

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN  
PARK COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2014

PRESENT: Commissioners: Aronoff, Banas, Jaramillo, Stephens, Wilson  
Staff: Parks and Recreation Director LuAnn Maisner; Parks and Recreation Administrative Assistant II Robin Faust

ABSENT: None

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

Chair Wilson called the regular meeting to order at 7:09 pm.

**2. Roll Call**

Chair Wilson called roll and the following members were present: Teri Banas, Marilyn Aronoff, Melanie Jaramillo, Mark Stephens, Todd Wilson

**3. Approval of Agenda**

COMMISSIONER ARONOFF MOVED, COMMISSIONER STEPHENS SECONDED, TO APPROVE THE MEETING AGENDA AS PRESENTED. Voice vote. Motion passed.

**4. Public Comment**

Vance Kincaid voiced support for the Wonch Park pavilion project and the current pathway project that is underway. He also voiced support for a new canoe landing utilizing existing culverts and concrete in river. He has spoken in support of this project with Director Maisner on numerous occasions.

**5. Public Hearing**

**a. Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund Grant Request for Wonch Park Pavilion**

Chair Wilson declared the public hearing open at 7:11 pm.

Parks and Land Management Coordinator Greenway offered the following presentation:

- The Commission is proposing to submit a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Development Grant for Wonch Park
- The grant request includes the construction of a new pavilion to replace an existing one built in 1972, planting of four (4) shade trees, electricity, water, two universally accessible grills and three handicapped accessible picnic tables

- The estimated project cost is \$250,000 with a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) fund request of 75% (\$187,500) and a local match from the General Fund of 25% (\$62,500)
- Plans for the pavilion are conceptual; construction drawings and details will be developed if/when the grant is awarded; necessary permits will be obtained; will address elements of nature and maintaining the current water flow rate; this improvement was requested in a recent survey; can function as an outdoor classroom for Project Fish and the Grand Learning Network groups who currently use the site; this pavilion is one of the highly rented facilities; in an effort to improve river access, staff is working with adjoining communities to develop a "Water Trail Master Plan" between Williamston and Lansing that identifies existing and proposed infrastructure and amenities to promote greater recreational use of the Red Cedar.
- The grants are submitted online and are due by April 1
- Grant results will be announced in December 2014, funds could be available for construction in 2015.

Parks and Land Management Coordinator Greenway read the following communications into the record:

- Letter of support from Willis Bennett, Director, Ingham County Parks and Recreation Department
- Letter of support from Brian G. Dale, Chairperson, Meridian Township Downtown Development Authority
- Letter of support from Marsha Madle, Chairperson, Meridian Township Economic Development Corporation
- Letter of support from Jay Hanks, President, Lansing Oar and Paddle Club
- Letter voicing concerns about land area misuse; construction in the floodplain and potential affect to water flow rate; and the possibility of attraction of large, loud groups which could affect adjacent neighbors
- Letter of support from Jeff Potter, resident and avid paddler

Public Comment:

Mike Swartz, President, Indian Hills Homeowners Association, voiced support for improvements to Wonch Park and support a new pavilion but is concerned about the potential for additional flooding with the construction of a paved pathway and new pavilion, and about the potential for loud evening programs. He has invited Director Maisner to their next meeting to talk about parks. He feels his neighbors will support the improvements.

Vance Kincaid, Okemos, voiced concern about the current loss of trees in the park. Currently when the police stop to lock the gate, their headlights shine across the parking lot into his windows. He is concerned about loud, noisy programs if allowed during the evening hours. He also suggested working with the Ingham County Drain Commissioner's Office to make sure any potential impact is addressed concerning water flow and erosion. He

suggested, as a future Eagle Scout project, to use the concrete currently in the river to construct a canoe launch. He also suggested the connection of Mt. Hope Road over to Marsh Road be explored to help alleviate traffic on Okemos Road and knows it will required federal funding.

#### Commissioners Comments:

Commissioner Banas asked how much parking is needed for canoe launch areas. She believes Ferguson Park canoe launch is in need of renovating and a new canoe launch is being constructed adjacent to the Harris Nature Center as part of the bridge reconstruction project. When asked about using permeable surface, Director Maisner replied the installation costs are higher because additional subsurface materials are required, the pathway will required on-going maintenance (vacuuming) and studies have shown that permeable pavement is more efficient when installed in larger areas like parking lots, but staff can research it. When asked if the asphalt loop trail or pavilion would impede water flow, Director Maisner replied it is constructed to not impede water flow as the cut and fill amounts are equal.

Commissioner Stephens suggested the use of plantings to absorb water and address any potential drainage issues. Commissioner Banas suggested planting Willow trees to help block lights and noise. She stated all Township parks are open dawn to dusk. Director Maisner stated during the Wonch Park Master Plan process, it was mentioned one of the future activities could include musicians at lunch time in the proposed plaza area.

Commissioner Aronoff reported this is one of the highest used pavilions and does not recall there being any problems with loud events at the site. She has received many requests for improvements to this park and has listened to the concerns and appreciates feedback from the residents.

Chair Wilson asked about need for electricity at the pavilion. Director Maisner stated the current pavilion does not have electricity, it is continually asked for and electricity is available at all of our other pavilions. Chair Wilson stated there is a permeable walkway at MSU and the general consensus is it is hard to maintain and was costly to install and since the area is restrictive, it may be hard to access to accomplish the installation in Wonch Park. The Township has had great success partnering with the Ingham County Drain Commission on recent projects and will continue that relationship with this project.

Chair Wilson closed the public hearing at 7:53 pm.

## **6. Commissioner Reports and Comments**

Commissioner Aronoff expressed her appreciation of the Winter Farmers Market inside the Meridian Mall and feels it is a positive for the Township,.

**7. Approval of Minutes**

- a. February 11, 2014 Work Session Meeting Minutes – no change
- b. February 11, 2014 Regular Meeting Minutes – page 6, last paragraph, replace the word “research” with “supporting documents”

COMMISSIONER STEPHENS MOVED, COMMISSIONER BANAS SECONDED, TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 11, 2014 WORK SESSION MINUTES AS PRESENTED AND THE FEBRUARY 11, 2014 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. Voice vote. Motion passed.

**8. Communications**

**A. Items to/from the Public**

1. To: Michigan Recreation and Park Association, RE: Kelly Colflesh to receive MRPA Community Service Award at ceremony on March 19

**B. Commission Information**

1. March Calendar of Events for Parks & Recreation
2. Parks & Recreation Department Monthly Report – February
3. Towne Courier: **Feb 9:** Meridian Ice Fishing Derby set for Feb 15; Winter Farmers Market; **Feb 16:** Vulture program at HNC March 7; \$6M park revamp plan envisioned
4. Kids' World News – February 14 issues; Meridian Township Parks & Recreation Family Winter Sports Weekend
5. Lansing State Journal: **Feb 15:** Investing in Parks; **Feb 16:** Kids get chance to try their hand at ice fishing;
6. LSJ Website: **Feb 15:** Investing in Parks; **Feb 17:** Meridian Township plans \$6M overhaul of parks; Lansing-area kids try their hand at ice fishing
7. OkemosToday.com: **Feb 28:** Park Commission pushes for new millage
8. Okemos Life Magazine: February issue

**C. Staff Inquiries/Response**

Commissioner Stephens stated Kelly Colflesh, Township resident, has received the Michigan Parks and Recreation Association Community Service Award. Kelly loves to fish and shares his passion with others by volunteering at all youth fishing events, provides stewardship to the pond in the Historical Village and maintains the storage box with fishing poles and tackle boxes for community use.

COMMISSIONER BANAS MOVED, COMMISSIONER ARONOFF SECONDED, TO ACCEPT AND PLACE THE ITEMS OF COMMUNICATION ON FILE. Voice vote. Motion passed.

**9. Director's Report**

- **Family Fun Guide:** Is set for delivery the week of March 17 that promotes activities through December 31, 2014. This will be an annual publication with announcements throughout the year through our Activenet registration program and social media and direct email. The front cover photo for this edition was provided by Jeff Potter. The guide is also available on the township website.

- **New Facebook page** – [www.facebook.com/MeridianTwpParksRec](http://www.facebook.com/MeridianTwpParksRec) - please log on and be a friend to receive up-to-date information on the events and activities happening in the Township
- **Van Atta Road Bridge Replacement:** Van Atta Road is closed through June to replace the bridge. Access the Harris Nature Center from the south via Jolly Road. A new canoe landing will be constructed by the ICRD near the existing fire pit area later this summer.
- **Legg Park:** staff is working on the driveway paving project for the site
- **Newton Road Park:** staff is working with Engineering and Planning Departments on construction of the parking lot
- **Wonch Park:** staff is working with the Engineering Department on the construction of the new paved loop trail in the Park as part of the new pedestrian bridge project on Okemos Road
- **Red Cedar River Water Trail:** staff is working with neighboring communities to establish a “water trail” along the Red Cedar River. This is a fantastic natural resource and we want to offering amenities along the route
- **Village Pond Project:** staff is working with the Meridian Garden Club to develop a monarch butterfly waystation garden on the shoreline of the pond in the Village. It will help with erosion while planting a buffer zone at water’s edge, provide a natural filtration system for water runoff, and help deter geese We are working with school groups on the planting project
- **New programs** at Harris Nature Center this month include: Introduction to Nordic Walking and Maple Moon Campfire at the Harris Nature Center on Saturday, March 22
- **Friends of Historic Meridian Lecture Series** starts Sunday, March 23 at 3 pm in the Village Chapel and this series will continue to meet in the Village Chapel due to renovations at the Service Center
- **Maps:** staff is working on Township maps depicting natural and paved trails. Eventually will be an interactive app for smart phones.
- February 15 – **Ice Fishing Derby** had 75 participants and **Family Moonlight Sledding** had 200 participants
- March 15 and April 5 & 19: **Farmers’ Market** at Meridian Mall
- February 28 was deadline for our **Snowman/Snow Sculpture Contest** and winners are:
  - Most Meridian Spirit: “**Frosty**”, builders are Jack, Thomas and Adam Lock
  - Most Original Sculpture: “**Club Penguin Igloo**”, builders are Eran, Jen, Eric and Emma Andrecheck
  - Most Original Snowman: “**Sharon’s Supersorous**” by Sharon Russell
- **Service Center Renovations:** Due to the recent closing of the Central Fire Station, the Fire Department personnel will be operating from the Service Center lunch room. Once the new fire station is built, the rooms that are being constructed now will provide additional office space for our department.
- I have recently been appointed to the MRPA Foundation Board of Directors

**10. Unfinished Business**

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

**11. New Business**

PUBLIC COMMENT

**a. Wonch Park MNRTF Grant Resolution**

Director Maisner stated a public hearing was held on the grant application earlier in the meeting and a resolution has been prepared for consideration.

Commissioner Banas stated we need to invest in our community and we want to get more people out into our parks. There is a need for a new pavilion for this site.

The following resolution was offered Commissioner Banas and supported by Chair Wilson.

WHEREAS, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources accepts grant requests from local units of government to assist in the development of recreation properties; and

WHEREAS, it is possible to have up to 75% of the total project cost funded through this grant program; and

WHEREAS, the Park Commission is interested in the continued improvement of Meridian Township's parks and recreation system; and

WHEREAS, Meridian Township has prepared a grant application for submission to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Program for an estimated \$250,000 of improvements to Wonch Park that includes a picnic shelter and associated amenities that will provide recreation opportunities and accessibility for visitors of all abilities; and

WHEREAS, Meridian Township has been working in cooperation with adjoining communities to improve accessibility and associated features to the Red Cedar River water trail; and

WHEREAS, the grant request is outlined and justified in the 2011-2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan adopted by the Meridian Township Board and Park Commission, and is on file with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources; and

WHEREAS, this grant request was reviewed by the Park Commission at their meetings on February 4 and February 11 and during the public hearing on March 11, 2014.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PARK COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN, INGHAM COUNTY, MICHIGAN, as follows:

To support submission of a grant application to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Program in the amount of \$250,000 for improvements to Wonch Park, including a new pavilion, water, electricity, 4 deciduous trees, 2 universally accessible grills, and 3 handicapped accessible picnic tables, and provide a local 25% match (\$62,500) funded by the Meridian Township General Fund.

ADOPTED:

YEAS: Mark Stephens, Marilyn Aronoff, Teri Banas, Todd Wilson, Melanie Jaramillo

NAYS: None

The resolution passed unanimously.

**b. Harris Nature Center Foundation Nature Exploration Area**

The Harris Nature Center Foundation is in the process of raising funds for the proposed Youth Nature Exploration Area. They are working on submitting grant applications to the Dart Foundation and Jackson National Life Foundation and have requested resolutions of support for each grant. This nature exploration area will offer unique opportunities for children to explore nature elements including a spider web to climb on, tree house, walkways, fossil dig experience, etc. The Foundation has been fundraising and is now in the position to seek grants to start with Phase I including the log climbing area, the fossil dig area and development of a gravel trail with an estimated cost of \$20,000. The Foundation is asking the Park Commission to commit up to \$8,000 of cash and/or in-kind services for the entire project. Park Millage funds for this project will be budgeted from the Harris Nature Center fund balance.

The Commissioners asked to receive reports from the HNC Foundation progress on their fund raising efforts. Staff stated that the project will go through site plan review before construction can begin.

**A. Resolution of Support of Grant Submission to Jackson National Life Foundation**

The following resolution was offered by Chair Wilson and supported by Commissioner Banas:

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center was founded in 1997 to provide a connection with nature for adults and children throughout the Township through programming, special events and casual visits; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation was established in 2006 to raise funds to support operations and capital improvements for the Harris Nature Center; and

WHEREAS, a plan has been developed to create an environmental exploration area for youth to play in the out-of-doors at the Harris Nature Center utilizing many natural elements from nature; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation has been fundraising to support construction of this new play area through silent auctions, annual giving programs and seeking grants from other organizations, and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation has prepared a grant application for submission to the Jackson National Life Foundation for construction of phase I of the Youth Nature Exploration Area at the Harris Nature Center which will provide environmental education through play opportunities for all visitors with an estimated project cost of \$25,000; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation is requesting \$5,000 from the Jackson National Life Foundation to assist with funding; and

WHEREAS, the Youth Nature Exploration Area is outlined and justified in the 2010-2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan adopted by the Meridian Township Board and Park Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Meridian Township Park Commission is committing up to \$8,000 of cash and/or in-kind service toward the entire project from the Park Millage Fund.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PARK COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN, INGHAM COUNTY, MICHIGAN, as follows:

Move to support submission of a grant application by the Harris Nature Center Foundation to the Jackson National Life Foundation for construction of a nature exploration area at the Harris Nature Center with an estimated project cost of \$25,000, and committing up to \$8,000 in cash and/or in-kind service from the Township's Park Millage Fund to support this project.

ADOPTED:

YEAS: Mark Stephens, Marilyn Aronoff, Teri Banas, Todd Wilson, Melanie Jaramillo

NAYS: None

The resolution passed.

## **B. Resolution of Support of Grant Submission to Dart Foundation**

The following resolution was offered by Chair Wilson and supported by Commissioner Banas:

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center was founded in 1997 to provide a connection with nature for adults and children throughout the Township through programming, special events and casual visits; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation was established in 2006 to raise funds to support operations and capital improvements for the Harris Nature Center; and

WHEREAS, a plan has been developed to create an environmental exploration area for youth to play in the out-of-doors at the Harris Nature Center utilizing many natural elements from nature; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation has been fundraising to support construction of this new play area through silent auctions, annual giving programs and seeking grants from other organizations, and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation has prepared a grant application for submission to the Dart Foundation for construction of phase I of the Youth Nature Exploration Area at the Harris Nature Center which will provide environmental education through play opportunities for all visitors with an estimated project cost of \$25,000; and

WHEREAS, the Harris Nature Center Foundation is requesting \$5,000 from the Dart Foundation to assist with funding; and

WHEREAS, the Youth Nature Exploration Area is outlined and justified in the 2010-2015 Parks and Recreation Master Plan adopted by the Meridian Township Board and Park Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Meridian Township Park Commission is committing up to \$8,000 of cash and/or in-kind service toward the entire project from the Park Millage Fund.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PARK COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN, INGHAM COUNTY, MICHIGAN, as follows:

Move to support submission of a grant application by the Harris Nature Center Foundation to the Dart Foundation for construction of a nature exploration area at the Harris Nature Center with an estimated project cost of \$25,000, and committing up to \$8,000 in

cash and/or in-kind service from the Township's Park Millage Fund to support this project.

ADOPTED:

YEAS: Melanie Jaramillo, Todd Wilson, Teri Banas, Marilyn Aronoff, Mark Stephens

NAYS: None

The resolution passed.

**12. Other Business**

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

**13. Discussion Items**

PUBLIC COMMENT

**a. Park Millage Ballot Proposal**

Commissioner Banas stated in preparation for the August 5<sup>th</sup> ballot proposal, the Commission will be asking for the public to support a new park millage of 2/3s of a mill to support for parks projects and maintenance. The new millage proposal will replace the current 1/3 of a mill which expires in 2016. If the new millage proposal passes this year, the Township will collect one mill for two years and in 2016, the park millage would reduce to 2/3 of a mill and run for ten years. At this point, a millage ballot committee has been formed by Park Commissioners Banas, Aronoff and Stephens with Trustee Wilson to organize communication materials and outreach to residents, neighborhood and civic groups. Last spring, the Township Board unanimously supported the Commission's request to place the increased millage proposal on the 2014 August ballot. The committee has been officially organized and is called the "Friends of Meridian Township Parks", which is separate from the Park Commission, and it can now solicit donations to spend on the ballot initiative. The Friends of Meridian Township Parks have enlisted people to serve on the community wide support team and if anyone is interested in assisting with this initiative, please contact us, everyone is welcome. Individuals are needed to assist with outreach into the community, to help share the word. In the future, the community will see flyers and other forms of communication. We are in the process of creating a website to assist with this endeavor. Our theme is to continue the high level quality of life for Meridian Township citizens and build a better future for our children. The Commission has received many communications and survey results where the citizens have stated they would support a millage. Commissioner Banas thanked Commissioners Stephens and Aronoff and Trustee Wilson for the many hours to prepare for this millage request.

Commissioner Stephens invited the public and anyone interested in assisting with the ballot campaign to attend the next meeting this Thursday at Schuler's Café. The Friends of Meridian Township Parks now have a bank account and can accept donations to help fund this campaign initiative.

Commissioner Aronoff stated if you cannot attend this week, please contact us or attend future meeting. We would be available to attend neighborhood and civic group meetings.

Chair Wilson stated he fully supports this initiative because in order to improve what the Township and the Park System has to offer, funding is crucial to improve the general quality of life for the residents. Due to economic pressures all over the State and County, it has been challenging with the current millage to maintain our facility at a level the residents have come to expect. The Commission and staff have been very mindful of what we have and if the millage proposal passes, it will address improvement needs and allow for development and support of future projects.

Commissioner Stephens stated the Commission will continue to seek grants and other funding to assist with project developments such as the exploration area for the Harris Nature Center. Our park acreage has tripled since the current millage was passed and funding has not increased. This new millage will allow us to enhance what we have but also allow us to do more. The Commission spends funds wisely.

When asked how many acres out of our 900 acres has been donated, Director Maisner replied she is not sure but only 200 acres of all the parkland is developed currently. For many years, the Park Commission was the only entity who could receive donated land. Chair Wilson stated that although some of the land was donated, the Commission is responsible for it and in order to improve and offer outdoor experiences, funds are necessary. Director Maisner stated currently residents are paying approximately \$33/year (from a home with a taxable value at \$100,000) and under the new proposal the millage amount would increase to approximately \$67/year. History shows the Commission has been very good stewards of parks and the current collection of millage dollars is covering operations.

Commissioner Banas stated under the current millage, the Commission has not been able to develop a major project during the last ten years. We were finally able to construct a small bathroom project with a grant. We cannot continue to operate under the current 1/3 of a mill and continue to offer the kind of services that are expected by our residents. Going from 1/3 to 2/3 of a mill, it will make a significant difference in maintenance and development of new projects.

#### **14. Final Comments**

None

**15. Announcements**

- a. Next Regular Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 8, 2014 Town Hall
- b. Farmers' Market – J C Penney Corridor of Meridian Mall, Saturday, March 15 and April 5 & 19 from 10 am-2 pm
- c. Van Atta Road Closed from Grand River south to bridge until June; access to Harris Nature Center from Jolly Road

**16. Public Remarks**

None

**17. Closed Session**

None

**18. Adjournment**

COMMISSIONER STEPHENS MOVED, COMMISSIONER ARONOFF  
SECONDED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 pm.