

Minutes of June 20, 2007

The public meeting of the Calhoun County Parks Trustees Board was held at 7:30 am on Wednesday, June 20, 2007 in their office located at 13300 Fifteen Mile Road, Marshall, Michigan.

Present: Commissioner Charles E. Monaweck, Chairperson
Commissioner Chester E. Travis, Vice-Chairperson
Commissioner Scott Brown, Member
Dennis Randolph, Managing Director
Joanna Johnson, Assistant Managing Director
Kevin Henning, Finance Director
Pixie Coats, Human Resource Director
Angela Kline, Assistant County Highway Engineer

Also Present: Tom Frank, Albion Township Supervisor
Sharon Drumhiller, Tekonsha Township Supervisor
John Neterer, Leroy Township Supervisor
Tom Sprau, Bedford Township Supervisor
Greg Purcell, Calhoun County Administrator
Pam Kline, Calhoun County Finance
Eusebio Solis, Calhoun County Commissioner
Mike Rae, Calhoun County Commissioner
Greg Moore, Calhoun County Commissioner
Russ Wicklund, Preim Group, LLC
Dave Veramay, Clarence Township Resident
Joe Bramble, Convis Township Resident
Gardy Berezonsky, Marengo Township Resident
Steve Ball, Calhoun County Road Commission
Hershel Stacy, Calhoun County Road Commission
Robert Volkmer, Calhoun County Road Commission

Chairman Monaweck called the public meeting of the Calhoun County Parks Trustees Board to order at 7:30 a.m.

Moved by Commissioner Travis and supported by Commissioner Brown to approve the Silver Leaf Renaissance Faire Special Use Permit. Voice vote: Motion carried.

Mrs. Johnson discussed the Special Use Permit and stated that the Silver Leaf Renaissance Faire has asked to have alcohol within the fenced in area of the park. After checking with the Emmett Township Police Department, she said that they had no incidents last year.

Commissioner Brown asked if the cups for the alcohol would be transparent. Mrs. Johnson stated that she didn't know. Commissioner Brown asked if she would express his concerns with

Silver Leaf to ensure that no alcohol gets into the hands of minors. Commissioner Brown said that he would like them to serve the alcohol in clear cups so that they know who is drinking what. Mrs. Johnson said that she would let them know.

Commissioner Brown asked if the County Board of Commissioners approved this permit last year. Mrs. Johnson said that last year we went before the County Board of Commissioners' to approve the updated Park Rules, which included the provision for a special use permit, which was not included within the previous County Park Rules.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Monaweck stated that he has been a Commissioner for a little over two and a half years so his historical knowledge of the Park System is quite limited. At the April 27th retreat, Commissioner Monaweck suggested that we have this meeting with the County Board so that the Road Commission could possibly get on firmer footing with the County.

Commissioner Monaweck stated that he wanted to read some facts that he received and maybe it will give the County some idea on how this has evolved.

Commissioner Monaweck read the following:

Sometime during the 1950's, the County took back control of the County parks and this remained the case until the 1990's. In 1996, the Calhoun County Road Commission was again given the responsibility of maintaining the County parks. At that time and since then, the County has not provided any significant funding for parks. Furthermore, the County has not given any direction as to what efforts should be pursued by the Board of Parks Trustees.

Commissioner Monaweck stated that in the last two and a half years he has been Chairman of the Board, the above statement is true. We have done pretty much what we thought we should do, as did the administration in their decision-making.

Meanwhile, the Road Commission was working with the County to create a way to reduce costs and develop an organization that could address community development in a rational manner. Besides parks, the Road Commission managed public works and planning activities. With roads, the resulting agency (doing business under the title Calhoun County Community Development) provided a broad range of services related to infrastructure planning and development.

Unfortunately, while the Road Commission was given the task to do this work, again, the County provided no guidance, did not ever say that any of these activities should be abandoned, and provided funding only for some planning activities. The Road Commission was left to develop funding mechanisms for public works and parks entirely on its own.

The County neglected its parks for many years. One of the consequences of this neglect was that an important component of the County's "quality of life" was lost. Another, and equally important consequence, was that our parks became prime areas for crimes of various types to occur. This criminal activity caused a significant risk and liability for the County. Moreover, the resulting, very poor reputation has made it very difficult for us to attract customers and users back into our parks.

However, beginning in 1996, the Road Commission began to reclaim these recreational resources and to improve and preserve the parks. In doing so, the community has responded positively, and the use of the county parks has increased.

Because more users come to the parks, and because the Emmett Township Public Safety Department patrols in the paved areas, serious crimes have been eliminated. However, there is still some vandalism and damage caused by motorcycle/ORV use in the parks (where it is illegal to ride such vehicles). Because the parks contain mostly trailways, it is difficult if not impossible for public safety officers to apprehend a suspect or access 80 percent of the parkland in a patrol car.

As we have redeveloped the County parks, we have expended much effort attempting to collaborate with private groups and develop innovative ways to provide funding for the work. All the work that has been done over the past eleven years, transforming our parks into places where families and law-abiding citizens can enjoy the essence of Calhoun County's rural and geological past, has come with only \$12,000 of County funds invested (\$1,091 a year).

Expenses for the parks are intended to enhance and increase the use of these parks for the residents of Calhoun County. They include:

- Regular grounds maintenance
- Building repairs
- Repair and replacement caused by vandalism
- Matching money for grants
- Maintenance and improvements to parks.

All of the improvements for the county park systems that have been completed since 1996 have been funded by grants. The Calhoun County Road Commission has provided the matching funds for these grants. The Road Commission is allowed to spend up to five percent of its Act 51 funds for roadside park improvements. All roads in the County parks are certified County Roads.

By their nature, parks need regular maintenance. If we do not cut the grass, pick up the trash, and clean the restrooms, we find that people treat the park as an abandoned site. The result of poor, little, or no maintenance is that families and individuals looking for a quality outdoor experience stop coming to the park. Then, as a result, individuals looking to engage in vandalism and criminal activity become the primary users of the parks

Over the past 10 years, the County has, on the average, paid the Road Commission \$69,500 for managing parks, public works, and planning. This amounts to 0.2 (%) percent of the County's general fund. If we look at only parks funding, we see that the share of General Funds is 0.0003 (%) percent.

For the 11 years, 1996 through 2006, the Road Commission paid for the audits for Parks and Public Works. This was a cost of about \$2,500 per year for each audit, for a grand total of \$55,000. This was money for County functions that the Road Commission paid for. In addition, the Road Commission paid insurance for the buildings and structures on Calhoun County park property. Insurance costs for park buildings have been \$541 a year, or for the past 10 years \$5,410 dollars. Therefore, between insurance and audit costs the Road Commission has paid \$60,410 over the past 10-years. This was the responsibility of the County. Of this amount, \$32,900 is directly park related, and amounts to about 1/3 of the park fund deficit.

Because the Road Commission handled the work, the County has been able to do without the following positions, which it previously had filled with full-time employees:

**County Positions Eliminated
Due to Road Commission**

Position	Annual Base Salary
Director of Public Works	\$45,000
Director of Parks	\$40,000
Director of Planning	\$40,000
Public Works Administrative Assistant	\$25,000
Total	\$150,000

With the Road Commission handling this work, the County has saved \$1,800,000 in salary only in the past 12 years, plus at least \$900,000 in fringes for a total of about \$2,700,000. This is for salary and fringes, and does not include any other savings such as for office supplies, floor space, utilities, etc., that would have been accrued if the County had these employees working at the County Building.

Since the County provided about \$835,000 to the Road Commission, the County has saved a net of \$1,865,000 or about \$155,416 each year plus about \$5,500 in direct audit and insurance costs, for a total of \$160,000 savings to the County.

Act 51 allows the Road Commission to spend funds for roadside parks and non-motorized travel

ways. These expenses are audited every year by MDOT. The work we do with these funds includes, but is not limited to:

- Paving shoulders and marking them for bikeways
- Installing pedestrian signs at signalized intersections
- Providing handicap accessible ramps and rumble bumps on sidewalks at intersections
- Construction of separate 10-foot wide bike and walking trails.
- Pavement marking crosswalks

Commissioner Monaweck stated that this is what we need to talk about to come up with some solutions.

PUBLIC OFFICIAL TIME & CITIZEN TIME

Commissioner Solis stated that he was glad to have the opportunity to be here and discuss the Parks System. He commented that he kept hearing the repeated message that we are under funded. Commissioner Solis stated that we need to look at the facts that were not put into the report that was just read, like how is the money being managed now. There are some glaring things that stand out to him. First, there is a \$113,000 deficit, and his understanding is that came through the operation of a golf course. His first question would be why would parks engage in the operation of a golf course? He stated that he wasn't a golfer, but one thing he does know is that golf courses are risky businesses. It's not what you would consider a solid investment, and because of that, the parks have a \$113,000 deficit. Commissioner Solis would like to know who authorized this venture. Did the Board of Road Commissioners authorize it? Do you see this as an acceptable investment of taxpayer's dollars? When you talk about asking for direction, did you come to the Board of Commissioners and say that you want to run a golf course and do you think this would be a good idea. He mentions this because this spills over into other departments such as the Road Commission and the way the money is being handled. The Road Commission has purchased some property as an investment and if you look at the numbers, you have been paying \$600 a month for nothing. In fact, the cost is going up on it. He stated that if they are going to have this discussion, then the Road Commissioners are going to have to take a hard look at how they are doing business, where the money is going, and the money that you are losing, as well as the money that you feel you need. Commissioner Solis said that he knows there are more details and he is over simplifying this, but in his opinion, it is an inappropriate use of taxpayers' money. Who authorized the purchase of property with taxpayers' dollars as an investment.

Commissioner Travis stated that the Parks Trustees authorized whatever happened, but it wasn't really purchased as an investment. It was purchased so we could get part of the right-of-way for the bike path. Commissioner Solis asked why are we trying to sell it then. Mr. Randolph stated that we bought a piece of property because it was available and we could build a trail on it. We bought the entire piece because the entire piece of property was available. We never intended to keep the entire piece and we were going to sell that piece of property if the Board thought it appropriate. The Board

of Road Commissioners approved that particular sale at the time. The property has been really hard to get rid of over the past few years because of economics. Mr. Randolph stated that the Board is going to be seeing an offer coming in at the next meeting or two for that property and that should take care of that particular problem in our audit that Mr. Fisher has mentioned again. It was not an investment. It was purchased for a trail for non-motorized vehicles, which is part of the Road Commission's duty.

Commissioner Monaweck asked if the trail was to get to the Ott Preserve or over Michigan Avenue. Mr. Randolph said that it was for a bridge to go over Michigan Avenue to the Ott Preserve.

Commissioner Brown said that this property was purchased for a trail, but where is the trail? Mr. Randolph said that the trail already exists and runs from Bridge Park, up through Kimball Pines Park and enters the North Country Trail and stops at Michigan Avenue. It then picks up again in the Ott Preserve. Commissioner Brown asked Mr. Randolph if this trail could have been accomplished without purchasing this negative amortization property. Mr. Randolph said no, there was a gap in the trail.

Commissioner Solis said that when looking for funds from the Commission, the Commission is looking at the management of that. Even if the property was bought for a trail, the trail has been built, and the property has been held for a long time. His understanding is that we owe a lot more than we originally bought it for and the \$600 per month we have paid on it for many years, was really for nothing.

Commissioner Brown asked how much money did we put into this property and how much do we still owe on it. Mr. Henning stated that we owe just over \$300,000. The purchase price was \$250,000 and we paid 25,000 down. The rest was to be spread over a number of years. Commissioner Brown said that the audit shows a \$175,000 purchase price and it shows that because of the negative amortization since 1999, we now owe \$279,000 on it. Mr. Henning said that was as of December. Commissioner Brown asked Mr. Henning to incorporate in the \$600 we have paid on this property every month to determine what our investment is on this property. Mr. Henning responded that he has that information upstairs and will get the total investment figures for him.

Mr. Purcell stated that he appreciates Commissioner Monaweck's monolog, but wished he could have had a copy of it prior to the meeting so that he could be prepared to address some of the issues.

Some of the issues are pretty relevant and he would have liked to address them. We share some of your frustration and so do the other Commissioners. This has been building for a long time and we need to know what is the role of Parks Trustees. Most of the other Boards and Commissions make plans and recommendations and bring them to the County Board of Commissioners, which is the governing body of Calhoun County. The Road Commission did that last year when they came before the Board wanting to make changes to the park rules and the Board was very receptive to that.

The first thing on the agenda today was to approve the special use permit to allow alcoholic beverages at the fair. This is going to be a revenue producer for the Road Commission and he feels

that the County has been helpful in that regard in terms of trying to assist with that. Earlier this year, the County approved \$7,500 to assist in moving forward to develop a new Recreational Master Plan, which will enable the Parks Trustees to continue to be eligible for State grants. An approved Master Plan is required to be eligible for grants. It was mentioned earlier that most of the Parks revenue has been coming from those grants. The sense he received from the comments that were made was that the Parks Board would like the County Board to tell them what to do. He said that they could do that but that is the reason they appoint the Parks Trustees to begin with. They are the Trustees for the County Parks and should make recommendations to the County Board of Commissioners. The County did invite the Road Commission, the Board of Public Works, and the Board of Parks Trustees to their strategic planning session and Mr. Purcell appreciates that Commissioner Monaweck, Mr. Randolph, and Mrs. Johnson attended. He stated that they are trying to involve the Road Commission. Mr. Purcell stated that he knows the County has not been able to provide the Road Commission with the kind of money that is needed to operate the Parks effectively and to do all the things we would like to do. This County is financially constrained. We have issues in terms of the finances and typically speaking, when the County looks at the budget, it's a put, take, situation. So, if you want to put more money into the parks, you will have to take it from somewhere else. Usually, those are essential services such as law enforcement, the County Prosecutor, Sheriff's Department and Health Department. Usually, you don't want to reduce these levels of services because they have to do with public safety issues. This doesn't mean we haven't tried to be helpful, because we have.

Mr. Purcell stated that the County does have some concerns as stated by Commissioner Solis, with the deficit. It's not just about this property that was purchased, although if you are purchasing property, you should have a plan on how you are going to deal with it and dispose of it. Frankly, Mr. Purcell has never heard of a negative amortization schedule until he saw this particular property and this needs to be addressed. The \$113,000 deficit that we currently have in the Parks Department is a concern to them because it becomes ultimately the County Board's responsibility. When the Parks Department incurs a deficit, the County Board could have to pay off the debt. One of the things we need to focus on is how that deficit was created. A significant amount of money was spent on operating the Kingman Museum some years back. What were the decisions that were made? Was there a financial plan for that? Now, the Road Commission comes to the Board to ask for guidance on what to do, but you didn't come to us then to ask if we thought it was a good idea. You just went out, did it, and incurred the deficit. The County doesn't want to hold the Road Commission back from doing good, but you do need to have a well-thought out plan and Mr. Purcell doesn't think the Road Commission did. It was a risky venture. Sometimes you can take risk and win, and sometimes you can't.

The other issue is one that was brought to the County Board for the right-of-way for Kimball Pines Park. The County asked the Road Commission to take time to hold a public hearing, which they did, and the County appreciates that. Mr. Purcell feels it was important for the public to have a say in whether to sell or dispose of park property. A question was raised from one of the Road Commissioners as to whether it should be a sale from the Board of Parks Trustees to the Road

Commission or just an easement, where no money need be exchanged. Mr. Purcell likes the plan but how are you going to deal with finances that already exist, since they are such a big issue.

Mr. Purcell said that he understood that the Road Commission is currently covering insurance on park property. This is the first time Mr. Purcell has been aware of this. The County has a policy through Risk Management that he believes covers all of the Road Commission buildings. If it doesn't cover them, the County can cover them through their policy to save the Road Commission some money. The County is trying to be helpful and is not here to take shots or to be negative.

Mr. Purcell stated that the bottom line is that the County does have a concern about the deficit because it has been there for a number of years. At some point it will have to be paid, and as it is now, it is continuing to go up. This is not a good plan. If you are asking should the County Board step in here and development a plan to resolve these issues for the Road Commission, then they could do that, but the Road Commission may not like the plan. Mr. Purcell stated that he has never been a "plan for you" kind of guy. He was always taught that when you went through a planning effort, you plan with people, not for people. He feels we need to do some joint planning with one another and to do this in a positive and constructive manner. He doesn't believe the Road Commissioners want the County Commissioners to tell them what to do; and if the Road Commissioner do, then he guesses the County doesn't need them. He thinks the County works best through a variety of different Boards and Commissions that are out there doing specialized, independent work. Then, after these Boards have a plan, they bring it to the governing body, the County Board, for input, modifications, or adjustments.

Commissioner Travis said that a few years ago, the Road Commission asked for a millage to be put on the ballot and for various reasons it was never done. He wanted to know if it would be possible for the Parks to have this put on the ballot. Mr. Purcell said that it was possible but this was not a priority of the County Board. Because of some of the issues at the County, they too have had to make some reduction. Mr. Purcell said that he would not want to see a park millage until we see what is going to happen in Lansing. The question is: Is it the highest priority? Mr. Purcell said that he is not sure if he knows the answer to that. He personally feels that it's not a high priority.

Commissioner Rae agreed with the concerns that Mr. Purcell and Commissioner Solis have. He said that the reason that they are here today is because there is a problem and the problem needs to be addressed. There simply has to be closer cooperation and feedback before we get remedies. As far as the property that was purchased, he understands that we may have a buyer. Mr. Randolph confirmed that. How many acres is this property? Mr. Randolph said it is 10 acres and we have had the property on the market almost since we bought it. Mr. Randolph said that the whole property became available and we needed 20 feet for the trail, but we put the property up for sale almost immediately so is hasn't been for lack of effort. Commissioner Rae said that hopefully the sale will allow a 20-foot easement and hopefully it will take care of the problem. Commissioner Rae said that maybe using the park advisory committee will help or maybe a representative from the County can start working with the Parks Trustees Board. Having this meeting today is a good thing and maybe

we can turn this around.

Commissioner Monaweck stated that when he was interviewed and came on this Board, he was asked if he knew anything about the parks system. He stated that he didn't, but he thought he could learn. Maybe we short-change our new Commissioners by not having a little educational forum before they start on the Board. He stated that he felt a little stupid because he didn't know anything about the parks, the history or the finances and trying to conduct a meeting when you don't know anything about it, is frustrating. Commissioner Monaweck stated that we do need a better line of communication between the County Board and the Road Commissioner.

Commissioner Moore stated that as a Commissioner for the district where all the County Parks are located, a lot of good things have been done and this is in large part due to the work by the Parks Trustees and the Road Commission. He thanked them for the work they have done with the parks. He knows the level of improvements that have been made. Commissioner Moore said that he understands the frustration because there are people out there that just don't care about the parks and no matter how much money you put into them, you still have people that will vandalize it. He said that having a County representative sit on the Parks Board might be a good thing. Commissioner Moore stated that many years ago when Kimball Pines was just an area to picnic, his parents were married out there. We may be able to utilize it as a way of building revenue. The Renaissance Faire is another way of receiving revenue. We need to tap into some of these things. Communication has to improve. If the sale takes place on Michigan Avenue, that will be good for all of us. If that sale does not take place, he would urge the Parks Board to look at refinancing so that the negative amortization goes away.

Mr. Veramay stated that he was on the Board for some time, and some of the decisions that were made were good and some of them were bad. It's obvious to him that the Administrator does not want to put the ¼ mill on the ballot because he has other priorities. Mr. Veramay feels it's an insult that the general population can't vote yes or no on what is important to them. He knows the majority of the budget goes to the criminal justice system and he feels it's a tragedy that we can't do good things for people that pay their bills and instead we spend our money on the bad people that do bad things.

Commissioner Solis stated that it was not just the County Administrator not wanting to put a millage on the ballot, he does not want one either. When you ask for a millage you are under the microscope, and being that we have issues with the golf course and the Kimball Pines property, this will not sit well with the citizens.

Commissioner Rae concurred with what Commissioner Solis said and he would not be in favor of the millage. A millage costs money and you have to consider the economy before you float a millage. If the millage fails, then you lose credibility. Commissioner Rae stated that now is clearly not the time to have a millage.

Mr. Purcell stated that the \$7,500 allocated to the Parks Trustees is strictly to update the Parks Master Plan to be eligible for funding. Mr. Purcell said that Commissioner Solis is absolutely right about the millage. You can't talk about going for a millage when parks have a \$113,000 deficit, and a negative amortization on a piece of property that has gone from \$179,000 to over \$240,000. When you look at the track record, it doesn't show good financial stewardship of taxpayer's money and yet we want more tax dollars. This is not a good time to be looking at a millage, given the history, track record, deficit, and the economy at this time.

Commissioner Moore and Commissioner Rae both stated that the County Commissioners would not be receptive to a millage given all the issues mentioned.

Commissioner Solis stated that he has been accused of asking the hard questions and not giving the praise that is deserved and he wanted to let the Parks Trustees Board know that he agrees with the other County Commissioners that the Parks Trustees have done a great job with the parks. He said that he is also looking forward to cooperating and finding solutions. Commissioner Solis commented that the hard questions have to be asked because we can't get beyond this situation unless we take an honest look at where we are, and how we got here. On the upcoming agenda for the County Board will be whether or not to expand the Road Commission. He is personally in favor of the expansion so that meetings can be held to discuss some of these issues without violating the Open Meetings Act and to bring two new perspectives to the table.

Commissioner Moore stated that in terms of direction, he would like to know what the Parks Trustees Board's understanding or comfort level is in making decisions that encumber the County. He feels that these types of decisions need to go before the County Board because it is ultimately County property or business.

Commissioner Travis stated that he feels that anything that has to do with the parks, the County needs to know what is going on because it is their property.

Commissioner Brown concurred with Commissioner Travis. As a suggestion, maybe the Parks Board should make recommendations to the County Board for approval. Commissioner Travis said that he didn't believe that the County Board wanted the Parks Board to go to the County Board for final approval. He feels that the County Board wants us to inform them of what is going on and let them have the opportunity for input before the BPW, Parks, and the Road Commissioners make a final decision.

Mr. Purcell said that he would take exception to not getting County Board approval for property. The acquisition or sale of property should go before the County Commissioners prior to the purchase or sale. After all, it is County property.

Mr. Randolph said that there is confusion here. There is a deficit in the Parks Fund; however, the property was a Road Commissioner action, which is totally separate from the Parks. As you know,

the Road Commission is far more separated from the County Board than the Parks Trustees. They are mixed together because the property is for the trails. The Road Commission, by law, has an obligation to spend money on non-motorized vehicle travel, and that is what that property has done. We have an obligation and the Road Commission has the authority by state law to take that action without any approval from the County Board.

Mr. Purcell said that if the Parks Trustees Board is purchasing or selling property, this would need to go before the County Board of Commissioners. As a Road Commission, Mr. Randolph is correct in saying that they have their own authority to purchase and sell property as they see fit. They have the obligation; therefore the deficit in terms of that property is not an obligation of the County, even though it is used for parks and trail purposes. It is a deficit of the Road Commission, but overall it's still a County issue. Commissioner Solis stated that the County receives complaints; therefore, communication still needs to be improved.

Commissioner Monaweck stated that the Parks Board would plan some new directions and certainly plan better communications with the County. Commissioner Monaweck said that he would certainly work toward making sure the County is more abreast of what is going on in the parks. He thought this was a good meeting and feels we have a new avenue to take now and will have better communication with the County Board.

Commissioner Moore asked if our Parks Trustees minutes are given out electronically. Mrs. Coats said that they are on our web site. He asked if they could be mailed out to each Commissioner and Mrs. Coats replied that she would do that.

Mr. Berezonsky asked if the Special Use Permit for the Silver Leaf Renaissance Faire is for the entire area. Mrs. Johnson said that it applies to the fenced-in area. Mr. Berezonsky stated that he went to the Bridge Park yesterday and said that you can't sit at a picnic table and have a conversation because of the noise from the highway. He inquired if they are going to put plaques on the bridges noting where they came from. Mr. Randolph said yes they were. Mrs. Johnson stated that our sign crew has made signs for each of the bridges.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Monaweck announced that the next regular meeting of the Parks Trustees Board is scheduled for Wednesday, August 1, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. following the 9:00 a.m. Calhoun County Board of Road Commissioners meeting. There being no additional business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:41 a.m.

Minutes of June 20, 2007

Charles E. Monaweck, Chairperson

Pixie Coats, Deputy Clerk