

Environmental Board Meeting Minutes, June 11th, 2014

Meeting called to order at 7:05pm

Members Present: Chair Ruth Caputo, Martha Dahlinger, William Beck, Jamie McCarthy, Genevieve Sertic, Catherine Niessink, Christin DeJong, Spencer Welling, and Director of Transportation and Utilities Christopher Barnes.

Excused Members: David Mayfield

Catherine made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Christin. The motion was approved.

General Discussion on What We Should do for the City of Portage

We first discussed what our purpose is as defined by the city charter and what our goals and objectives that the city council has given to us. Martha brings up possibly providing more input to the planning commission and other entities with regard to decisions that are made that affect the environment. Bill brings up being the point/purpose of the board to help the city figure out what its blind spots are. Ruth brings up three paths we could take:

1. Help the city define its assets.
2. Figure out how Portage can affect and make a difference in the region
3. Develop how we think the City of Portage should look in twenty years.

"Assets meets blind spots." Basically, help the city figure out its assets and determine its blind spots.

Sustainability has been a big buzz word in the past but is it still as big of an issue today. Jamie mentions that other cities are studying sustainability with regard to cost savings.

Spencer thinks looking at the difference that Portage can make in the future or how it should look in twenty years or so might be a better approach in order to attract more people to Portage. It would also make it easier to reach some of our other goals.

Martha brings up asking the city council maybe what they would like us to do. Christin makes the point that bringing these ideas to city council's attention is part of our job according to the charter. Bill brings up that compared to the rest of the world the City of Portage is still a very good place to live, even compared to other cities in Michigan.

One of the problems/threats is lack of education of the public with regard to environmental issues as well. To some degree, Jamie brings up that one of the things the city could do is model the behavior they'd like to see of their constituents. We then discussed the myriad issues regarding the environment that are caused by people.

Bill brought up having a reward for the community that does the best job in keeping its community clean as a possible idea.

Genevieve brings up that a city with green space, many walkways, and trails is desirable. Making Portage more walkable is good. She does believe that the City of Portage is a great place to live.

It will be interesting to see what the comprehensive plan update contains and also what the 2025 plan includes. Bill says the comprehensive plan may be a good place to check for blind spots. Chris, as the liason, advises it might be best to consider the costs and benefits of each issue when we do discuss these issues. Spencer brings up fitting our thoughts on these issues into Portage's desire to still attract people to move here and be a great city.

This topic we'll touch on again after the comprehensive plan is made public.

Invasive Plant Pulls

West Lake pull focused on Asian Bittersweet, Honeysuckle, and Barberry. Roughly eight people attended.

Schrier Park May 24th pull only had Spencer and Tim at it. Spencer and Tim pulled the second-year garlic mustard along the eastern edge of the park and then some of the Asian Bittersweet along the main trail.

Schrier Park June 7th pull only had Christin and Jamie pull some of the Asian Bittersweet that they found. No residents attended this pull either.

Jamie and Christin mentioned that maybe we want to consider mapping invasive species as being more valuable than doing pulls as those don't seem necessarily to be that helpful at the moment. Chris mentions possibly using GIS mapping software to do this. We can maybe control the northern boundary of the Asian Bittersweet in Schrier Park but we won't be able to pull all of it out.

Next pull is June 21st. We are going to work on Bicentennial trail with the master gardeners north of Milham on the garlic mustard along that trail.

Fishing Fair and Earth Day

We received two letters from the student advisory committee and Park Rangers thanking us for our participation. Fishing Fair did seem to be fairly beneficial. Rain barrel display provided by the city was a hit.

Purple Loosestrife Beetles

Tim, Ruth, Marty, and David released this year's supply of beetles on Thursday, May 29th. We had 12 releases that we released around the City of Portage. Saw beetles at all locations we released from prior year releases. We also saw beetles at locations in the West Lake Nature Preserve and Sugarloaf Drain area where we have never released before.

Goal Progress

Chris has a meeting with Eleanor of the Michigan Wildflower Farm regarding the native planting at the Water Treatment plant and its upkeep.

Green Infrastructure/Local Stormwater Ordinances

Martha mentioned something discussed at a meeting of the Kalamazoo County Climate Change Coalition regarding a universal sign so that people would know why certain things were planted such as rain gardens, native plantings, etc. The Kalamazoo County Climate Change Coalition is discussing green infrastructure as a subgroup issue. This subgroup just met this past Monday. There will be more in the future on this issue.

Martha makes a motion to adjourn, seconded by Spencer. Motion to adjourn is approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:32pm

/s/ Tim Winslow