

Environmental Board Minutes, September 9, 2015

Meeting called to order 7:01pm

Members Present: Chair Ruth Caputo, Vice-Chair Martha Dahlinger, Jamie McCarthy, Spencer Welling, William Beck, Catherine Niessink, Christin DeJong, David Mayfield, Tim Winslow, Director of Transportation and Utilities Christopher Barnes

Members Absent: None

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

Mike Graham, City of Portage Arborist

It came to the attention of the environmental board at our last meeting that there were many trees down in Eliason Reserve due to Black Oak wilt. Thus, we asked Mike to attend our meeting to address this topic. Mike recommended that the process of removing trees wait until the fall after the bats and other animals did not need the trees anymore. Mike says thus far there is no actual oak wilt there yet that we know about. Mike will check on this soon though. There are black oaks in Eliason and wilt can be spread by insects and also roots coming into contact with each other.

The tree trimming business is basically unregulated so tree trimmers may trim and take down trees not during the right time period.

Hickory trees are also experiencing some type of disease. Mike has talked to others in the state about this disease although not much has come about it yet. People really don't know what is causing normal healthy Hickory trees to suddenly die over a year or two despite having an ample water supply.

Walnut trees are also having issues with Thousand Cankers disease. This disease has mainly been west of the Mississippi although it has now been found in Indiana but not Michigan yet.

So, when an issue comes up regarding trees to the city, how does the environmental board find out about this issue? Mike brings up the example of Emerald Ash Borer. It was found first near some airport in southeastern Michigan near Detroit and determined in 2002 to be from the Emerald Ash Borer insect. Unfortunately, these insects had spread across the state already and killed many trees. That insect is very invasive and will attack healthy trees as well as unhealthy trees, which is unlike some insects. Dutch Elm disease, a

fungus carried by an insect, spread the same way. There was the same issue with Chestnut trees. The lesson to be learned is to plant as many varieties of trees as possible so that when a disease hits one type, we don't lose all of our trees. Maples trees could be vulnerable to the Asian Long-Horned Beetle that has been found in New York and Chicago. We just never know.

There are Black Oaks, Hickory, and Red Maple mainly in Eliason Reserve. To the best of Mike's knowledge, there are no Walnuts in Eliason. Most White Walnut trees have been wiped out by blight.

Main problems in the State of Michigan circa 2013 regarding trees: Emerald Ash Borer, Two-Oak Ash Borer (attacks Oak Trees), Spruce decline (neo-diseases), and herbicides (such as extended-use Roundup that contains 2,4-D in it) that have long-term effects against trees.

For oak trees, we should wait until after the first hard frost before you prune, trim, or take down these trees. This is because then there will be reduced to not much insect activity at this time. This is to help combat Oak wilt. You should paint oaks in the summer if you trim or prune your oak trees but otherwise you do not need to do this.

Mike says most of his job is dealing with requests from the City of Portage and citizens. Mike only works for the city one day a week so he doesn't have much time to otherwise ascertain the health of trees in the city.

Single-Stream Recycling

People have been complaining about their requests regarding the cart size for single-stream recycling. Most people waited until the last minute before sending in their notice or going online and choosing their cart. There isn't much the City could do to prevent this problem. We also expect many more cart requests through the first three months of the program as others see the carts outside and then will request their own cart.

It's too early to determine if the program will be a success or not. We'll know more in six months. The schools are making more efforts to recycle as well especially since they have a new contract with Best Way regarding recycling. The plan is for the board to keep spreading awareness on the topic throughout the year regarding single-stream recycling. Martha asks how the schools are recycling whether they are using more receptacles throughout the school or not. All we know now is that they are recycling more materials but not the specifics regarding how yet. Our next step will be to try and ramp it up some more.

Tim inquired about apartments and condominiums since he hadn't heard anything yet. Bill says the rollout for those will be done later after the residential push.

Purple Loosestrife Beetles

Tim contacted Integrated Weed Control regarding whether it is possible that the beetles died off this year or had some type of catastrophic population crash. She said she didn't think our beetles were dead and that this experience had happened in other parts of the country. At least one other entity in the area has had a similar issue to what we've experienced. Tim is going to wait until April/May before we check the population again and see how they are doing before deciding on next steps.

Catherine will contact someone regarding their efforts in a group she is with.

Invasives in General

Phragmites has come back in places we've treated it (Austin Lake, Consolidated Drain area). Some of it is dead but some of it is alive and appears to be spreading. We will convene the subcommittee regarding this topic.

Retention Basins in the City of Portage

Joint venture with a couple local firms Kieser & Associates and Hurley & Stewart to inventory each of the 69 city-owned retention basins. The objective is to develop a criteria for management, maintenance, and sustainability of these areas. The city is looking at the basin, location, features, risk factors, to determine the best way to maintain these basins. Right now basic maintenance is to mow around the basin both inside and outside the fence and to also keep the trees off the fences. A lot of the maintenance to some degree is complaint driven right now. This plan would help the city figure out how to maintain each basin and the priority for doing so. Potentially some of these basins might become micro-habitats for plant and animal species. Bill asks if there is any consideration is given to the appearance of a basin. Chris brings up that the neighborhoods really determine how a basin looks. Different basins are maintained differently. The goal of this study is to categorize these basins into different levels for different maintenance plans.

Water Treatment Plant

The lawn area surrounding the Mesic Prairie planting has been mowed by the city maintenance crew and the invasive Canada thistle has been pulled by a dedicated Environmental Board crew. Martha has requested that the EB

continue to help with the physical maintenance of the native planting and to work with Chris to develop a maintenance plan suitable for the native plants.

She has also advised to work with Chris to rid the area behind and to the east of the building of the invasive thistle and the phragmites. Chris is exploring the possibility of a burn for the area next spring. A burn will be good for the native plants and will help with control of the invasive plants moving into the area.

Deer Article

Christin read the deer article. We made a couple of group edits to the article and then re-sent it around for circulation. Once everyone approves the edited article, we will send it on to the Portager for publishing.

Working with Volunteer Groups

Bill brings up that we don't manage the relationship between priorities and resources as well as we could. We don't really have enough resources to accomplish everything we want to especially with invasive plants. As part of our plan, we need to figure out what our biggest threats are and how we plan to manage these threats. We need to develop a strategic threat assessment for the city and a plan for how to tackle these threats. We need to start with a more strategic view, what the major threats are, and then determine what resources are needed to handle each threat.

Bill believes we should meet with each group and give them the necessary resources for them to help us tackle these threats. Bill is hoping to meet with these groups sometime in October.

Old Business

Martha brings up us looking into updating the weed ordinance possibly in the future and working with other municipalities with regard to invasive species. Tim brings up that The Stewardship Network is working on forming this group. Ruth will reach out and contact this person.

New Business

Martha would like the city council members that serve on county environmental boards/groups to update the environmental board with regard to their activities. Martha would like to see more cooperation between these groups.

Announcements

Martha and Dave attended the Zero Waste Initiative that is being initiated by the Southwest Michigan Sustainable Business forum. Their goal is to increase participation in this project by fifty percent. They also want to create a baseline for each business and they want to reduce the amount of waste to a landfill by five percent. One idea is to have central compost areas possibly. Many landfills are closing in the area so this project might bear fruit in the future.

Martha also attended a natural shoreline meeting at Corey Lake. She was very impressed with the meeting. The meeting was sponsored by Michigan State, DNR, DEQ, the Kalamazoo Nature Center, etc. to name a few. There were a lot of people there and it was successful.

Portage 2025 Visioning Renewal event is on October 3rd and all should attend. It is from 9am to 2pm and lunch will be provided. It will be held at the Portage Central High School auditorium

Kalamazoo Water Festival will be held on September 19th at the Riverview Launch from 11am to 4pm.

The board thanks Spencer and Christin for their service to the environmental board over the years.

Spencer made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Tim. Motion passes.

Meeting adjourned at 8:47pm

/s/ Tim Winslow