

Leelanau County Parks and Recreation Commission
Veronica Valley Park Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 5, 2023
Leelanau County Government Center, Suttons Bay, Michigan
Tentative Minutes – Meeting Recorded
<https://www.leelanau.gov/meetingdetails.asp?MAId=2499>

The Veronica Valley Park Committee meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m. by Committee Chairman, Dave Barrons.

Chairman Barrons led the recitation of the “Pledge of Allegiance.”

Roll Call: Dave Barrons, *Committee Chairman*
Steve Christensen
John Popa
F. Jon Walter

Staff Present: Laurel Evans, Executive Assistant
W. Scott Bradley, Maintenance Worker *(Absent)*

Guests Present: Heather Hettinger, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
(MDNR) Fisheries Biologist (via Zoom)

Approval of Agenda and Late Additions/Deletions:

Motion by Christensen to approve the agenda, as presented. Seconded by Walter.

Discussion – None.

Ayes – 4 (Christensen, Popa, Walter, Barrons)

No – 0

Motion Passes.

Public Comment:

None.

Action Items –

Invasive Species Management – Pond Weeds. Heather Hettinger, MDNR Fisheries Biologist, joined the meeting via Zoom. Barrons reported that Ms. Hettinger’s fish report will be postponed until the May 3, 2023, Parks and Recreation Commission Regular Session due to the fish supplier, Dan Laggis, tending to a family matter. Barrons reminded Hettinger about the deadline for receipt of the final invoice for the fish to ensure timely payment. Hettinger said she would have “the numbers” well in advance of the deadline for the committee to review.

Barrons said to the group that he invited Hettinger to give her opinion about pond weed management and whether it can be managed without hiring an outside service. Hettinger said that in 2012, there was a similar discussion about three options for treatment in the ponds: 1) continued mechanical/physical harvest of the vegetation; 2) use of weevils, which target Eurasian Watermilfoil; and 3) chemical control. She said the invasive weed creating the biggest threat was milfoil and, at the time, there was only one company in the Midwest that was raising

and selling weevils. Unfortunately, that company went out of business. Option three, chemical control, was strongly opposed, so mechanical/physical weed harvesting continued – which is a very labor-intensive process – and so help was recruited from community volunteers.

Hettinger said when the chemical route was taken, she had concerns about copper, which is contained in the chemical used to spray the weeds. Copper is a mucus irritant to fish and kills aquatic insects. Hettinger said she had a long conversation with staff members at Savin Lake Services about what the pond was used for, what results were expected regarding weed control, and how the pond should be treated to eradicate invasive weeds and still maintain enough vegetation to sustain fishability. She said that after a few weeks of the initial application, she was “horribly disappointed” in what resulted; there was very little vegetation, the sand bottom was exposed, and the fish were left exposed having very little vegetation where they could hide. She said she thought that the understanding she and Savin came to about how to manage the pond was “all thrown out the window.”

Barrons asked about an alternate, reasonable plan using spot treatment and if Hettinger thought weed control could be managed in-house. Hettinger responded, “One hundred percent.” Hettinger explained that when treatment is broad from spraying, it creates a clean slate and predictability of where invasive plants will return is lost. Unfortunately, she said, what grows back first are invasive species. She added that watching how vegetation comes back this summer will determine the problem areas. Hettinger said products for self-management are available, and referenced (Harrietta Hills Trout Farm, LLC) in Wexford County. She said they specialize in pond management and are a distributor of aerators, pond rakes and various chemicals for treating small ponds. Hettinger said weed management in-house could be done at a fraction of the cost. She added that she has consulted with Dan Vogler, owner of the Trout Farm, on a number of projects. Popa asked Hettinger’s thoughts about mechanical removal of weeds. Hettinger responded that rakes are available and, though it is time-consuming and labor-intensive, removing weeds mechanically (raking) is her preferred method of controlling weeds.

Barrons reported that there has not been a meeting with Lake Leelanau Lake Association’s (LLLA) Brian Price and Ron Reimink to hear feedback about what they would like done to manage weeds in the pond at Veronica Valley Park, but he said LLLA is not in favor of “cutting up a whole lot little chunks of it” that would somehow make its way to Lake Leelanau. He added that the committee has agreed that they want to work with LLLA. Hettinger responded that she can appreciate LLLA’s concern but, she said she would feel more strongly about their concern if she knew there was a huge milfoil infestation where the creek enters Lake Leelanau. Hettinger explained that milfoil transfers two ways; the most effective transfer is when it goes to seed. It develops a seed packet about the size of a quarter, called a turion. If the seed is disrupted, the weed is transported. She explained that the second way milfoil transfers is through fragmentation – cutting the plant. She said that method of transport seems limited to how far it can go. Hettinger thought transfer concerns could be mitigated by harvesting before the milfoil goes to seed or by using a biofilter (black mesh) to catch turions from moving downstream.

Discussion ensued about methods of raking previously deployed at the pond – how weeds that were removed were dried and taken from the banks, and who assisted in the removal.

Barrons asked for Hettinger’s recommendation for treating the pond this season. Hettinger responded that, because it such a small body of water, and because the goal is to keep fish thriving year-around, she felt extensive treatments were unwarranted. She said to keep plankton and bug communities healthy and not create a sterile pond that could develop algae issues, a large scale weed treatment “gives her heartburn.” She said she would rather see how vegetation reestablishes itself and make a gameplan going forward.

Christensen asked and Barrons affirmed that there was no weed treatment in the pond last season. Barrons noted that there is a thick mass of algae along the shoreline of the pond. Hettinger said that is why she is not fond of chemical treatments. She said when there is an abrupt aquatic change that wipes out weeds, it opens the door for imbalance. With no other plants to compete for nutrients, the algae took off. She suggested manual removal with rakes, then drying it out and transporting it to an appropriate landfill.

Barrons said he did not know what to do about not treating the pond this year. He thought there would be an overgrowth of weeds if nothing is done. Hettinger suggested spot treatment as an option. She was hesitant about a massive chemical treatment. Barrons asked and Hettinger affirmed that algae could be spot treated. She added that the type of algae present needs to be determined before administering the appropriate treatment. Christensen suggested spot treating only where necessary. Hettinger thought treating areas (chemical spot treatment, raking) where the public fishes and leaving areas for the fish to refuge would be a good plan without “nuking the whole thing.” Christensen asked when milfoil goes to seed? Hettinger was unsure but said she will research and follow-up with an answer. Barrons asked if Hettinger could also advise on the timing for treatment of algae. Hettinger said algae should first show up so it can be properly identified and treated accordingly. Walter said he could help if mechanical removal is utilized. Barrons thanked Hettinger for attending the meeting and she signed off.

Christensen suggested recommending to the Parks Commission that the plan to treat the pond this year would be to conduct a multifaceted approach to weed control in the pond, including investigations with LLLA; spot treating and raking; and watching for algae bloom. Barrons said the response to Savin regarding approval of the contract is due by April 15 (2023). Christensen commented about how the previous plan to treat the pond with Savin went sideways. Discussion ensued.

Consensus of the group was to not pursue an agreement with Savin Lake Services for weed eradication.

Approval of Minutes:

- February 7, 2023
- March 1, 2023

Motion by Christensen to approve the committee meeting minutes of February 7, 2023, and March 1, 2023, as presented. Seconded by Walter.

Discussion – None.

Ayes – 4 (Christensen, Popa, Walter, Barrons)

No – 0

Motion Passes.

Spring Tree Planting Update:

Barrons reported that approximately 60 trees and shrubs were purchased and paid for (\$305.00) and will be planted the first part of May within the two protective corrals. He is working with District Forester Ellie Johnson to get help with planting. Varieties of trees and bushes include Black Cherry, Burr Oak, Mountain Ash, White Birch, Shag Bark Hickory, Service Berry, Flowering Dogwood, Winter Berry, and Witch Hazel.

CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) Update/Discussion:

Barrons noted that the back portion of the Regular Session packet includes copies of the CIP requests submitted to the Planning/Community Development Office

(https://www.leelanau.gov/downloads/04052023_pandr_rs_pkt_opt.pdf).

Discussion ensued on the submittals from the Committee, including Invasive Species Mitigation, \$2,500.00 (Annually); Completion of Porta Potty Upgrade, \$35,000.00; Universally Accessible (U/A) Pond Walkway, \$75,000.00; Picnic Enclosure, \$65,000.00; and Paved Parking Lot, \$75,000.00. Barrons reminded the group the dollar figures and timing of projects were flexible and subject to change throughout the years.

Parking Lot Design:

Discussion ensued about where the pad for portable toilets might be sited near the parking lot. Popa said he was not in full support of the “big parking lot” and was concerned about where the toilets will be located.

Christensen reported that the Old Settlers Park Committee met yesterday and has proposed a combined meeting/walkaround, which will begin as an information gathering event, and then finish up at the Government Center, proposed for May 3. Discussion followed.

Barrons proposed changing the request from invasive weed mitigation to the U/A trail around the pond for a Tribal 2% Allocation Request. As a discussion point, he noted that the dam or weir between the two ponds is breaking down. Bradley clarified that it was the wall that kids fish from (in front of the curved walkway) that Barrons was referencing. Bradley added that timbers are rotting and falling over, and there is “stuff missing.” Christensen suggested meeting on-site to inspect it. The group discussed their schedules and decided on April 25, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. to meet at the park then return to the Government Center to reconvene at 2:00 p.m. Evans confirmed the meeting room was available at 2:00 p.m.

Returning to the topic of pond weeds, Popa asked about the status of the letter from LLLA for assistance in assessment of weed mitigation. Barrons said he responded with a letter stating interest in coordinating with the association. Popa asked about meeting with LLLA biologist,

Ron Reimink, to observe weed growth. Popa asked that this topic be added to the May agenda as “old business.” Barrons confirmed there will be a discussion at the May meeting about what was learned today from Hettinger’s input.

The topic of parking lot design was pushed to the next meeting once the on-site walkaround has been completed.

Public Comment:

Alan Campbell, County resident and member of the LLLA. Campbell said that he thought there would be a good group of volunteers (Boy Scouts) to assist in clearing out the pond, including the the back pond (farthest north). Campbell said he would like to get the word out about the U/A walkway. Barrons said there are maintenance issues that need to be addressed first. Campbell added that he did not see the need for Evans to attend the on-site walkarounds. He thought it inhibited free discussion. Evans explained that she assists by taking notes and videos of the activity.

Board Member Comment:

None.

Motion to Adjourn:

Chairman Barrons called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion by Popa to adjourn. Seconded by Walter.

Ayes – 3 (Popa, Walter, Barrons, Christensen)

No – 0

Motion Passes.

With no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Lori Eubanks, Recording Secretary