

MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE OF THE VILLAGE OF METTAWA, ILLINOIS, HELD AT THE HOUR OF 5:30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2015, IN THE SAVANNAH BOARDROOM OF THE HILTON GARDEN INN HOTEL, 26225 N. RIVERWOODS BOULEVARD, METTAWA, ILLINOIS.

A. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Towne called the meeting to order at approximately 5:30 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Upon a call of the roll, the following persons were:

Present: Chairman Towne, Members Armstrong and Pink

Absent: None

Also present: Mayor Urlacher, Scott Anderson, Village Engineer; Bob Irvin, Village Administrator; Colleen Liberacki, Deputy Village Clerk; Larry Falbe of MOLA, former mayor Jess Ray, Pam Sheldon, Tom Phillips, Andy Cohn, Tom Heinz, Jeff Clark and Denis Bohm. Chairman Towne declared a quorum present.

C. Approval of minutes from January 14, 2015.

Member Armstrong moved to accept the minutes of January 14, 2015 as presented and Chairman Towne seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

D. WRD PRESENTATION OF THE PARK & OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE VILLAGE BY JAY WOMACK

Jay Womack prefaced his presentation by stating his impression from the numerous interviews with the residents and project stakeholders was that the greatest common denominator was that Mettawa values its open lands and its desire for a long term stewardship partner. He stated that those present would hear the term “permanent conservation easement” frequently.

REVIEW OF EACH SITE ANALYSIS

Parcel #1: 27570 Oak Hill (2.91 acres)

Jay Womack noted the parcel was infested with buckthorn and contained a private driveway. His recommendation was to have MOLA adopt the site and use it as a good opportunity for environmental education, buckthorn removal and create a monitoring program for stewardship. He noted that a MOLA member lived in close proximity to the parcel. Jay Womack highly recommended putting the parcel in a conservation easement, long-term stewardship and educational signage.

Parcel #2: East Side Oasis Service Strip (1.23 acres)

Jay Womack noted the parcel was a 40ft right-of-way strip that must be maintained. He suggested attention to avoid blockage, help improve drainage and remove the buckthorn.

Parcel #3: Oasis Park (20.89 acres)

Jay Womack noted that what he felt really made this spot special was the high points, which created a spectacular view to the west, showing the treetops and village land. He furthermore

noted the large and expansive feeling generated from inside the parcel. Jay Womack noted that there was water moving thru the site, which was the cause of some erosion and felt that vegetation and existing trees would soften the appearance of the berm.

Jay Womack's recommendation was to use native plants (prairie short grass) to create a large prairie and omit the planned trees on the berm. He noted that the compacted soil had 98% density due to the spoils dumping and only a top layer of black soil, which would discourage tree growth, yielding stunted and sickly trees. He suggested creating a boardwalk parallel to the road and possibly 2 or 3 parking stalls on top for access to the vantage points.

Parcel #4: Riverwoods Blvd (0.92 acres)

Jay Womack noted that there was a small piece of the parcel in an existing conservation easement, close to a right-of-way, and it is largely a flat parcel, with a little spot qualifying as a wetland. He further noted that parcels #4, 5 & 6 were continuous properties.

His observations were that part of this property had a "T" intersection at Riverwoods and Bradley Road, intimating a dividing line between the corporate and residential areas. He thought that it gave a nice feel of residential with the oaks at the "entrance" to residential area at the "T" and thought native wildflowers would be suitable to the area. Chairman Bohm noted that TallGrass was supposed to be maintaining the area.

Jay Womack's recommendation was that the sun exposure (or lack thereof) would dictate a savannah style plantings.

Parcel #5: Riverwoods Blvd (9.04 acres)

Jay Womack noted that this parcel stretched from Bradley & Riverwoods Road to a conservation easement owned by the DNR and Village of Mettawa.

His observations were that there were incredible oak trees, however it was being choked out by a heavy infestation of buckthorn; winding trails connecting to the corporate area, yet the property served as a separation between the residential and corporate area. He noted that there was a small verdant pool (which was rare) on the parcel that was a breeding ground for salamanders; however, the presence of buckthorn had absorbed most of it.

Jay Womack's recommendation was to clear the buckthorn, remove the existing meadow fencing, place the parcel in a conservation easement, and create a long-term stewardship plan.

Parcel #6: 26230 Riverwood Blvd. (2.41 acres)

His observations were that this was a very open piece of property with no vegetation in it to restore, except some teasel was cleared. He felt that this parcel lent itself to development vs. restoration. Jay Womack's recommendation was that the village should let it be as is and just keep it mown.

Parcel #7: Whippoorwill Preserve/Farm (11.18 acres)

Jay Womack noted that this parcel had no conservation easement and a trail from Bradley Road was located across the back end. He also noted that there was a corner berm with some steep slope, but the rest was flat with one small wetland area.

Jay Womack's recommendation was that the village should keep the berm intact and move forward with other changes. He noted that there was a significant buckthorn infestation that should be removed as well as clover and elm that should receive the same treatment, as it was eliminating what native plants there were. He noted a lack of biodiversity and signs of erosion. He recommended along with removing all invasives, herbiciding the entire berm and reseeding due to the overwhelming presence of clover.

He also thought it would be a good idea to retain the bluestone patio, as it was part of the Korhumel history. Womack suggested incorporating native landscaping, along with plugs for a splash of color and keeping some spots of the parcel "cultural", as it once was when the Korhumels lived on the property, along with interpretive signage. He would recommend the entire parcel be put into a permanent conservation easement.

Parcel #8: Costco North (2.80 acres)

Jay Womack noted that there was no conservation easement present and no village trails leading to the property. He advised that it was originally a wetland where Costco was now located, which displaced the water and pushed it into other areas.

His observations were that this property was not as big as it initially looked, and it gives you the feeling of being down in a hole. Jay Womack's recommendation was to work with Costco to put the parcel into a permanent conservation easement. He also suggested working with the cattails, which were a symptom of poor water quality (probably runoff from the parking lot) and eradicate the buckthorn.

Parcel #9: Costco Berm (2.19 acres)

Jay Womack's recommendation was to leave as is.

Parcel #10: 701 Riverwoods Road/Everett Pond North (24.01 acres) and

Parcel #11: Everett Pond South (5.23 acres)

Jay Womack noted that nothing much was going on but a little bit of passive wetlands for Parcel #10 and for Parcel #11, nearly 2/3 of the property was a pond. The property was located next to Grainger on one side and LCFP with a trail on the other side.

His observations were that this was the front door to Mettawa coming from Chicago, and the view was spectacular looking west, including the berm and a rural feeling from the hayfields given the village's history of horses. He also noted a grove of oak trees (infested with buckthorn) and a giant burr oak tree, suggesting native plantings should go under it. He felt that this property was a critical piece of the future and how it should be handled, firstly by placing it into a permanent conservation easement and involve Grainger in doing so. He thought that the village should continue to be guarded against future development here, due to the presence of Costco.

Jay Womack's recommendation was that the village should maintain the land as a hay field for the next 10 – 20 years and then convert it later to a prairie and open up the view by eradicating the buckthorn infestation. He again urged cooperation with Grainger to put the parcel into a permanent conservation easement.

Parcel #12: 25960 St. Mary's Road (3.95 acres)

He stated that the land slopes toward the Des Plaines River and the highest point was where the house was previously located prior to demolition, and there was a wetland on the back side and corner of the property, maybe ½ acre in size.

His observations were that there was an extra thick infestation of buckthorn, more than he had ever seen. He felt that there was no tree worth saving on this property and no redeeming qualities, due to the amount of traffic and noise produced on such a busy corner; he felt it was nearly unbearable to spend much time there.

Jay Womack's recommendation was to remove the buckthorn and plants should stabilize the north half of the property against erosion. He further noted that the slope and moisture content of the parcel would be a deterrent against development, and this would be an unlikely spot for a village hall, in addition to the traffic and noise produced on such a busy corner. He did recommend putting the parcel into a permanent conservation easement.

Parcel #13: 16 Alexandra Drive (3.91 acres)

Jay Womack noted that this was a landlocked parcel, partly in a floodplain and the adjoining property was underwater. The presence of the sound barrier wall was ineffective, as the sound would bounce over it and funnel into the low point. Jay Womack's only recommendation was to sell the property and use the proceeds to fund the restoration work on the other village parcels. He felt that this property had no ecological value.

Right-of-Ways

Jay Womack noted that there was much buckthorn and (recently removed) dead ash trees. He noted that this parcel contained right-of-ways, but residents had no understanding about the boundary lines on both sides of the road. He noted much encroachment with fencing and landscaping into the right-of-ways.

Jay Womack's recommendation was to work with the residents about education and communication regarding the right-of-ways and whose responsibility it was to maintain. He suggested establishing right-of-way signs for everyone's benefit. He also thought there should be discussion with the homeowners about removal of invasives and natives for screening and wildlife habitat. He also advised a program for tree pruning, erosion control and water management; and lastly, recommended putting the parcels into a permanent scenic easement.

He further advised that the trails were pretty complete and no need to develop more. He then opened up the presentation for questions.

Member Armstrong was concerned that the Whippoorwill berm was in trouble due to the erosion and lack of native plantings, despite the village's effort. He wondered whether it should be a priority, to which Womack said yes. Jeff Clark wondered if the zoning classification for open space was necessary if perpetual easement was being proposed, as it seemed redundant. Womack replied that the permanent easement was best and an independent third party should administer it.

Chairman Towne was interested in open space zoning for the 12,200 acres inside of the village, much of the land owned by LCFP. Also, with the right-of-ways, he wanted to be sensitive to the neighbors that might be affected by the recommended changes and suggested talking to them first, to which Jay Womack agreed with the right-of-ways approach.

Chairman Towne asked Jay Womack his opinion about which property (Dreikosen - #12; Whippoorwill Farm - #7; or Costco - #8) would be best suited for the construction of a village hall that is currently being discussed. Jay Womack discouraged #8 due to the amount of water and wetlands involved; also, that it gave off the feeling of being in a hole and looking at a parking lot was not pleasant. Jay Womack discouraged #12 due to the amount of noise, traffic and the limited amount of useable land for building. Jay Womack thought #12 was a nice piece of property for the location of the village hall, but he recommended parcel #3, Oasis Park since it was already a draw for people, not being too far into the village and it could be an amazing piece of land for the purpose.

Chairman Towne asked Jay Womack what his thoughts were regarding the character of the open spaces of the village, what stood out for him. Womack replied that he loved the small roads and the rural feeling he would get if he pulled off the main roads and that they should work hard to protect that. He cautioned that parcel# 10 & 11 should be protected against development.

Larry Falbe suggested that each site be labeled with a descriptive name in addition to a number, so that he is able to make the association when listening to the comments. He also suggested having WRD create a table with such categories as name, location, observations, recommendations, etc., so that anyone could see comparisons at a glance and formulate priorities. Larry Falbe informed the group that the permanent conservation easements needed to be held by a third party that would need a donation in order to accept responsibility for the parcel, to cover maintenance, stewardship and possible legal fees.

There was a question as to how much of a donation was sufficient. Jay Womack offered to talk to Keith Gray, of ILM and also a Mettawa resident and Conserve Lake County officer to gain perspective on how much of a donation was appropriate. Larry Falbe offered for MOLA to have a Wine and Cheese social hour to accompany a village event to educate residents and promote enthusiasm for the project.

He also questioned the suggestion of the village hall being located on the Korhumel property and/or Oasis Park property, due to its size requirements and where it would be placed on the property. He also suggested that the proposed Oasis Park boardwalk be located away from the trails due to the horse traffic. Bob Irvin noted that the village has a contract already in place to move over the side of the road to the east of its current location. Larry Falbe mentioned he was disappointed that trees were not advised to be planted on top of the berm due to poor soil quality, since some of the residents were counting on the screening from the toll way lights. He further suggested looking at the Granger and Deerpath berms, which were successful in planting trees.

Jay Womack explained for the benefit of those present that a permanent conservation easement would take away the rights to develop a piece of property, but there was a cost

associated with holding onto the property along with scheduled visitations to make sure that the property was in compliance with the terms of the permanent conservation easement. He further suggested that a well-written easement document would benefit the village in the long term. Bob Irvin noted that the village board was committed to keeping the spaces open, but wondered what was the cost associated with losing control of the property. Jay Womack replied that if there were no development, there would be no loss of use. Larry Falbe cautioned that the grantor and the beneficiary of the easement could not be the same entity. Jay Womack advised that if the use of the parcel ever changed, it could void the easement, i.e., a railroad depot that ceased to exist due to relocation of the railroad line.

Jess Ray complimented Jay Womack on a presentation well done, and suggested for Oasis Park plantings that would attract butterflies, and possibly contacting the Illinois Toll Way Authority to economically benefit from their plan to cultivate milkweed to attract and revitalize the monarch butterflies. He further applauded the idea of a boardwalk to discourage tick infestation. Jess Ray questioned Womack if he interviewed the commercial residents (Grainger, Costco, etc.), to which Womack replied he did not. Jess Ray thought it would be a positive step for working towards a permanent conservation easement and gaining their cooperation and possibly contributing funds. He thought it a likely possibility, since many of the employees use the trails. Denis Bohm mentioned that there was a Grainger Charitable Foundation. Bob Irvin cautioned that one of the parcels with the fence that would be affected by this planning was owned by a HOA, not the village. Larry Falbe stated that he was one of the homeowners in that HOA and that they would be open to suggestions, but density screening was necessary, as was open lands.

Bob Irvin noted that three or four utility poles in the Whippoorwill Preserve could be removed, and lines put underground, should the village hall be located there. Rick Phillips shared that he supported the idea of permanent conservation easements, noting that 2/3 of Deerpath Farms was in permanent conservation easements, and what was truly important was that this would preempt any zoning and the land would truly be protected. It was comforting to know that beyond the present village board, which supported open lands that the land status could not change, despite a possible change in sentiment. Chairman Towne agreed to take this under advisement and present this idea to the village board.

Jan Pink inquired which parcels would be considered as a seed bank, to which Jay Womack replied that either Whippoorwill or Oasis Park would have the greatest potential. Chairman Towne advised that MOLA already had a seed bank plan. He also complimented Jay Womack on a great presentation.

E. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY APPEAR BEFORE THE COMMITTEE FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION TO THE VILLAGE BOARD.

None.

F. ADJOURNMENT

With no further items discussed, it was moved by Member Armstrong to adjourn the meeting at 6:39p.m., seconded by Chairman Towne. The motion was carried.

Colleen Liberacki, Deputy Clerk

This document is subject to correction as noted on next meeting's minutes.