

Environmental Board Minutes, October 14, 2015

Meeting called to order at 7pm

Members Present: Chair Ruth Caputo, Vice Chair Martha Dahlinger, Secretary Tim Winslow, Catherine Niessink, Jamie McCarthy, William Beck, David Mayfield, Mike Sergeant, and Jerry Kroehn.

Members Absent: None.

Introduction of the guests from Kaiser & Associates and Hurley & Stewart.

Catherine made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Jamie. Motion passes.

Elections

Ruth, Martha, and Tim were re-elected to their same positions to great acclaim.

Retention Basin Master Plan/Maintenance

City of Portage's approach is like most other municipalities and is more reactive. This grant is being used to help the City of Portage create a master plan for how to best maintain, improve, and repair its retention basins. This process began back in April of 2014 when Kaiser & Associates and Hurley & Stewart met with city staff to bring together all the information they could regarding these basins. Staff members from Hurley and Kaiser then went to all 72 basins within the city limits. Some of these basins are on private land and the city has access through easements. This does not include the number of private basins with the city limits. When going to these basins, we figured out the inlets, outlets, etc of each basin. That process took them through August of this year. The next stage of the project is to establish a level of service for each basin. Is it just maintenance aspects or are there aesthetics and environmental values that should be considered? They want to develop seasonal and annual plans for each basin.

Most pipes have a flared end at the end where the water enters the basin and in some cases these ends have fallen off. Some of the basins hadn't had any maintenance in the past 15-20 years or so. They did not find any imminent threats to these basins though so that is a good thing. The study doesn't look at private basins that are held on private property where the city has no easements. Part of the study is to look at whether there are enough basins as well in certain areas of the city to determine if they are adequately meeting their goal. Western Michigan currently has \$1 million dollar grant to study its stormwater infrastructure. The federal government is starting to look at

stormwater runoff a lot more in terms of pollution control. The city has been monitoring its groundwater and stormwater runoff since 1992. So there is a program in place to some extent. We know that invasive species have moved into some of the basins.

Martha wishes we could incorporate more native landscaping into the basins but it is hard to do since we do have to keep fences around these basins due to liability concerns and the way these basins were designed. Kaiser & Hurley are starting to see more developers use more native landscaping with these stormwater basins instead of just building a pit to hold water. Portage mostly treats water in some fashion in their basins. Stormwater management has really changed in the last ten years. In terms of making retention basins more aesthetically pleasing that really comes down to costs for current basins. How basins are designed in the future though really comes down to city ordinances and what is required although some developers do go beyond that. The City of Portage is looking into its current requirements for stormwater retention basins and seeing if those requirements/plans should be changed to some degree.

There is a lot of variation in the types of stormwater retention basins we have currently in the City of Portage. The City of Portage does have a budget for stormwater improvements regarding basins and the like. The current budget is \$80,000 for this year and will be increased \$100,000 for next year.

Ruth brings up whether they are looking at rain gardens as a way to help potentially help alleviate stormwater and basically reduce the amount of runoff with developments. This might be a requirement we could actually add for stormwater retention. The city brings up though that you'll still need to stormwater retention basins though to help with this management. And retention basins are cheaper than a rain garden to put in unfortunately. This is something though that can be encouraged more for sure. Even the use of rain barrels would be a good thing for more residents/homeowners to use.

With roadway developments, we are starting to see more use of rain gardens and whatnot to help alleviate stormwater runoff. Cities with no ordinances unlike the City of Portage are finding they will have millions of dollars in upgrades to their stormwater retention basins because they haven't had any type of ordinance in place.

The environmental board does try to push rain barrels and rain gardens at our public events that we attend. The board does not interact much with developers though. This issue is not high on most of the public's list of things to care about though.

When looking at the map for the City of Portage, it seems that most of the basins are located where the city is older rather than where there is the most concrete. Jerry asks if they are looking at capacity of the stormwater system if there is a deluge of rain and if there are any issues with the City of Portage's system. Portage does have a separate sewer and stormwater system though. This is really beyond the scope of this project though.

Lately the City hasn't really had a need in terms of stormwater retention basins lately with most of the money ticketed for other projects. This is why there is a need for this plan now though to help with this. There are many communities struggling now with the federal requirements regarding stormwater runoff and will face a great increase in costs to decrease their runoff and manage it better.

Single-Stream Recycling

Bill went to the high school game and had a display for single-stream recycling. Our station was stationed next to the field and there were a lot of people there but not much in terms of opportunity. The displays look very nice though and opens up upon itself. There was only one other table present at the event. The people we did talk with at this event though were very interested and answered some good questions from people. We found that the most likely targets are the parents with kids from the elementary schools. They seemed to be the most interested.

The displays are very nice. Bill bought some hooks to help display some recycleable items. The displays may have some issues standing up in the wind like every other display we've had as well. We should find more events with families present.

The next Farmers' Market could be an idea to attend. Also the tree-lighting event could be as well.

Best Way is still working on rolling out the apartments and condominium complexes at the moment.

Invasive Species

We are sending out letters to some property owners asking them to get rid of Phragmites and Purple Loosestrife. Mike is concerned that the Phragmites there might be a native type and do we know for certain that these are invasive Phragmites. We do know in some of these locations that those are invasive. Most of what we see around here though is the non-native type usually.

Next year we'll see if the Purple Loosestrife beetles survive the winter and how many survived. Once we know this data, we'll decide what our next steps are to do.

Thursday, October 29, 11am to 1pm the City of Kalamazoo is hosting a lunch event regarding Japanese Knotweed that Ruth hopes to attend. Paul MacNellis with the Stewardship Network is trying to coordinate a countywide response regarding invasive species. Thus, we can tap into greater networks of labor to help battle these species. As of right now, we can't really even treat Japanese Knotweed with chemicals as Roundup as no effect.

Deer

Apparently there was a buck who had his antlers caught in the soccer net at Portage Northern and given that there will be some more attention on this issue we are wondering what the board should do potentially. One future issue is possibly passing a ban on feeding deer within the city limits of Portage. Right now there seems to be an overpopulation of deer in certain sections of the city but not the entire city itself. The number of car/deer crashes are decreasing within the City of Portage.

Volunteer Group

Bill has contacted three volunteer groups thus far and has found that they have low expertise thus far regarding invasive species and other environmental issues. Bill would like to only work with these three groups now to see if we can use these groups effectively. Bill would like to prepare these groups now for garlic mustard. He believes we should have an educational event with each group and wants to do so soon so that they can schedule their events accordingly.

New Business

We believe the Kalamazoo County Road Commission is spraying herbicides along the roads. Martha would like to explore why the county is doing so especially when the state is trying to restore some of the vegetation along roads. Martha can either do this as a member of the board or as an independent citizen. For now, Martha will inquire as an independent citizen and figure out why the commission is doing this and what they are spraying.

Martha would like to see the parks do more with plantings for bees and butterflies in some of the parks. She would like to see the parks put some money into some type of waystation/garden. Ruth would like the group to figure out if this is a priority or not.

Announcements

Martha and Dave attended the Zero Waste Initiative that is being initiated by the Southwest Michigan Sustainable Business forum. They are setting up future meetings as of right now but these meetings are only open to members. Martha won't be able to be as involved next year with this group though. Jamie is wondering if there are any champions of business involved with this group located in the City of Portage. Dave doesn't think so.

Jerry brings up Monarch butterfly rearing and wonders if the butterflies survive better from house/individual rearing or in the wild. This might be an issue for the board to consider.

Martha plans to meet with Chris regarding displays and getting some money for it into the budget.

Our new members, Mike and Jerry, introduced themselves.

Dave makes a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tim. Motion passes. Meeting adjourned at 8:59pm.

/s/ Tim Winslow