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EATON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

April 14, 2021

The Eaton County Parks and Recreation Commission met virtually.

PRESENT: Eric Deibel, Brian Droscha, Jack Duffy, Duane Eldred, Alisa Gonzales-Pennington, Jon Horford, Kathy Webber, and Jane Whitacre

ABSENT: Sarah Ferguson and Barbara Rogers

GUESTS: John Rockford, Bruce Bright, Steve Suckow, Christopher Hammond, and Alicia Alonzo

STAFF: Troy Stowell-Director, Jackie Blanc-Operations Manager/Naturalist, Crystal Smith – Recreation & Event Coordinator, Melody Smalley – Administrative Assistant

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Webber called the Parks Commission meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

2. INTRODUCTIONS/CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

None

3. CONSENT AGENDA

Motion made by Whitacre, second by Droscha to approve the consent agenda that included April Agenda and March minutes. **Motion carried.**

4. STAFF REPORTS

- Crystal Smith gave a brief overview of her report that included Family Campout at Fitzgerald Park on June 5th, Summer Camp at Lincoln Brick starting June 12th for 9 weeks, Ledges Car Show at Fitzgerald Park on July 10th, Waterfest at Crandell Park on August 14th, and a couple of photo shoots that are being scheduled at Fitzgerald Park.
- Jackie Blanc gave a brief overview of her Operations and Naturalist Report that included the transition from winter season to spring season, the kayak launch at Crandell Park, and the progress on hiring of summer staff. Jackie also gave a brief description of a few naturalist programs that are in the process of being developed that would include nature walks that would be pet friendly.
- Director Stowell gave a brief overview of his report that was distributed by email.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

The following individuals expressed their views of supporting the recreational activity of “bouldering” at Fitzgerald Park:

- Steve Suckow, 483 E Jefferson, Dimondale, MI
- Christopher Hammond, 223 N. Bridge Street, Grand Ledge, MI
- Alicia Alonzo, 631 Hollywood Drive, East Lansing, MI

6. FINANCIAL REPORTS

A. Master Voucher

March Master Voucher was received. Motion made by Droscha, second by Whitacre, to receive the Master Vouchers. **Motion carried.**

B. Financial Report

March Financial Report was received. Motion made by Droscha, second by Duffy, to receive the Financial Reports. **Motion carried.**

7. PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- A. **Friends of Eaton County Parks** – Vice Chairman Webber gave a brief overview of the last meeting that included the bench honoring former Chairman McConnell for his support and leadership to the parks and Parks Commission, the Friend’s Board has openings, and she will be chairing the Friends’ annual fall fundraiser.

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. “Restore Our Parks” Long Term Revenue Subcommittee Report

Director Stowell recapped the meeting that was held on March 29, 2021. They discussed the strategies of how to effectively advocate messaging to the public that would support an increase in park funding.

B. FY 2022 Capital Requests

Director Stowell went over the capital requests for FY 2022 that was distributed by email.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Keehne Environmental Area RC Track Proposal

A copy of the proposal developed by John Rockford, was distributed by email. Mr. Rockford gave a brief overview of the proposal that included the type of RC that would be used on the track, the proposed layout and description of the track, and how the track would be maintained without putting more responsibilities on the parks staff. Motion was made by Droscha for Blanc and Rockford to meet out at Keehne and affirm the permanent location of the track and fine tune the type of RC that would be permitted on the track, and a maintenance agreement for the track. Then bring the proposal to the Commission again. Motion second by Duffy. **Motion Carried.**

B. Rules and Regulations Amendment Article V – REGULATIONS GOVERNING SPORTS, GAMES, ACTIVITIES, AND OTHER USES

Director Stowell stated that it has been a standing, unwritten policy that any type of rock climbing has not been allowed at Fitzgerald Park and Lincoln Brick Park. The “No Climbing on Rocks” policy has been consistently signed through the parks. Stowell, also, stated the City of Grand Ledge only allows climbing at Oak Park. However, the policy has been challenged by participants that would like to participate in the sport at Fitzgerald Park because the policy doesn’t not specifically state this type of recreation is restricted in the current wording. Director Stowell proposed the following in written form to the Commission:

***Addition to Eaton County Parks Rules & Regulations Article V –
Regulations Governing Sports, Games, Activities and Other Uses
Section 11- Climbing***

Purpose:

To codify in the Eaton County Parks Rules and Regulations, the prohibition of rock climbing within the parks. Rock Climbing has been disallowed in Parks and justified under Article III – Protection of Property and Article IV – Protection of Wildlife. The addition of the language below will solidify the County’s stance by explicitly outlawing the practice of rock climbing within the parks system,

a decision which is also fully supported by the Michigan Municipal Risk Management Association.

Proposed Language:

No person shall climb, rappel, belay, anchor, swing or otherwise attempting to ascend or descend from cliffs, arches, or other rock formations within any property owned or managed by Eaton County Parks. To include rock climbing, bouldering, abseiling, traditional or “trad climbing”. The use of bouldering pads and other climbing equipment is also prohibited while on parks property.

Blanc gave her background understanding of the current policies since her employment for the past 30+ years, and her views as a Naturalist, Operation Manager, as well as, the safety and risk management point of views.

Blanc also shared her experiences participating in the sport at other locations throughout the United States, and the changes in policies over the years due to the impact the recreational activity has had on locations and how policies have been changed at those locations, due to environmental impacts.

Discussion was held, that included the preservation of wildlife, fauna, and the protection of natural resources vs. the public being allowed to participate in activities of their personal choosing and how that may or may not be in conflict with protecting natural resources.

Motion was made by Droscha, second by Duffy to reaffirm the current rules that adopted the proposed language as written. A roll call vote was taken with a passing of 4 to 3. Yay – Droscha, Duffy, Horford, and Whitacre. Nay – Deibel, Pennington, and Webber. Commissioner Eldred had left the meeting prior to the roll call vote. **Motion carried.**

Motion was made by Whitacre, second by Webber to have further discussion at the next board meeting to address the possibilities of future special events/programs/special permits that may allow for this type of participation at future time. **Motion carried.**

10. LIMITED PUBLIC COMMENT

- Steve Suckow, stated his disappointment in the support of the Commission to continue the current policy. And advocated for change in the future, stating that their intentions are not be in conflict with harming the natural resources but with their support would be supporting the preserving the environment and be present to “police” other public members.
- Christopher Hammond stated his disappointment in the continuation of the current policy and stated the current park staff doesn’t have the time to monitor and enforce the current policy. Hammond also stated that the climbers would be present to help regulate the public that currently disregard the non-climbing policy, and be educators in how to safely participate and protect the natural resources.
- Alicia Alonzo, advocated for special permitting and waivers in the future.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

None

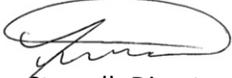
12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

None

14. ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting is scheduled for May 5, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at either Lincoln Brick Park, Grand Ledge OR virtual based on Executive Order. There being no further business, a motion for adjournment was made. The regular meeting was adjourned by Chairman Webber at 8:12 p.m.

For the Commission,



Troy Stowell- Director of Eaton County Parks

MLS