

Environmental Board Minutes February 8, 2017

Meeting called to order at 7:05pm

Members Present: Vice-Chair Michael Sergeant, Martha Dahlinger, Jerry Kroehn, Deirdre Nieves, Student Advisory Member Betty Barnett, Secretary Tim Winslow, Assistant City Engineer Jamie Harmon.

Excused Members: Chair William Beck, David Solberg, Kathy Fiebig,

Visitors: Emma Dubensky, Civil Engineering Major at Western Michigan University, Jessika Maas, Kalamazoo Valley Community College student.

Present Environmental Board Members introduced themselves to our new visitors.

Jerry makes a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Seconded by Martha. Motion passes.

Devin Mackinder, IT and Marketing Director of City of Portage

Devin goes through his marketing plan for the City of Portage Environmental Board. BoardSync is an electronic system that allows the City to put agendas up before meetings take place. Meeting participants can put up documents that pertain to that agenda up on BoardSync so everyone can see the documents. This is how the city council members look at agendas pre-meeting electronically and add notes to these agendas and documents. The notes are private. You can use it on your smartphone or laptop. Once the meeting is over, then the agenda, minutes, and other documents do go live at some point.

It was discussed that the City needs to give the board more guidance and clarification with regard to complying with FOIA and the Open Meetings Act with regard to board activities.

Devin went through his recommendations in his marketing plan, which was emailed to the board in late January.

Situation

The Environmental Board has requested marketing assistance with the following goals in mind.

1. Expand the Board membership/presence and community volunteerism
2. Educate citizens on Portage environmental issues
3. Motivate the Board/community to active participation
4. Tap in to what the city is already doing

5. Provide good recommendations to the Council

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on an overarching theme of maintaining continued engagement through a standardized process requiring scheduled and recurring activities that gives the Board and community volunteers a sense of purpose and measurable accomplishment. The recommendations can be implemented singularly and in a phased approach, but are built to work in a complimentary fashion for maximum impact/exposure. The actual work is expected to be completed by Environmental Board members and volunteers to create the appropriate separation from city employees. The recommendations also take into consideration a Spartan budget.

Recommendation #1: Periodic

Portager newsletter articles/inserts: The Portager reaches all city addresses (approximately 22,000) on a monthly basis. A special 8 ½ two-sided newsletter could be inserted in the Portager as the Board desired (i.e., monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc.). Each month could feature a particular issue of importance. The city could create the newsletter template for the Board to use. The insertion cost is approximately \$1,000 but there would also be a cost for making the necessary 22,000 copies.

Another option would be to submit a short article to the city for the Portager newsletter. There is no associated cost with this option for the Board, but space is limited so the articles would need to be very short and there is no guarantee that a Board article could be included with each monthly edition.

The insert might be too expensive for the board. The Portager monthly articles could work, but we might have a few small articles not make it into a Portager too.

Recommendation #2: Website News and Events articles:

In coordination with the articles/newsletters, the Board could also submit the same information to the city as a "News and Events" article for the city website home page. The online article would include a link to the Environmental Board page of the city website which already provides informational documents and links of interest.

On a periodic basis, the Board could also post a linkable icon on the city website homepage for volunteering and Board membership opportunities. When clicked on, the icon would link to the appropriate sign-up form or "please join" article.

The board could use this recommendation for some of its events or to further educate the public about certain things the board is doing.

Recommendation #3: SeeClickFix

(Report It!): The city has an online tool available on the city website and MI.Portage app that allows citizens the ability to report issues they identify in the community such as potholes, inoperable traffic light, and the like. The issues are forwarded to the appropriate department for action. The city could add an additional "agency" for the Board which could include items such as "garlic mustard weeds" or other agreed upon issues that fall under the Boards purview. The only catch is that the citizens would be made aware that they are reporting the issue directly to the Board for resolution, and not to the city directly. In order to be an effective tool, the Board would need to commit to timely issues resolution. Otherwise, the city would be obligated to delete the Board agency from the Report It! system. But if the Board were to use this system correctly, it would have the potential of activating volunteers as an effective response team while also addressing environmental issues identified in the community. Since the system has a reporting feature, the Environmental Board could show measurable value by running a report on an annual basis and providing it to the City Administration and to Council.

The board is cautiously optimistic that this might be helpful but there are other apps that can be used to map invasive species as well. The invasives species subcommittee/workgroup will discuss this issue more in depth.

Recommendation #4: Facebook Page:

A recent Pew research study stated that 75 percent of adults are using Facebook on a daily basis. The city currently has three Facebook pages that continue to gain in popularity and have risen to become the top referral sites to the city website. The Board could easily set up a Facebook page as an educational, promotional, and "call to action" vehicle. It could also be a great way to encourage community volunteerism. The Facebook page could act as the cornerstone of all other recommendations listed herein. Facebook also can be shared by others who "like" your page, which can increase awareness. Best of all it is available to the Board at no cost.

The Facebook page would require almost daily upkeep from an environmental board member. So we would need a member to really step up and handle this page.

Recommendation #5: Public Service Announcements:

The Public Media Network provides the public use of video equipment and training at no cost. The Board could work separately, or in conjunction with the city on developing short video segments based on varying subjects such as volunteering, Board membership, or specific topics of interest or concern. All of the videos would include a "call to action" designed to motivate citizens to take part in some way. The videos could be posted to the Board Facebook page and also run on the government cable access channel or distributed as promotional materials (keep in mind the related distribution costs, however).

This could be an option for the board to do some video and radio segments on environmental topics.

Recommendation #6: Events:

Look for dual-sponsorship opportunities with other, more prominent events happening in the community that have an environmental theme or connection. These do not necessarily need to be city-sponsored events. The Board would need to do some research and then reach out to the event sponsors to see if they would be interested. Connecting with more prominent community events will help raise Board awareness.

The board may want to consider hosting an event to get more visibility regarding what it does.

One idea for recommendation #2 is to have a contest for designing an environmental board icon where anyone in the community could design an icon.

Secondary Prioritization Projects

We decided to table this item to the agenda at our next meeting.

Agenda

At our next meeting, we are going to make decisions regarding the marketing recommendations put forth by Devin. We are also going to discuss our obligations under the Open Meetings Act.

We discussed whether we need to burn the native planting at the water treatment plant.

Deirdre made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Jerry. Motion approved.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:55pm.