

PENINSULA TOWNSHIP PARKS COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

August 25, 2021

6:00 pm

Township Hall

MINUTES

Corrections made by Lola Jackson and Becky Chown on September 23, 2021

1. **Call to Order** by Skurski at 6:00 p.m.
2. **Pledge**
3. **Roll Call** Zebell, Murphy, Milliken, Shanafelt, Dahl, Karczewski, Skurski
4. **Approve Agenda**
Karczewski moved to approve the agenda, second by Milliken Passed Unan
5. **Brief Citizens Comments-for items not on the agenda** None
6. **Conflict of Interest** None
7. **Consent Agenda:** any member of the board, staff, or the public may ask that any item on the consent agenda be removed and placed elsewhere on the agenda for full discussion.
 - A. Minutes from July 28, 2021
 - B. Correspondence
 - a. Bill Stott-Trail Clearing
 - b. Armen Shanafelt-Hammocks in the Ordinance
 - c. Mary Beth Milliken-Archie Park Update
 - d. Dave Murphy-Parks Impact on Water Quality**Karczewski moved to approve the consent agenda, second by Murphy Passed Unan**
8. **Business**
 - A. Rescheduled Park Planning Work Session with LIAA (Matt Cowall & Barry Hicks)
Cowall: in searching for comparable metrics within the state and adjoining communities, the township is unique. Peninsula Township rents 600 acres comprising old mission state park from the DNR. Most locations of similar size populations do not have 600 acres under management and this skews the data. You are not going to spend half a million dollars to take care of old mission state park.
Shanafelt: I understand the acres to population ratio and should a park this size need half a million dollars given the context and usage?
Cowall: a recreation center on two acres may need more dollars than 600 acres with few structures. We are looking for a tidy formula to give us a good benchmark of what to spend and none quite fits here. If asking for the public to fund the parks, it is important not to over ask, and have clear metrics.
Karczewski: one needs to take into account old mission park has 100,000 visitors in a concentrated season. This park gets trampled. This is different than a typical park.

Hicks: we separated the 5 acres with the lighthouse, which needs its own budget and old mission state park.

Cowall: \$100,000 appears to be the number to start with. [At the next meeting, Township Deputy Treasurer Marge Achorn suggested the number is closer to \$250,000.] The cell tower fund does not appear to go entirely to parks, so you are looking at about a \$14,000 deficit year-to-year. Parks do not usually run in the black, which is not what parks do.

Murphy: the lighthouse revenues are not staying within the park system **as a whole; they stay with the lighthouse and are used for lighthouse expenses and improvements.**

Cowall: this committee makes recommendations to the town board, which holds the purse strings and ultimately makes the decisions. Tonight we are looking to get your input on the various parks, both operationally as separated out from the aspirational, capital projects. How are you operating?

Zebell: the maintenance person has devoted most of his time to cemetery burials. Basic items such as getting a missing basketball net installed are not getting done. Some trash pickups are occurring, but the frequency of people at Ridgeway results in overflowing trash cans. More maintenance is required.

Karczewski: we can't seem to get anything done. This is a small township and we are 7 people. Why is there not some leadership and person on the ground making sure these basic tasks are conducted rather than tying us up once a month to talk about basketball hoops and such over and over? Why do we need to make recommendations for ongoing, routine maintenance? Permission is required for too many basic items that should just be standard. We do not feel effective as a board.

Skurski: there are two issues. There is not enough operating budget and the budget amount is 35-45% less than last year. There is more demand than capacity and covid has increased demand by at least 25%. The trash cans overflow faster, the dog waste increases, and simple, routine items go undone. There is a list, but the items remain month after month. Simply put, we need more maintenance help. If you look at the maintenance contract, we are supposed to get 80% of his time and now only receive about 40%. He is being pulled in other directions, especially the cemetery work. We did break off the snowplowing work with a different company and we may need to do more of this. Perhaps we get more entities to do the lawn moving, trash pickups, and basic tasks and Wilkinson becomes more of a specialist for us.

Dahl: there is an increase in camping and abusing the parks. The sheriff is busy handling other issues such as traffic and cannot get out there. A park ranger is needed to be the point person.

Karczewski: Yes, we are missing opportunities for grants and a park ranger position would probably pay for itself.

Murphy: there has been talk about putting restrooms into Pelizzari. The proximity of traffic coming up the peninsula would result in massive roadside use of a bathroom located there. I am not in favor of installing restrooms there unless we have the ongoing operational capacity to service these types of facilities.

Skurski: we are good at issue identification and can come up with 10 possible solutions. The issue is more structural and not running to the solution too quickly. A reallocation of resources can help. Getting another deputy can help. The seasonality of maintenance needs to be addressed.

The time to put wood chips on the ground or fix fences is before the summer season, not during it. The best lines of communication have been through the supervisor and the clerk.

Cowall: there appears to be no staff support from the township at this time.

Karczewski: the planner helped us with the rec plan. There have been two planners in 5 years and currently the township is without a planner. Continuity is lacking.

Murphy: **Even so**, there is a lot of benefit to this committee. With the parks being on the agenda for each town board meeting, there are more questions and interest. There is still room to collaborate.

Cowall: one stabilizing factor becomes having continuity with staff. Sometimes the human capacity can be as important as the funding dollars.

Zebell: is it unreasonable if wood chips are needed that maintenance takes care of this?

Cowall: these are routine expenses that are predictable. If wood chips are needed every year around the playground equipment, this is part of routine maintenance. If this expense is not used every year then the money goes into next year's budget. There is usually a pat on the back for only spending what is needed. Gravel replacement might be another routine, annual expense. In your case, there is a parks back log of maintenance requiring attention.

Shanafelt: so are you saying it is a best practice for parks committees such as ours work with a dedicated staff within the municipal government with a certain amount of hours allotted to park issues.

Cowell: without some sort of government staff effort in between your meetings, you will continue to see the same 6 issues on the punch list month after month. You are all volunteers and field those calls and do yeomen's work and yet lack human capacity from township staffing.

Dahl: a fireman could potentially wear two hats and work out of the fire station 3, but this might be against union rules. There are people who live near the parks who want these parks run well. They could take ownership as friends of Bowers Harbor or friends of the lighthouse and coordinate with the ranger.

Cowell: most townships of similar size have a general person, who often is the sexton, taking care of routine maintenance. Garfield township is larger and just this past year hired a part time enforcer, who also does maintenance. Garfield got away without hiring someone even as they continued to add parkland for 10-15 years. The township had a planner, deputy planner, and zoning. The deputy planner had an interest in parks and did this for a while.

Karczewski: the township is talking about merging planning and zoning and this would only make it harder for us to get anything done.

Murphy: we have a history here of going to the breaking point, with so much growth and little support. Old mission has become the playground for people from Traverse City. We actually had a staff person in 2010 and it just did not work. I have spent 15 hours at Pelizzari this month alone and I am sure others are spending equal time with their parks as well. Where is the tipping point?

Shanafelt: are we at a tipping point where we are so broken or do we have a chance to get ahead of this?

Dahl: my son has put up signs in the lighthouse park; I am out cutting trees, and doing trail maintenance. We do most everything ourselves.

Murphy: are we giving you enough information?

Cowell: you are confirming what we have found. Maintenance is spread too thin, there is no staff person within the township, and there is a general lack of human and financial capacity. If you are spending \$100,000 per year and only getting 50% of what is required, then do you need \$200,000? This is not so much acreage versus population. The current structure probably could not even manage a group of volunteers.

Skurski: if we go out, raise money, and find there is a lack of human capacity from the township board, trustees, and a staff person, then this is a tragedy.

The parks committee and Cowell discussed the high priority projects list and an operational budget (see meeting packet on website).

Skurski: creation of a template for what our parks needs to look like can begin with a list such as parking, fencing, bathrooms, and signage. Each of the parks has evolved to attract different types of users. The issue is to make sure they are all inclusive. The operational costs need to cover the basics.

Karczewski: there needs to be a contingency plan built in for unexpected expenses such as the \$4,000 repair to the pickle ball courts.

Murphy: in the citizen survey, the creation of non-motorized activities scored high on the list. Not sure if this belongs with parks or planning. Tart might be able to help conceptually, but resources are spread thin.

Cowell: trails are like the road commission; if you build it, you need to have the funds to maintain the trail into the future. In the next meeting, we will present a potential operating budget.

Karczewski: are we confident the money spent from our budget for maintenance is actually being used for the parks? There is no accountability.

Cowell: Who keeps track of the work?

Skurski: no one. So the question is how do we know if we are getting the hours allocated to us and how do you track expenses for work outside the scope of the contract for maintenance?

Dahl: there is a veterans' monument near the lighthouse where some stones are falling off the triangle base and you need a professional stone mason. I was going to approach some of the veterans' groups in the area to raise some money for the repair. This needs to go on the project list.

Cowell: the goal is to come up with an operational dollar amount that is explainable when making requests whether it is for the town board, grants, or millage. The important pieces are maintenance capacity and staff capacity.

Murphy: I have been attending the town board meetings and what message needs to be conveyed at this time.

Cowell: there are missing dollars for investment in the parks. There cannot be an expectation that all the needed work can be done by volunteers alone. Michigan is a place where people come for the outdoors and small, local places are proud of their parks. There is outside grant money for parks from the state. However, you need the administrative capacity to go after those dollars. We are approaching the time when a decision needs to be made. As the parks decline, user complaints increase, infrastructure deteriorates and one way or the other, these issues need to be addressed.

B. Maintenance Update (Wilkinson) Wilkinson absent.

C. PNA: Tree Proposal & 4-wheel vehicle usage (Murphy)

Murphy: the 4-wheel vehicle users have been tracked down using an email blast and 4 hours of my time. Some fencing should take care of this access point. The large oak just off Center Road is on Pelizzari land. This is the largest tree in the park. In the last storm a large limb came down and there now is a large wound. The tree had been treated for oak wilt. It will cost \$1,500.

A discussion ensued over whether to spend the money to save that particular tree.

**Murphy moved to make the extensive repair of the oak tree and will do some work himself to help bring down the cost and not to spend more than \$1,500. Second by Shanafelt. Roll call vote: Yes-Shanafelt, Dahl, Skurski, Zebell, Murphy, Milliken Passed
No-Karczewski**

D. Parks Rep for next Town Board Meeting & Feedback from last report
Murphy will attend the next town board meeting on September 14, 2021 and request the town board vote on specific recommendations from the parks committee. These line items ideally would appear on the agenda. Milliken wants to know who has the \$5,000 check [**\$4,500 for damages and \$500 for attorney fees**] the township received from the Archie Park settlement. The money will go to repair the hillside damage done at Archie.

9. Citizen Comments

Nancy Heller 3091 Bluewater Rd.

One cannot just hand over a list of requests such as for playground equipment without having specific and detailed information. Regarding the dog park, Peninsula Township lands are contaminated with arsenic. A dog digging in the dirt presents a safety issue for the dog. When this came up several years ago, I could not get a veterinarian to come out even for a discussion. Restrooms are only as clean as the last person who used them. Some of the expectations of maintenance personal are unrealistic. Regarding budgeting, you are being asked to take on more and more responsibility, but there is no increase in the budget to get items done. Why are we not approaching the entities that fought and fought to get the ball field or the pickle ball courts and ask them to help sustain them and work together? This is a two-way expense. Be sure to clarify whether if the funds are coming from the lighthouse tower tour or the cell tower fund. I want to thank you for your work; I know I have been critical at times and I do not mean to be. We seem to be a community until dollars become involved. We have dropped the ball on the spending for our parks. The township is currently experiencing the winery lawsuit and this takes time and money away from the community. Make sure when you have project, that they are cleared with the zoning department.

Susie Shipman 14735 Shipman Rd.

The prior maintenance person tried to do all of the work himself as well as some park policing and it was too much. I just wanted to place some historical context here.

10. Board Comments

Karczewski and Skurski will investigate money spent on maintenance.

11. Adjournment Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting with a second by Milliken. **Passed Unan**
Adjourned at 8:28 p.m.