

6:00 p.m., Monday
April 4, 2022

MANISTEE BOARD OF COMMISSIONER'S
415 Third St.
Manistee, Michigan

RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

The Recreation Commission is operating remotely and electronically by Zoom under PA 254 of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

❖ Call to Order and Roll Call.

❖ Ms. Margaret Batzer, Commission Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Recreation Commission Members Present: Wayne Beldo, Margaret Batzer, Erin Secord, Linda Cudney, Devin Wegner, Gary Schwaiger, Robert Schulke, and Bryan Dunlop

Recreation Commission Members Absent: Eleanor DeYoung

Others: Douglas Barry - Michigan DNR, Mike Szokola – Manistee County Planning Department

❖ Approval of the Agenda

Dr. Dunlop moved, seconded by Ms. Cudney to approve the April 4, 2022 agenda as presented.

Voting yes: Ms. Batzer, Ms. Secord, Ms. Cudney, Ms. Wegner, Mr. Schwaiger, Mr. Schulke, and Dr. Dunlop

❖ Approval of the Minutes

Dr. Dunlop moved, seconded by Mr. Schwaiger to approve the March 7, 2022 minutes as amended.

Voting yes: Ms. Batzer, Ms. Secord, Ms. Cudney, Ms. Wegner, Mr. Schwaiger, Mr. Schulke, and Dr. Dunlop

❖ Public Comment

- None.

❖ Trail Champions

- Doug Barry shared an update from Rob Carson that the EDC grant has been verbally approved pending additional information. They need some formalized paperwork submitted from the DNR.
- The DNR trust fund grant application to fund the construction of a bridge over Bear Creek has been submitted. Doug addressed the fact that it has been asked why apply for this trust fund grant when the bridge is included in the EDC grant, the answer is



that the trust fund proceeds could be used as match dollars for the EDC grant. This would save \$130,000 of Community Foundation dollars that could be used for other purposes.

- Dr. Dunlop asked Doug who wrote the trust fund grant? Doug Barry replied that his wife Lara Treemore-Spears donated her time and expertise this year. Lara helped the snowbirds apply for this grant two years ago and was contracted for \$12/ hour by the Benzie-Manistee Snowbirds
- Ms. Batzer asked if there was an administrative side to this trust fund grant? Doug Barry replied that there may be. Lara Treemore-Spears has worked on this in the past; however, he is not sure if she will be eligible or available this round.

❖ Staff Updates

- Mike Szokola provided a staff update. The Grant Writer position has been posted.
- Mr. Schwaiger asked if the position was full-time or part-time. Ms. Batzer replied that is a contracted position.
- Mike Szokola added that one of the downsides to a contracted position that should be noted is that once a grant is awarded, the administrative responsibilities fall to County department heads or the associated board or commission unless it is specifically written in the contract that the Grant Writer will carry out these duties. This could be problematic as the County department heads have limited capacity.
- Mr. Beldo shared his opinion that the Grant Writer position will not be as beneficial in a contract format. He hopes that if the County identifies a qualified individual, a permanent position will be offered.
- Mike Szokola made the comment that all Recreation Commission members should be aware of and share during any conversations about recreational development in the county that trust fund grants can be tapped to maximize the benefit for projects. Anyone who has a recreational project plan should be directed to the County Planning Department.
- Ms. Batzer commented that she is in agreement with Mr. Beldo regarding the contract basis of the Grant Writer position. However, she wanted to add that at this time, a contract basis was the only way the position could be approved by the County Board. Mr. Beldo responded by expressing his frustration with missed opportunities for funds that would benefit the County. He added that we should continue to push the message.
- Dr. Dunlop asked who was in charge of posting the position, interviewing, and hiring. Mike Szokola replied that the County Human Resources department would handle this. He added that it would be nice if Parks and Recreation could be part of the process as there will be work in this area right away. Mike Szokola then highlighted a candidate out of Ludington and emphasized the need for an experienced grant writer.
- Ms. Batzer recommended a Q&A piece with the newspaper involving a few members of the Recreation Commission and Mike Szokola.
- Doug Barry asked who will prioritize what grants are sought after by this new contracted Grant Writer, once hired? Mike Szokola replied that the position will be quite robust and will require administrative support from other departments, this will



create an extra burden on staff and will have to be considered as part of the grant selection process. He added that the County Board will likely be involved in the grant selection process.

- Ms. Cudney commented that one of our County Commissioner's was at a MTA meeting and they made a comment that there are plenty of funds available and the contracted grant writer will help Manistee County access it. Mr. Beldo added that there is plenty of "low-hanging fruit" to go after. Mike Szokola replied with examples from other cities including splash parks and tree inventory. These are projects that can fall to the Planning department when truly they should be contracted out. He finished by adding that sometimes the "Low-hanging fruit" can be labor intensive.
- Ms. Batzer returned to the plan for a newspaper article. She challenged the commission to come up with some FAQ's to discuss at the next meeting. Mike Szokola offered to help create some bullet points. Mr. Beldo made the suggestion that it could be an ongoing feature.

❖ Old Business

- None

❖ New Business

- Ms. Batzer spoke with Ed Hoogterp of the Benzie County Parks and Recreation Commission. They are exploring a feasibility study to determine if the Benzie County should hire a Parks & Recreation Manager and how they would define the position and its responsibilities. Ed had shared this with Rob Carson who then directed him to engage Manistee County about the possibility for a shared position between the two counties. Benzie and Manistee counties share many cooperative positions currently and the foundation for sharing position exists. Benzie County has secured \$15,000 from their board as well as another potential \$5,000 from MSU. The feasibility study would consider if there is a need for the position and what it would look like. Ms. Batzer added that for this cooperative position perhaps we could secure a grant to fund this position, at least for Manistee County's portion.
- Mr. Beldo asked if they were asking for a match for the feasibility study? Or the position itself? He also asked if ARPA funds could be used for something like this. Ms. Batzer replied that the County now has a process in place for ARPA funds. There will be two cycles, things that need to be done, and then approximately \$2,000,000 will remain for other projects. These other projects can be submitted for consideration to the County. Then Ms. Batzer and Mr. Beldo considered whether a feasibility study to determine if the position was needed is really warranted, or could simply the right personnel discuss and decide?
- Dr. Dunlop observed that there may be an educational opportunity here that would benefit the Recreation Commission as well as the County regarding the entire feasibility study and grant process. He wondered if an experienced Grant Writer from a county such as Kent County could come and enlighten Manistee and Benzie counties on this process.
- Ms. Batzer commented that when she thinks about the position of a "Parks and



Recreation Manager” and when she thinks of what this commission has accomplished in its infancy, we seem to be cobbling expertise together from multiple sources such as Networks Northwest, Mike Szokola, the DNR, etc. In her mind, all of this expertise should come from a singular position, and she believes it would still be beneficial if it was shared with Benzie County.

- Mike Szokola gave a summary of the conditions for applying for ARPA funds and the various deadlines. He added that sustainability is very important for a favorable application and applying early would be best.
- Mr. Schwaiger asked if we could submit a grant application to fund a grant writer position? Mike Szokola replied yes. He added that we could be denied because we have an active listing that is already funded by the county.
- Ms. Batzer asked if the Recreation Commission would like to formally pursue this position? She added that the County Board is concerned about using ARPA funds to fund a position because the sustainability could then be questioned.
- Doug Barry gave some insight as to the source of need for the Benzie County. Last fall the Benzie County leased a 40-acre parcel from the DNR and have a plan for more developed recreation. He added that Benzie County does not have any developed recreation, but there are a lot of opportunities to develop it by leasing DNR land. The feasibility study could be very useful in this case because they will be working with many additional agencies and Manistee County will get the advantage of that expertise if they decide to be a part of the project.
- Mr. Beldo added that each entity within the county has ideas of what they would like to accomplish but have trouble doing so alone. A centralized position would help these ideas come to fruition.
- Mr. Schwaiger commented that it sounds like Benzie County will focus on how to use the land in their feasibility study whereas Manistee County already has that part figured out. Mike Szokola replied that Manistee County will require a feasibility study for our next steps anyway, even though we already know the land will be used for trails. We still will need a plan/feasibility study as to how we move the trail through the county and to the City of Manistee.
- Ms. Batzer returned to Ed Hoogterp and read the verbiage from his email which stated that they are planning a feasibility study to determine whether it makes sense to create a position of Parks and Recreation Manager for the county and if so, how they would define the position’s responsibility and funding. It is specific to the position. All members of the Manistee County Parks and Recreation Commission agreed that this study would benefit Manistee County and our recreational goals as well.

❖ Other Items

- Ms. Cudney provided an update on the Friends of SMART Trails. The groups met on March 10, 2022, for their second strategic session.
 - They revised their budget
 - Mr. Gribble submit a proposal and the group wishes to amend it somewhat. Specifically, they would prefer a 3-month contract period.



- Rob Carson informed the group that the EDC grant was approved, but with changes needed
- The third strategic meeting will be held April 5, 2022
- Ms. Batzer made a motion to submit a grant to Manistee County for ARPA funds for the purpose of having a feasibility study for a Parks and Recreation Manager or Administrator. Ms. Cudney seconded.

Voting yes: Mr. Beldo, Ms. Batzer, Ms. Secord, Ms. Cudney, Ms. Wegner, Mr. Schwaiger, Mr. Schulke, and Dr. Dunlop

❖ Adjourn

Mr. Beldo moved, seconded by Ms. Secord to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Voting yes: Mr. Beldo, Ms. Batzer, Ms. Secord, Ms. Cudney, Ms. Wegner, Mr. Schwaiger, Mr. Schulke, and Dr. Dunlop

The next meeting will be held May 2, 2022, in the County Commissioner's room at 6 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Secord, Recreation Commission Secretary

Date: April 4, 2022