

**Whitewater Township Board
Minutes of Special Meeting held March 25, 2019**

Call to Order

Supervisor Popp called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. at the Whitewater Township Hall, 5777 Vinton Road, Williamsburg, Michigan.

Roll Call of Board Members

Board Members present: Treasurer Benak, Clerk Goss, Trustee Hubbell, Popp

Board Members absent: Trustee Lawson (on his way)

Others present: Deputy Supervisor Bachi, Rick Stout (Fleis & VandenBrink), and 9 others

Set/Adjust Meeting Agenda

There were no adjustments.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

None

Public Comment (2:09)

Shelly Rybarsyk, 9543 Palaestrum Road, stated she is here to address her concern about the proposed change to our township park. She is concerned about the speed that this is being rushed through without township residents' feedback. She guessed half the community is gone; snowbirds may not be aware that this is happening. She stated we have one of the prettiest township parks in the state. She feels like we want to turn the park into a metro marina. She asked if there has been any study done how many times during the summer we need 90 places for boat parking. Her guess is 4th of July, Labor Day, and Memorial Day. She also questions the proposed floating docks, whether they would be permanent storage for people or day storage. She questions who will do the upkeep and pay the liability and insurance. She wonders if anyone has done research on the feasibility of using floating docks on a lake considering they get very rough water.

(Trustee Lawson arrived at 6:05 p.m.)

She questions too, if they are permanent, if they are going to include boat lifts. Mooring a boat on Elk Lake without a boat lift is foolish.

(5:09)

Pat Pierce, 9500 Larsen Road, stated he lives a mile south of Whitewater Township Park. He stated, as a riparian, for himself, we do not own these beautiful waters, they should be shared, and some features of the new park he finds absolutely great. He said a fixed pier is a good idea. The boat cleaning station is fantastic and fits in with recent state passed laws that make boat owners aware of the dangers of invasive species. He hopes that is not left on the table in the future. The 4-lane boat launch is necessary, even for the 55 lots. The kayak launch is fantastic and will go well with the Elk Rapids Rotary Club's own plans for a kayak launch. He stated his concerns are upping the 42 present parking spots to 98. There is also two other spaces with a future possibility of 50 plus 24 additional possible overflow spaces for boats and trailers. This

would be a total of 172 possibly in the future. He stated this is a real concern for him and shows the direction that someone wishes to take the park from the 55-site campground to something quite different in the future. At 55 sites, he thinks a 22-boat floating ramp is just the right number. With 55 sites, about half of those people would have boats that they should be able to keep in the water instead of trailering every day in and out, and no one likes to see moored boats off the campsite. In light of all the possible parking spaces, he comes to one of three conclusions: Either someone has determined a very large future increase in outside day boaters, which he does not think is the case, or you are planning to substantially increase the number of campsites from 55 to some other very large number to accommodate 190-some parking spots, or what he fears most is that the township has plans to increase the 22 floating boat slips, which is substantiated once he sees the old plan which says 66. The much larger number of added boat trailer spaces would indicate that someone is thinking in the future of adding a lot more floating boat slips and changing the décor of this beautiful park that we all enjoy and appreciate to something quite unsightly from the water. He repeated that as a riparian, he has no control over who uses the water, but he does look out for his rights as a property owner, especially just one mile away, from the viewpoint of his privacy and the quiet and peace that he paid into to buy a lot on beautiful Elk Lake. He said he will always be at these meetings to protect that right.

(9:15)

James Rybarsyk, 9543 Palaestrum Road, stated this whole thing is being rushed forward so fast to try to get this grant money. Most of the public does not even have any idea what is going on here. This is just drastic overkill. He stated they take their boat out three or four times a week and they go by this thing and most of the traffic is on Labor Day, Memorial Day, and 4th of July. Sure, there are other weekends that they park up on the grass, but it is very limited. He stated you are turning this thing into like a metro area marina. He thinks it is drastic overkill and you are going to totally disrupt the community that we live in based upon what we have here in front of us. He stated he is totally opposed to it.

(10:38)

Sue Anderson, 9483 Palaestrum Road, said she is just reiterating the same thing she said at the first meeting for the record, which is a little bit on a different topic. She stated they have some mapping issues down in that area from Palaestrum and Cram where the GPS is now leading people down a private road through the conservancy to the park, even in the face of signage that says the park is not here. She said she does not know what has changed to make that happen, but last year was the first time. Her concern for that would be if we are looking to accommodate increased traffic separate from this plan, somebody needs to look into that mapping issue. She said she has already reported it to all the places that she is aware of that it can be reported. She also said from the standpoint of the owners who live directly south of the park property and share that property line, if you look from an aerial view, you can tell the current swimming beach kind of actually shoots people right off in front of their house, so the concern would be just as the development is happening, if there are going to be more boats in that area, that that is really well defined as to where that boating traffic should stop in front of that private residence, whatever the regulations are for that.

Agenda Items as Listed in Special Meeting Notice (12:22)**Revised Whitewater Township Park Conceptual Plan/Master Plan**

Rick Stout stated, with respect to the master planning process, it is not ever the intention that everything on a plan is getting built. The idea is to explore options, ideas, thoughts. He stated he does not think it was anybody's intention to end up building 178 parking spaces for trailers. There are a couple locations that we are saying either Option A, Option B. He stated the original thought process from the township's perspective is there is an issue with the launch. Looking at DNR standards, if you are looking at three to four launches, the average launch requires at least 30 spaces to be effective for trailer parking. How you do that, it could be a combination of overflow areas or a combination of building a permanent lot. It is really the purview of where do you want to go with the master plan. He stated the slip piers was a thought process of do you want to try to provide boat parking; you may not want to provide any. It may end up being two small finger piers just for somebody to tie up to. It does not have to be a series of piers. It could be two, or it could be just the fixed dock. He stated part of the process is to have that discussion on those items. In the process, they are trying to look out and explore and now try to funnel back down. All those things are up for discussion. If the direction is to scale those back, then that is the direction that we can modify the plan. First and foremost is exploring some of those options and saying you have a topographically challenged property; where are some of the areas that could be developed, just to try to give everybody a size, scale and scope. The same thing with the drain field; there is an Option A and an Option B. He stated he does not think it is anybody's intention to build two drain fields and drastically expand the campground. The intent with the campground is primarily going to be in the future of upgrading the power service to the existing sites. It is outside of this, and he does not think there has ever really been a discussion that the campground needs to be 150 spaces. It is more of that would be another stand-alone project of how do you operate those camp facilities to really serve the campers. As units get larger and larger and have more electrical need, the 20-amp and 30-amp services are not really working for camping.

It was noted by Benak that these are not just for campers. These would be for Whitewater Township citizens to come and use the boat launch and have a place to park also. They may not be staying in the campground.

Stout agreed, and stated one of the things is: Do those even end up being gravel lots? They do not necessarily have to be paved, which would have the advantage of letting water through and being permeable. He stated we are just trying to explore circulation, where could parking take place, how much parking. The direction at the last meeting was we had three boat launch bays. He stated he thinks the direction was that four would be more conducive, just in the ability to manage the traffic. He stated there is a lot of flexibility in the scale and scope, and that is part of the dialogue. There was the thought of potentially do you look at some scaled-back version of improvements in the ramp under a Waterways grant, which are typically due in April. He stated if your directive is to wait and postpone it for a year, that is totally up to the community.

Stout stated they tried to take some of the comments, addressing the kayakers, leaving the existing shelter building, trying to accommodate day user parking the best that we can. He stated the variable is what level do you want to really accommodate and how many boaters do you want to try to accommodate. It is a first-come, first-serve basis, and if it is 43 or 45 or it is 90,

when it is full, it is full. He stated that is the directive that needs to come from this board and the community.

Benak inquired of Stout: The time frame of April 1 to put your concept in for a grant through the Waterways, if we were to use this concept that is sitting before us today with modifications, whatever we submit by April 1, that is just a concept; you do not have to build everything that is there, but if you get a grant, you cannot build something that is not there. Benak gave an example of getting a grant for a stage one project and asked if, in a year or two, when we go for another grant, can we change this concept.

Stout said yes, any concept is never etched in stone; it is fluid. This grant opportunity on April 1 might be relocation of the drain field and improvements at the launch ramp and maybe some gravel parking for trailers. It is a master plan. It is not what is intended to try to be put in the ground this year. This may take 10 to 15 years to come to fruition. He stated we are trying to identify the whole, so that when you go forward, the pieces make sense. He stated he put overall what are the dollars involved, and it can be shrunken down to what are the key elements that have to happen first to make some of these things happen. It does not necessarily mean that there is going to be paving; it does not necessarily mean that you are going to build 120 parking spots for trailers. He thinks the idea of boat slips is something that may be 15 to 20 years down the road. It was just something to get the discussion going. Does it make sense; does it not make sense. He stated the worst thing that would happen, from their perspective, is someone would say, well, didn't you think about maybe having boat slips. Yes, we did, and it went through the process and the community said no, that is really not one of the priorities. That's where the concept started. These are ideas; let's talk about them, and if it makes sense to pull them back, let's pull them back.

Popp inquired when Stout supplied the document dated 3/22/2019 to the township.

Stout replied he believes 3/22.

Popp stated this is the first time he is seeing it; it was not included in the packet of information.

Goss noted the packet had already gone out.

Popp stated we had some residents the last time go through some of their own personal funds to kind of overlay with Stout's document where the current park resides. Popp stated he does not see that information on the provisional drawing. He thinks Keuvelaar did it on his own volition, and it showed many of the campsites within 5 to 10 feet of the parking lot.

Stout stated this was modified to pull the parking lot drastically back from the campsites.

Popp stated there is no delineation of where the existing campsites are.

Stout stated they have aerial information that the campsites are in the woods. They do not have a full survey. He stated that would be part of the process going forward, is refining that and getting that information, but they are going off aerial information the best they can.

Popp stated the e-mail of 3/19 was also not included in the packet, which covers some important verbiage on the plans indicating items that are scaled back. He said it would have been nice to have that in the packet so folks could understand what was going on. The drawing went out with no explanation.

Goss stated Mr. Stout is here to explain the drawing.

Goss went on to detail why the whole concept of expanding the launch is being undertaken, i.e., it is not just campers who use the boat launch; there is a lot of daily boat traffic that comes in to the launch. Campers are asked to take their trailers back to their campsite in order to allow the daily boaters to park in the launch parking lot. There is also overflow parking west of the ranger station, which cannot be seen from the water. There is a deficiency in the number of parking spaces as it sits right now. The launch can be very busy when there are three or four vehicles that want to launch boats and, if the weather takes a turn, multiple boats trying to get out of the water at once. Bass tournaments are occasionally hosted also. Dedicated parking for the pavilion is also needed. Goss stated the proposed additional drive which goes behind the ranger station is also needed. Incoming traffic on Park Road, traffic for the campground, and traffic for the boat launch all converge near the ranger station, creating a highly congested area and a major safety concern. The park has become a water trail site for Paddle Antrim. A location north of the current launch has been proposed for a kayak launch in order to keep non-motorized and motorized watercraft traffic away from each other, with the plan being that an ADA launch will be installed eventually. Parking is needed also in that location.

Addressing some of the concerns, Goss stated parking will not be located near campsites. There are currently no plans to expand the 55 sites at the campground. The biggest challenge in the campground is that the amperage at sites needs to be upgraded. Goss explained that the purpose of the parking spots is for camper boat traffic and daily boat traffic. Movement of the dump station and drain field down Park Road to a better location, and adding a boat washing station, is also under consideration. The ranger station needs to be replaced as well, perhaps with a small pre-built structure.

Goss reiterated that we need to address the traffic for safety concerns, as well as additional ramps to speed up the launching process. Being the only boat launch on the west side of Elk Lake, which is very popular because of its location on the Chain of Lakes, a lot of boaters use the park. The number of floating docks has been downsized on the plan but are not currently on the park's radar. The plan shows a lot of things that can be done at the park, but the price tag is not something the township can afford. Goss stated she is not a proponent of incurring huge debt for the park.

In answer to another concern, Goss stated we are not trying to rush this through. She stated she met with two representatives of Fleis & VandenBrink at the park last fall and they came up with the initial plan. The goal is to meet a 4/1 deadline to submit a Waterways grant application. The goal is not to do everything shown on the plan; it is to address the most immediate concerns, safety of campers, boaters, and park personnel via the road access, get some more availability of boat ramp, get the kayak launch. We do not need 120 boat parking places next year, but we do

need to start addressing some of these things. She stated it is not that the park will be busier if you build these things. The park has already gotten busy, the traffic is already there, and we are trying to address everyone's safety and get people where they need to be quicker.

Stout added that it is a long-term place-holding technique. What you build and how you build it may take five phases to do and not really touch anything more on the water other than the fixed dock and the ramp. He stated the day use area to the north and a kayak launch would probably be a separate grant application. The south would be the same; that could be another phase. You could do some reorganization at the entry way, but maybe that is phase two. Putting down numbers starts to put a little bit of reality to what can you afford and how fast do you want to do it.

Discussion followed concerning specific areas of the proposed plan and other comments:

- Parking for RVs at the ranger station instead of parking on the main road.
- The Baggs Road launch will be closed for the summer of 2019.
- Two-way traffic down the center spine.
- More logical flow at the entry way.

Discussion turned to scaling back the plan to something that can be applied for by April 1.

Part of the discussion was Stout's comment that the cost of the launch improvements would be between \$150,000 to \$175,000, as well as Benak's comment that she would like to see the cost of the different projects broken out separately so you can get a better idea of what to plan for in the future.

Popp commented that he prefers parking away from the million-dollar view and a new pavilion.

Benak commented that she likes the concept of the beach on the north.

Stout stated the concept is to connect some of these things and provide opportunities for universal accessibility.

Per Stout, communities have spent as much as \$70,000 to \$80,000 to do a kayak launch, which would include a universally accessible gangway and a floating system such as the EZ Dock system.

Possible parking areas were discussed, with Stout stating they are looking at what are the larger flat areas which, with a minimal amount of grading, could be converted into some type of parking. It was not envisioned that all of it be done. If you are going to look at a shuttle service, it equates out to over 2,000 feet.

Stout is estimating \$65,000 to relocate the drain field and the dump station.

Discussion again turned to the scale, scope, and cost of a first phase grant request.

Addressing the launch, additional parking even if it is gravel, and deferring the kayak launch, Goss stated she would like to see something that is not over \$400,000, and thinking about the park coming up with a couple hundred thousand dollars over a couple year period.

Goss offered that there may be some solutions which the park can do on their own to address the traffic and safety concerns at the ranger station area.

Stout offered a few suggestions for those concerns.

Popp expressed concern about using all of the funds the park has saved to complete a project, stating there should be a minimum balance established.

Discussion followed concerning using General Fund monies, the self-sustaining status of the park, costs spread over 2 to 2-1/2 years, not allowing the park to fall into disrepair, and other sources of grant monies.

Goss reiterated that she would like to see a scaled back project which includes improving the launch, adding some gravel parking, moving the drain field and dump station, and putting in the boat wash. Goss added that it is just a matter of trying to better serve the boating public, who spend a lot of money at local businesses in the area, and the need to make sure that the people who come here have safe and upgraded facilities to use.

Stout stated that having some type of plan will be important as the township pursues grant opportunities.

Goss reminded everyone that the park has not been supported by taxpayer money in many years; it survives on camping fees, boating fees, and the sale of other items.

In response to Goss's request, Stout stated he could prepare a revision that can be discussed at the board's meeting tomorrow night.

At this point, Popp stated tomorrow night's meeting agenda is already very full, the Whitewater Township Board needs to perform its due diligence on any future building or park expansion project, and insinuated that the fire station remodel project was grossly overbudget.

Benak stated the facts show it was not grossly overbudget.

Hubbell attempted to direct the discussion back to the topic at hand, at which time Popp became argumentative with Hubbell.

A call to order was voiced by Deputy Supervisor Ron Bachi and the argument ended.

Benak stated she would like to see the 16 spaces of trailer parking go back to the old concept, as well as the ranger station put back where it was.

Goss agreed, thanked Stout for traveling here, and stated they have done a great job.

Stout stated their goal is to be the board's advocate and take their direction.

Goss noted that at the kickoff meeting lots of ideas were thrown out, which is where the original plan came from. The engineering firm put everything on the plan, and no, the township cannot do all of it at once, and some of it may never be done, but we have to start somewhere.

In response to Benak's question regarding more conceptual meetings in the future to maybe revise the plan, Goss stated she is sure there will be, and they will be posted and public input will be welcomed.

Stout stated if the township gets the grant, then you will start getting things like a topographical survey, you will do a preliminary design phase, a final design phase. When you go for grants, it is about identifying the scope. It is not necessarily size or location, but you have the scope elements identified that you want to do and some general idea of where they are going to fit in.

Benak asked Stout: It is not unreasonable to say that a project of this scope that might be five, six, seven phases encompassing over a 10- or 15-year period of time would not have more roundtable discussions with the public about what is going to happen?

Stout replied that you will get through a phase and see something different and obviously you are going to make a course correction. Something in phase two might have spun off and changed and then all of a sudden you have to revisit it again.

Benak asked Popp if he had a different idea on parking.

Popp replied that, on page 2, where the ancillary parking is noted, would be advantageous for two reasons. One, we could leave the septage as it is, so we can address the overall problem of parking, along with at least one additional dock, maybe not two, as depicted on page one, which would then double our potential loading and unloading capability. But if we move parking some 2,000 feet away, that too is not without challenge. It is going to have major challenges. We are a linear park; we are a long way away from the water.

Benak asked Popp what he thought of Goss's idea of coming off the end of the existing parking area and making a gravel parking area there .

Popp stated he thinks that is an area of high value for the parking, and have thought it for many years. Where the nature trail is currently located, he does not see why that could not be trimmed off, cut off, and then filled. We would have to do some wetland investigation to make sure the vegetation would allow it to be filled.

Benak stated that also would be an option for additional parking in this phase. Benak stated she would love to move the septage, not necessarily because of all the parking, but because it gives us more options for the nice plateau we have sitting there. Benak stated she is interested in the gravel lot at the end of the current parking because it still keeps it in the general area, but it is not as expensive.

Stout stated it is closer, but he thinks it is going to have earth work and is going to be probably a higher construction than the other areas that are further away. He added that doing the boat wash with the drain field movement is going to require some type of ability to treat that water.

General discussion followed, involving the board and others present, concerning the new DNR requirement regarding boat washing.

Various questions from audience members were answered by Stout.

Popp inquired if board members had any other questions for Stout.

Benak confirmed with Stout that, even with the proposed movement of the swimming area to the north, the existing beach could be left where it is.

Popp inquired if there were other questions from the public.

Bob Reider, 9435 Fairview, asked why do you want to move the beach.

Janet Bachi, 6987 Cook Road, stated the two-lane road is not very safe for sizable boats.

Shelly Rybarsyk, Palaestrum Road, asked if people parking along the fixed dock will hinder the 4th ramp.

John Keuvelaar, 1701 Borton, Essexville, does not like the idea of the two-lane road. People are used to the one-way; it is a natural flow. He thinks it is worth looking at the nature trail for additional parking. The campers don't use the beach. He does not agree with putting money into a beach. He would like to see a place for kayaks, but \$80,000 is an awful lot.

The above questions were addressed by either Stout or members of the board.

Board Comments/Discussion (1:53:26)

None

Public Comment (1:53:42)

Ron Bachi, 6987 Cook Road, deputy supervisor, welcomed Popp back and stated we appreciate everything he does and how hard he fights for the community.

Sue Anderson, 9483 Palaestrum Road, stated she does appreciate the thoughtful dialogue, even the differences of opinion, and asking the community for their input, too. She wonders if it has already been done or considered to do more surveys of the people who camp at the park, the community, and the people affected. She stated she feels like the employees of the park are probably the first, most accurate voice of what is needed at the park. She was at the first meeting, and by her count, there were only about three there who were not park employees. Any attempts to get these opinions from people are good, and she appreciates all the differences of opinion.

Bob Reider, 9435 Fairview, stated one source of grant money is the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, as well as getting the support of the bass federation who has the big tournament.

Adjournment (1:56:25)

Motion by Lawson to adjourn; second by Hubbell. On voice vote, all those present voted in favor, none opposed. Meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl A. Goss
Whitewater Township Clerk