

June 8th Environmental Board Minutes

Meeting called to order at 7pm

Members Present: Chair Ruth Caputo, Vice-Chair Martha Dahlinger, Catherine Niessink, William Beck, David Mayfield, Jerry Kroehn, Mike Sergeant, Director of Transportation and Utilities Christopher Barnes, Secretary Tim Winslow

Excused Members: Jamie McCarthy

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

Deer

The four criteria that we are looking at in order to make our decision regarding deer. The four criteria are public safety, ecosystem health, impact on city residents, and herd size. Jerry asks why we are going with such broad, non-specific criteria. Ruth answers that with this very broad list we are not limiting ourselves in what we consider to make this decision. Bill mentions that each one of these four is a broad index that can be used to help make our decision.

Ruth will send a letter to the city council regarding what criteria that we are going to consider for making our decision regarding deer.

The options for gathering more information are a continued online survey, phone survey, or a public referendum. We think that we have received the most feedback we can regarding the online survey. Jerry is going to check with Chris and Jamie regarding whether a city has used a telephone survey before and how much it cost. We believe that a public referendum is the best method for obtaining more feedback from the public.

We have asked Mark Mills from the DNR regarding how to best measure the impact of deer on ecosystem health. Mark says the best way to do this is with deer exclosures that would keep deer outside of a certain area that can then be used to compare to the areas outside the exclosure. If it is obvious between the difference between the area inside the exclosure and outside the exclosure, then you have a problem with deer. If there is no notice of difference, then you don't have a problem. The exclosures should be roughly 10 x 10 feet. We would probably want to put up a few of these in the Bishop's Bog-Eliason Reserve area. We will want to specifically place the exclosures in certain spots. We would do this to see what environmental damage the deer are causing. Mark says the exclosure needs to sit out for a season at least.

We think the best way to determine an estimate of the herd size is with an aerial survey. Mark says those are somewhat reliable. There can be an error margin of 30% he says with an aerial survey. The best way to measure the deer population would be to trap all the deer we could and put some type of collar around them. We know Ann Arbor used aerial surveys. Mark says a helicopter would be a better way to count the deer than an airplane. Mark mentions that this is really only one factor in our decision

regarding what to do about deer. Where deer herd size comes into our equation is helping us determine if we are at the carrying capacity for deer within the City of Portage.

Ruth mentions that she would rather see the aerial survey than to do another online survey. Mike thinks that we should do an aerial survey to at least give us some more data that we can then provide to the public to help them make their decision. Bill isn't sure though that the public would really understand the deer numbers though that we could provide them. Martha wants to provide materials to the residents to help them with their deer "issues." We could do this in combination with any recommendation to the city.

Martha would like to also make a recommendation regarding the exclosures since we'd need to get those up fairly soon in order to have that data for a potential decision next year. Bill says we should also do exclosures with people's gardens to better understand the social carrying capacity of deer and see the damage the deer are causing.

Mark says that you could do an exclosure for around \$50 per exclosure probably.

Tim makes a motion to recommend to the city to do an aerial survey to determine the size of population of deer within the City of Portage, seconded by Catherine. Motion passes.

Jamie will call Rosie Norwood or Sarah Reding with the Kalamazoo Nature Center to determine the costs of doing an aerial survey.

Mark will try to find another experienced person to do the aerial survey as well.

Marth asks if Fort Custer would have any experience with doing aerial surveys.

Ruth asks how we should do the exclosures. Mike doesn't see any reason to wait to do these. Tim and Catherine will work with the Parks Department on where to put these, how many, etc.

Bill makes a motion to ask the Parks Department to help provide the support to do some deer exclosures within the City of Portage. Martha seconds the motion. Motion passes.

Martha wonders how we should approach the Parks Department regarding putting these up in the parks. Jamie recommends writing a letter to the Parks Department explaining why we are doing these exclosures what we hope to accomplish with these.

Chris and Jamie have discussed the maps regarding car/deer maps that Karl made for us and believe we should try out the density of car/deer accidents in a certain sector with relation to traffic flow and the volume of traffic.

Mark mentions you could also do random mail surveys to gather feedback from the public regarding their opinions on deer. Jamie mentions that postcard surveys are found to do the best with regard to

receiving feedback regarding deer. Mark mentions that the DNR does have survey specialists that could help us create a deer survey.

Environmental Threat Assessment

Bill believes that we really need to do an environmental threat assessment for the City of Portage to best determine what threats exist and how do they rank. Bill believes it would be worthwhile to do a threat assessment so that we can provide a better basis to the public for our decision-making. This might result in some difficult decisions being made.

Ruth mentions that we tried a similar approach with setting our goals 2-3 years ago. Catherine asks how we would do this. Bill says it would be an outside party that would be conducting the assessment with some input from the board.

Bill has set up a meeting with Larry to discuss this further and see if there are resources within the City to do this assessment or is this something that the board would do. Bill will explore this topic more with Larry and report back to the board.

Invasive Plants

Ruth will not make the pull this Saturday. She needs someone to handle the storage shed and run the pull. Tim will probably be there. Jamie might be there. The pull is at 9am to 12pm at Schrier Park.

Tim found some more Phragmites at the Hampton Creek wetlands complex.

Jamie will get some more information to Mike regarding the retention pond survey that was completed last year. The City has not received the final report yet.

Bill thinks we need to do more to publicize our volunteers and the efforts they have made to also illustrate the need for more people. Bill thinks the City should dedicate some more resources to working on getting more volunteers.

Purple Loosestrife Update

Tim has released all the beetles. We did 26 releases this year at 8-10 spots throughout the city. Some locations have good populations of beetles that are doing their job. Other locations are not doing as well. Tim is compiling a report on the beetle program and hopes with this data to figure out the best way to work this program.

Ruth mentions that we need to probably try to kick these invasive committees off again and get to work on some of these issues.

Old Business

Ruth will host a potluck in lieu of our July meeting.

New Business/Announcements

Martha mentions that it would be good to have a better relationship with the Parks Board. She mentions the issue with putting the cement pathway through Eliason Reserve and wishing she had more time to go through the proposal regarding the funding of Phase II with Eliason Reserve.

Mike talked to Ann Arbor briefly on deer and they mentioned they did aerial surveys regarding deer. Mike is going to talk to board members in the future.

David made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Tim. Motion passes.

Meeting adjourned at 8:17pm

/s/ Tim Winslow