportation Board voted to approve the abandonment of the COE railroad through Walled Lake, Wixom and Commerce. The Lakes Community Trail was able to work with the Trust Fund Board to get them to hold off on their cutoff date for making the decision on potentially funding the acquisition grant. The original date was Oct. 1, and they were able to push it back until Oct. 20, when the decision was made by the transportation board. There are still some preliminary things that need to occur in order to get the railroad abandoned, but it is moving forward.

**PRESENTATION: Highland State Rec. Area Trail and Designing Trails with Habitat Considerations –
Kristen Bennett, MDNR Park Planner**

Michigan State Parks have been trying to get ahead of the curve on their regional trail connections, especially in Oakland County. They have seven state parks in Oakland County alone, and trail groups in Oakland County have been doing a great job of making all the major regional connections. It was realized that if the State Parks did not make decisions on where regional trails were to go through their parks, someone else would decide for them. They also wanted to make sure trail connections would provide access into existing trails, as there are over 900 linear miles of trail within the whole park system. The State Parks want to showcase the parks without infringing on the natural habitat, which supports one of their overall goals of preserving and protecting the environment. There are Recreational Trail Program grants for Seven Lakes State Park and Highland Recreation Area. The grants are to help fund the engineering of regional trail connectors through that area. Seven Lakes' new trail will connect to the Headwaters Trails system in Holly, and Highland's will connect to the Milford area's trails.

During the preliminary process it was discovered that both locations are habitats for the Massasauga rattlesnake, which is protected as a species of special concern, and listed as a candidate for the threatened endangered species. State distribution shows southeast Lower Michigan and southwest Lower Michigan as prime areas for habitat. They also found out through research on the project that Michigan is one of the last stronghold areas for this snake, as our habitat is ideal. These rattlesnakes live in prairies and forested areas adjacent to wetlands in the summer, and they winter in crayfish burrows, keeping their body below the waterline, and their head above it. This snake has not been highly researched as a species, which makes it hard to determine whether or not the construction of trails will affect it. Research done on snake crossings trails has mostly been done on roadways, not on trails. The feeling is that the openness of the road/trail allows predators to see the snakes, and makes the snakes hesitate to cross. Snakes also follow hormonal scents, and an asphalt path stops the scent, which means less breeding snakes. It is also thought that asphalt attracts snakes to its warm surface, which increases road kill.

Michigan State Parks have two test cases in studying the impact of trails in Massasauga habitat: Seven Lakes and Highland parks. It was decided to try two different approaches. In Seven Lakes State Park, the park road already separates their summer and winter habitats, and they have had several snakes killed in that area. The decision for this area was a snake fence and tunnel, where snakes are guided to the opening of an under road tunnel by fencing. The tunnel has to be perforated as snakes will not cross an entirely dark tunnel. Seven Lakes would require 500' of fencing to herd snakes to tunnel opening. This could be built with trenched-in silt fence as well, but hard plastic would require less maintenance. Seven Lakes is still actively pursuing grants to get this built, as the materials were found to be more expensive than planned.

At Highland Recreation Area, the biggest problem is that a huge wetland complex is very close to the park road, which is parallel to the new trail (10' wide pedestrian-bike trail, and a separate 5'-6' wide equestrian trail). The initial thought was to put the trail in and then install a boardwalk, but it was realized that the boardwalk would have to be 500' to 600' feet long - which is expensive, hard to maintain, and too long for equestrians.

The first solution was to move the trail up to the narrow portion of the wetland which would only require around 100' of boardwalk. This would be less expensive and easier for users to cross. The park would like to keep pedestrians, bikers, and equestrians separate, but it is too expensive to build individual boardwalks for each, so that would be a portion of the trail that all users would have to share. When this was sent out for review the stewardship group said it was another barrier for the Massasauga rattlesnake. A discussion was held on how to solve this problem. There is an existing driveway from the gatehouse that goes down through the park, and then comes back to road. The park talked to DEQ to see if a portion of wetland could be filled to widen the road. The DEQ said this would work as long as the area filled was no larger than 1/3 of an acre. This would result in 900 linear feet of trail being on filled wetland. It is important to keep the trail at least 100' away from the wetland "emergent zone", where wetland habitat thrives.

Highland Recreation Area will be finishing up design over the next month or so, construction will begin over winter, and be finished late spring or early summer of 2012. At some point there will be multi-use connection across M-59, right now equestrians can't get in without trailering their horses. Highland has been looking at

options to cross M-59, but it remains a huge challenge. MDOT will be very involved in the design of the potential future crossing.

PRESENTATION: Clinton River Trail “Look and Feel” project – Kristen Wiltfang, Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services

The Clinton River Trail is a 16-mile trail that starts in Rochester/Rochester Hills and ends in Sylvan Lake. On the western side it connects to The West Bloomfield Trail; on the eastern side it connects into the Macomb Orchard Trail. It also connects with the downtown Rochester River Walk, which then heads north into the Paint Creek Trail. When the railroad was abandoned in 1998, The Friends of the Clinton River Trail was formed and has made significant strides in creating this trail, getting it approved, and getting the bridges put in. There is also a Clinton River Trail Alliance; which consists of the five communities (Rochester, Sylvan Lake, West Bloomfield, Macomb and Orchard Lake) who meet monthly, along with the friends group. The six entities keep the trail development moving forward.

Kristen displayed a picture containing 21 different signs in a single view of the trail; this is to depict that there are way too many signs for one location; it's confusing to motorists and pedestrians. The Group needs to be concerned with safety on the trail, trail etiquette, where the signs are located, and community identification. Kristen then shared another picture with two different mile markers, one indicating mile 30 for the railroad, and another indicating mile 6 for the trail; there needs to be a correct/consistent mile marker system by possibly removing the old railroad mile markers.

The Friends Group started the “Look and Feel” (LAF) project in the spring of 2008 with brainstorming sessions about amenities people wanted to see along the trail. The top idea to come out of these sessions was clean restrooms, which didn't really address some of the issues they were really trying to focus on. In August they worked with Nancy Krupiarz from The Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance and the stakeholders to put together a series of maps. Some of the amenities/ needs suggested from these meetings were scenic overlooks, trail identification signs, information kiosks, trash receptacles, and maps of major road crossings.

After some fundraising, the Friends Group made a push to hire a consultant for the LAF project. They issued an RFP in December of 2009, and then held a series of meetings with the stakeholders in Dec. of 2010. The chosen consultant was Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. of Lansing, and they subcontracted with Michigan State University's Department of Design and Landscape Architecture to engage student work on the project as well. Oakland County's Planning and Economic Development Services also provided support to the community. Other stakeholders included some of the businesses along the trail. The goals of the LAF project were to develop design guidelines, establish some of the amenities, and create a signature look to stand out from the other trails in the area.

For the first assessment they really wanted to take into consideration the characteristics of some of the area communities. They looked at surrounding land uses and natural features, trying to decide what types of signs to put along the trail. The group also met with some community officials at each one of the stops. At the first meeting the questions asked were what they thought was unique about their community, what they liked about the surrounding communities, and what they considered to be world class. The overall response was that people liked the trail-oriented characteristics about the community, the history, the park and nature feel and the culture. At the second meeting people were shown 60 different images and asked what they liked and didn't like. Key characteristics that people liked were cut out and detail work, wayfinding signs, historical markers, archway-gateway to trail, benches, art work, and shade shelters. Kristen then shared a few of the student-created designs. The Friends Group gave the student designs to the consultants and they were polished up. These revised drawings were shared as well. It was decided that the “history style” was the clear choice from the studies. The designs of the mile markers, monument signs, information kiosks, and gateways were displayed. There was also the suggestion of donor benches that people or groups can purchase to be placed on the trail.

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The action plan that was identified in the “Look and Feel” booklet was to first market the trail, and then promoting it through events, cross-branding opportunities with the downtown areas, exploring social media i.e. a Facebook page, and hold events. It was recommended to explore a variety of funding opportunities, and then create a design team. The plan will be completed in phases.

The lessons learned so far:

- Regulatory signage was important; make sure all of intersections are uniform.
- Field check the sign locations
- Work with utility companies
- Contact and get all of stakeholders on the same page
- Consider other amenities, such as solar lighting, Wi-Fi hot spots, and GPS coordinates.
- Incorporate results into master plans and capital improvement plans for budgeting
- Use materials that last and are easy to maintain and replace
- Be consistent with the signage

GROUP DISCUSSION ON “Other Power-Driven Mobility Devices”

Stephanie made available an evaluation of some of the OPDMD policies she picked up at the Mid-America Trails and Greenways Conference in Indiana.

Stephanie stated that Oakland County Parks and Recreation is still in the process of getting a policy together regarding OPDMD’S. After attending the workshop in Fort Wayne Stephanie feels that she may have to go back and evaluate OCPR’s trails a bit closer in accordance with the DOJ’s 5 evaluation factors. The DOJ really wants trail managers to look portions of the each trail; they really do not want just a blanket policy written. There is no federal oversight/ review an entity’s OPDMD policy to say that the Department of Justice guidelines are not met, unless an incident occurs.

It was discussed at the conference to focus on evaluating the appropriateness of the device in the environment/trail, and not the person using the device. You do not want to inquire whether or not the person should be using the device, just whether or not the device can be used in the environment you have.

The other issue is proving you wouldn’t allow certain devices because it would pose a safety threat, and what would constitute that is up for speculation.

Stephanie then asked the equestrian representative how the group would feel about a Segway going 5-10 miles an hour on a trail.

Merle Richmond stated she didn’t think it would be very compatible with the equestrians; she explained that if it were a straight trail it may be OK, but if there were curves in a trail, anything that comes up on a horse quickly it may cause a problem.

The challenge for people making a policy is that documentable risk needs to be found.

Merle suggested that one of the problems she saw at Pontiac Lake was when the mountain bikers came in and rode on the equestrian trails, when they rode fast on the hilly and curvy trail they would surprise and spook the horses. The horse seemed to be OK when the bikers came at them from the front.

Is it a possibility to get a group of equestrians together and test sharing the trail with different motorized vehicles?

The other issue is not allowing people with mobility disabilities to use devices that the parks routinely use for maintenance on the trails, such as 4 wheelers and trucks. The rule states that if it is allowed on the trail at all, then

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it should be allowed for anyone with a mobility disability. Stephanie would like to speak with legal counsel for advice.

The deadline for OPDMD has passed, but OCPR will try to have their policy in place by the New Year.

Merle questioned if every trail had to be accessible to people with a mobility disability. Stephanie responded that they do not, but if it is said that a trail cannot accommodate a mobility disability then it has to be justified as to why.

Kristen Bennett stated that everything new that is built must be accessible, as well as every trail that is improved.

The Federal Outdoor Accessibility Guidelines that should be adhered to.

Another point from the conference was that someone suggested that there are a lot of signs that say “motorized use is prohibited”, it may be possible to just change the sign to “authorized motorized uses only”.

The law is difficult because most trails were designed and built to be used as non-motorized trails. It also creates a potential conflict with the existing users of the trail.

Each OTAC meeting will have an update, as policies come in they will be shared with the group.

Stephanie advised visiting the American Trails website www.americantrails.org all updates are listed there.

Meeting Dates for 2012

Meeting dates for 2012 will be sent by email, the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for January.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

No announcements or public

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 a.m. motion by Kristen Wiltfang and supported by Stephanie Loria.

Minutes taken by Shanna LaBair - Administrative Services - Oakland County Parks and Recreation;
edited by Stephanie Loria – OCPR.