

Cascade Township Parks Committee Notes

Tuesday, June 8, 2021; 8:00 am

Virtual Meeting

ARTICLE 1. Community Development Director Steve Peterson called the meeting to order just after 8:00 am.
Members Present: Dawn McDonald, Alan Rowland, Mike Reese, Ginny Wanty, Matt Douglas, and Grace Lesperance.
Members Absent (Excused): Joe Engel
Others Present: Planner Brian Hilbrands

ARTICLE 2. Approve the minutes of the April 20, 2021 meeting.

Members approved the minutes as written.

ARTICLE 3. Park Discussion Items

1. Discuss Park Master Plan Survey Questions and Timing

Member Reese stated that he, Member Wanty, and Member Engel formed a small subcommittee to review the Master Plan and discuss what they would like to accomplish, and what kind of information they would like to gather with the survey. Member Reese stated that a lot of the questions paralleled survey questions from 6-7 years ago, but believes that is a good way to compare and see how answers have changed, to adapt new trends, and to see how park usage has been affected by the pandemic.

Member Reese stated that wording for the parks millage is important to make sure people understand what it is, and what can be done with it, and introducing programming and/or a parks director has also been discussed to be able to expand the parks offerings.

Member Wanty stated that the new survey is exactly the same as the 2014 survey, however two questions (10 & 11) about the trails were left out, so they were put back in. Director Peterson stated that the Township Board has made a separate pathway survey and a pathway millage, which is why those questions were removed. Member Wanty stated that she and Members Engel and Reese have rewritten the survey questions, and changed the pathway questions to a "wish list" such as having trails connect, a trailhead location, etc.

Member Reese asked Director Peterson if/how the survey questions relating to where people live versus where they would like to see improvements was used. Director Peterson stated that it was helpful to see which parts of the Township residents believe are underserved, or if there needs to be things in particular areas of the Township.

Member Wanty shared her computer screen with the Committee, and Member Reese reviewed and explained the survey questions, and how and why they were edited by their subcommittee to be more current.

Member Reese stated that it may be helpful to have residents rank some answers "1-5" instead of just selecting 5 out of 10 (for example) to better track answers. Member Wanty stated that all questions have been changed to a ranking system to be consistent.

Member Wanty asked if the Township allowed any hunting as indicated on the survey, and wondered if that question could be removed. Director Peterson stated that annually (November 1-21st) up to 15 permits are given for bow hunting at Peace Park only, and agreed that that question could be removed, or that it could possibly help with future acquisitions of property if there is enough interest in hunting within the Township. Members Lesperance and Douglas believe the language should be changed and that it should be specified that bow hunting is the only hunting allowed at Peace Park.

Member Reese stated that having a question(s) that asks what residents would like to see in Cascade that other communities have, and having an open "other" section where ideas can be filled in would be helpful as good ideas can come from the public. Member Wanty stated that Member Reese suggested this part focus on park and recreation amenities and facilities, and not focus on services. Member Reese stated that services can be discussed with possible programming questions.

Member Reese stated that in addition to asking if residents will support parks with a park millage, adding an option to invite residents to volunteer at parks for things such as a garlic mustard pull can be helpful if the Township is looking to expand parks. Member Wanty states that this may help get residents more engaged.

Member Wanty stated that the 2014 survey showed residents were in favor of paying \$50 or less when asked about financial support for the parks. Member Reese asked if there should be a sliding scale for the level of tax a resident would be responsible for with a park millage. Member Lesperance suggested a new park millage be compared to the Townships pathway millage. Member McDonald suggested there be clarity with these questions as they are deep into the survey.

Member Lesperance asked how the survey given out in 2014. Director Peterson stated that there was a focus group session where the survey was available, and it was available on Survey Monkey via the website.

Members discussed different ways to get residents to complete the survey, including booths at events, the newsletter, direct mail, and a QR code physically at the parks and in the newsletter that is linked to the survey. Member Reese stated that it is important to have both physical and electronic surveys available for residents preference, or in case they do not have access to the internet.

Director Peterson asked about timing to get the survey distributed and returned. Member Reese stated that the plan needs to be submitted to the DNR in February, so there is enough time yet for public engagement so that Staff can present a draft

plan to the public, and then submit the plan to the DNR. Member McDonald suggested a fall window of August-October for public input as there are people using the parks before school begins, and before residents head south for the winter.

Member Lesperance asked if Members are in favor of meeting more often than their scheduled quarterly meetings. Member Reese stated that because the Master Plan process is being done this year, it may be helpful to meet more frequently (monthly) this year than other years in order to keep up with public engagement.

Members and Director Peterson scheduled their next virtual meetings for July 13th and August 10th, both at 8 am.

Director Peterson asked Member Reese to send him the draft survey so that he and Planner Hilbrands can clean it up before the next meeting.

2. Discuss Park Bylaws

Director Peterson stated that there are bylaws in place for officers or other positions typically seen on committees, and, if desired, Members can make the Committee into more of a formal structure. Member Wanty stated that she is not sure officers are necessary, however she would like a Committee Member to help draft the agenda in order to add desired items.

Member McDonald agrees that officers are not needed, and also agrees with the idea of a Member assisting with the agenda.

Director Peterson stated that if Members would like to keep the same Committee structure, he would like to know which Member will be assisting with the agenda, and suggested Member Lesperance as she is the Township Supervisor. Member Wanty asked if they could brainstorm a new format for the agenda, and Member Lesperance asked if the proposed agenda could be distributed to all Members prior to being finalized.

Director Peterson stated that an updated format will be used for the agenda, and it will be distributed to all Members before being finalized.

Members discussed updates and repairs that were done at Peace Park, including repaired erosion, repaired/replaced trail marker signage, and possibly adding a QR code to help with trail navigation.

A member of the virtual audience raised her hand to comment at this time.

Ms. Keely Shay stated that she never saw that last survey, and would like to see a physical copy of the new one handed out. Ms. Shay stated that she believes anything that can be done to preserve greenspace in the Township should be done.

3. Review Possible Pedestrian Pathway Repair Recommendations

Director Peterson stated that the Township has been trying to incorporate the pathway system into the park system, and wanted to present Members with maintenance program ideas for the pathway system. Director Peterson stated that the Township Board budgets about \$100,000 annually to redo parts of the pathway system, and this is built into millage funds. Director Peterson stated that this dollar amount equals about 2,000 feet of pathway that can be redone.

Director Peterson listed the following areas of pathway as needing improvement:

- Cascade Road, south from Laraway Lake
- Thornapple River Drive, 200 ft. both north and south from Shagbark
- Cascade Road, from Mont Rue to the south Manchester Hills drive

Director Peterson suggested Member look at these areas and report back at the July meeting.

Member Reese wondered if a pedestrian crossing button with a light over Thornapple River Drive (at the school/Bridgewater) would qualify as trail maintenance. Director Peterson stated that it would not qualify, and this would be something that is worked on with the Kent County Road Commission.

Member Wanty stated that she would like to see pathways in the Township connect to neighboring communities in the future, and that there are suggestions from the last survey indicating what residents would like to see happen with pathways.

Member McDonald asked where information about the safety survey that was conducted for the pathway system can be found. Director Peterson stated that Manager Swayze is working on the safety audit for Cascade Road, and that information may be included in the Strategic Plan.

Discussion was held between Members about the potential purchase of the 2965 Wycliff property for a possible park.

The Meeting adjourned at 9:53 am.