

MINUTES

Eau Claire County

• Committee on Parks & Forest •

Monday, February 8, 2021

5:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Present: Kevin Stelljes, Joe, Knight, Missy Christopherson, Gary Gibson, Tami Schraufnagel

Others Present: Josh Pedersen – Director, Jody Gindt – Supervisor, Winnie Parker – Administrative Specialist III (Committee Clerk), Kyle Johnson – DNR County Forest Liaison, Don Edberg – Wisconsin Highschool Cycling League

Chair Selljes called the meeting to order at 5pm and confirmed public posting of the meeting.

Verbal roll call was taken by the committee clerk and is noted above under present.

No members of the public were present.

The minutes of January 11, 2021 were not included in the Agenda Packet and therefore will be reviewed at the next regularly scheduled Committee Meeting.

The next meeting date was set for **March 8, 2021, at 5pm** virtually.

A special meeting to discuss the 15 Year Plan was set for **March 1, 2021, at 5pm** virtually.

Don Edberg presented a proposal from the Wisconsin Highschool Cycling League (WHCL) to hold an annual cycling race on the grounds of the Expo Center and Lowes Creek Park to be held September 25 and 26, 2021. This event would close both venues to the public. Edberg explained that WHCL adheres to strict Covid recommendations guided by the CDC and local officials as well as general safety guidelines for events such as this. They are hoping to have a regular season this year with five (5) total events much the same as the one he is proposing at the Expo Center in Eau Claire County.

Last event they had in 2019 through Eau Claire County Parks and Forest included approximately 660 participants and their league has grown 20% since then. Therefore, Edberg expects around 1,000+ participants (especially when you include parents and coaches) at this year's event which will bring in significant revenue for the community at large.

Edberg expects around 200 tents and RV's. In the past they have had events whereby camping was not permitted. They find that parking then becomes an issue especially when you consider all the RV's present. It is WHCL's intent to take care of ALL their own waste including portable restrooms.

Kevin Stelljes emphasized the need for the Parks and Forest Department to strive to "normalize" and unify the handling of all contracts, being consistent with all events reserved, especially with regards to expenses and safety. Therefore, in keeping with other reservations and the fee schedule, Edberg agrees to pay the non-profit fee of \$400 per day and waive the normal \$5 daily admission

but charge \$2 per participating cyclist. Furthermore, the WHCL would also pay the going rate for the 20 campsites on the premises. Camping would therefore be staffed and run by volunteers of the WHCL. Josh Pedersen suggested that WHCL would need to empty refuse once per day and clean the bathroom facilities two times per day.

Tami Schraufnagel moves to approve the WHCL's proposal to rent the Expo Center grounds and the Lowes Creek Park on September 25 and 26, 2021, for the non-profit rental fee to use the grounds including the cost of the 20 campsites and a \$2 per participant fee, pending Covid regulations working with the City-County health department to ensure the safety of all participants as well as working with Josh Pedersen on all the details of the event. Motion passed unanimously.

The Committee discussed the proposal to name a wilderness area to honor Bruce Willet, former Parks and Forest committee member and county board chairman of Eau Claire County. This proposal seems fitting because of all the work Willet did to secure more wilderness area in Eau Claire County. Kevin Stelljes suggests a strip near Beaver Creek, some 250 acres which is hemmed in on all sides by private property and the Eau Claire River with only one access point on County Road K. This area has many characteristics of a natural looking forest which has been untouched for some time because of access issues.

The biggest "glitch" is the snowmobile trail that runs through this area. There was discussion about making the existing snowmobile trail an exception to the County Code. Parking may be a problem as County Road K is a busy corridor and the County Code prohibits parking on wilderness land. Access, in the form of a walking path, could be granted, however, off Road Highway K. The land was thought to not be able to log but Kyle Johnson confirmed that the land was logged once in the 90's and three times in the 80's. Logging may be possible given permission for access from one of the local private property owners. While hunting is allowed on wilderness designated land, it is a concern.

These issues may be more "headaches" than it is worth and perhaps we need to keep searching for another area to honor Bruce Willet. Joe Knight suggested walking path access similar to another spot near Dell's Pond. Kevin Stelljes suggest the Committee keep searching and to bring their ideas to the next meeting. Josh Pedersen mentioned that this would be a great issue the Advisory Committee could research and bring forth their finding to the Committee.

Refund and Reservation Policy was reviewed for the 2021 season. Stated in County Code 16.30.40 Section C an assertion was made to issue a full refund if there was a health declaration handed down by the federal, state, or local government. It is expected that the declaration be extended through April 15. There is a six (6) step process involved in processing these refunds which accounts for additional man hours. Kevin Stelljes stated that we revert to the pre-Covid policies for handling refunds once the existing declaration expires.

Concerns were brought up regarding our normal opening date of May 15 for reservations, opening concessions, sanitizing bathrooms, the sale of ice and firewood, and renting equipment. The Committee suggested to Josh to use his discretion when it comes to operations and to go ahead and open May 15, as scheduled unless there are further mandates handed down from the authorities.

There was brief discussion of Chippewa Valley Trailriders (CVTR) report. Joe Knight asked if the horse riders would object to the bird hunters sharing the trails, but Kevin Stelljes said that the trails

for bird hunters, dog and horse trails are changed often enough that it does not seem to be a problem. ACTION: Josh will follow up with the National Rifle Club about their being delinquent on their annual report.

Approval of the Emergency Fire Wardens (EFW) – To allow for more locations for in-person permit acquisitions from the public, the Committee needs to approve the list to authorize Emergency Fire Wardens for the prevention and suppression of forest fires in the county for 2021 in the Town of Seymour and the Town of Bridge Creek, Ludington, Wilson. Joe Knight moves to approve the sites and Emergency Fire Wardens listed for in-person permits. All in favor, none opposed.

The drafts of the final chapters of the 15 Year Plan were sent to the Parks and Forest Committee as well as the Advisory Committee. Please send comments directly to Josh Pedersen via email by the February 28 and highlight topics for further discussion. Josh will respond to some comments that he can address directly and compile a master list of discussion topics for further debate at the special meeting of March 1, 2021, at 5pm.

Joe Knight asked about the Advisory Committee status. Josh Pedersen informed the Committee that there are 11 spots on the Advisory Committee with seven (7) spots currently filled which leaves four (4) vacancies. The members of the Advisory Committee have a variety of experiences and expertise that they bring to the “table” and given more direction from the Committee could better utilize all that they have to offer. For instance, the research on a location the Willett Wilderness Proposal. They have reconvened and are reviewing the 15 Year Plan and will be included in the March 1 special meeting. The Committee should take a different approach than they have in the past for recruitment and perhaps rely more on word of mouth and personal invitations to consider the possibility for individuals to be on the Advisory Committee.

Josh Pedersen in his Director’s Report reported on the Fourth Quarter Financials. These figures will still change as more revenue is coming in due to timber sales and grants. There is a \$412,000 surplus mostly due to expenditure cuts across the board. Many improvement projects such as sidewalk repair, tree trimming, parking lot repairs, and playground improvements have been put on hold because of the uncertainty of Covid. Jody Gindt stated that we are mainly in maintenance mode when it comes to projects like these. Limited summer staff restrictions what we can accomplish during the summer, but we are doing our best to create the best and safest atmosphere at each facility. Even though the 2021 budget does not account for many projects like these they should not be put off indefinitely because by doing so we develop bigger issues the longer we wait. Therefore, the Committee should consider future improvements as finances become available.

In addition to the 15 Year Plan, Josh suggested considering a 20–25-year plan that serves to guide the capital improvement projects as a whole. When considering short-term or long-term projects they will be consistent with and in conjunction with all the other parks plans, looking at the system as a whole.

Joe Knight asked about providing Coon Fork with a credit card reader because it has been cumbersome to use a credit card when making reservations at the park. Josh Pedersen said adding a credit card reader was as simple as adding this feature to our account and getting a reader out there. To add a kiosk system to each park for the public to use to process daily and annual park fees would cost the county somewhere between \$9,000 and \$15,000 for each location. These units would be like the ones used at places like public parking lots and would be a capital investment.

The third party who had an interest in managing the Expo Center has withdrawn their intent.

Kicking Kids had their event this evening and it seemed to be going well. The first scheduled event was canceled due to Covid and lack of good snow conditions.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm

Respectfully Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Winnie Parker".

Winnie Parker

Committee Clerk

Administrative Specialist III – Parks & Forest