

MEETING NOTES
CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES
JANUARY 19, 2012 - 1:00PM

Kent County Commission Board Room (Room 310)
County Administration Building

Committee Members Present: Sandi Frost Parrish, Mike DeVries, Rebecca Rynbrandt, Ken Krombeen, John Schneider, Andy Johnston, Andy Guy, Rich Houtteman, Eddie Tadlock, Cathy VanderMeulen,; Brian Donovan; Bryan Harrison; Carlos Sanchez; Milt Rohwer; Rosalynn Bliss; Ron Koehler; Greg Northrup

Staff Present: Roger Sabine, Kent County Parks Director; Mark Fitzpatrick, Ada Township Parks Director; Grand Rapids Parks Director Jay Steffen, Assistant County Administrator Mary Swanson, and; Kent County Management Analyst Jennifer DeHaan

Meeting Notes:

Welcome & Introductions -. Kent County Board Chair Sandi Parrish thanked everyone for being at the meeting today. Parrish noted that since the last meeting in November, the consultants (Kerry Laycock, John Kazcor, and Barbara Heller) have been working to gather information about the parks systems throughout Kent County. Today, they have a presentation of their initial findings and will be working over the next two months to develop any appropriate recommendations. Parrish stated that the consultants may work with the Citizens Committee to form smaller focus groups to obtain additional feedback about the study, the findings, and any recommendations. Additional details will follow. As it relates to funding, Parrish noted, that the County has unofficially received notice that the State through the Economic Vitality Incentive Program has awarded \$37,500 for the parks study. This funding was sought after due to the time that it takes to obtain funding and is intended to be utilized for Phase II of the study, should it be necessary to develop an implementation plan for the recommendations.

Approval of the Meeting Notes – A MOTION was made by Mr. Sanchez and supported by Andy Guy to approve the meeting notes for November 14, 2011. The MOTION passed unanimously.

Parks Study Update: Kerry Layock stated that for the past few months they have been working to gather data and information about the parks services throughout Kent County. He noted that this data gathering process has not been without its challenges but that they have had some good information from some local units allowing them to develop some key initial findings that they will discuss today. A copy of the powerpoint presentation is posted on the Parks Citizens Committee webpage located at www.accesskent.com.

Greg Northrup stated that the findings do not seem to identify best practices for counties of similar size. Laycock stated that they are continuing to identify best practices for governance of parks systems. Currently, they are finding that there are a couple of best practices including a sustainable funding source and an independent governing body. Laycock noted that today's presentation was really to identify some key findings associated with how Kent County parks

operate and are governed and in the next steps they will continue to work to identify recommendations. Cathy VanderMeulen asked about how confident the consultants will be in making their recommendations based upon the challenge in getting the information. Laycock stated that while each community may operate differently there are definitely some opportunities for cooperation and even some coordination. Laycock stated that any recommendations which they make will be supported by both data and information.

Mike DeVries asked that the consultants take another look at the number of acres in Grand Rapids Township that are designated for parks and recreation. John Kazcor noted that there may be some clarification regarding preserved land and parkland but that they will take another look and work with Grand Rapids Two. Rebecca Rynbrandt noted that one piece that may be missing throughout this report is activities that are classified as “after-school programs” which operate through the Parks and Recreation Department. For example, Rynbrandt noted that Kentwood and Wyoming receive federal dollars through the ARCH program that provided targeted after school services. Laycock noted that the role of the schools in the parks and recreation system are both formal and more notably informal relationships. John Kazcor stated that getting a grasp on the informal relationships and even formal relationships between the schools and the local units of government has been challenging and requested that if there are lists/information about those relationships that they be forwarded to him. Andy Guy noted that there are additional earned income revenue streams that should be looked at in addition to relying on a single revenue stream such as a millage. Milt Rohwer stated that there may be some additional opportunities to work with the State as the State uncaps the National Resources Trust Fund. Rohwer noted that community’s have placed a significantly high value on the use and development of trail systems. Rebecca Rynbrandt noted that one thing that is obvious from this study is that there is an underserved population in the parks and recreation programming that is dedicated to special needs groups.

Laycock thanked everyone for their feedback today and stated that they will be going back to their findings and further developing recommendations and next steps. Additional information for the Citizens Committee will be forthcoming.