

## LUZERNE COUNTY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES ADVISORY BOARD

**Meeting minutes:** March 5, 2018

Vice-President Michele Schasberger called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM followed with the pledge to the flag and roll call.

**Attendance:** Michele Schasberger, Stephen Maakestad Absent: Carol Husa, Rich Adams

County: Eddie O'Neill, Operational Services Director for Luzerne County, Daniel Butch, Transportation Planner, Luzerne County Planning Commission

Tim McGinley, Chair of the Luzerne County Council was also in attendance.

Carol Husa is travelling, but Michele will try to call Rich ahead of time next month, but not on a Monday (his business is closed on Mondays in winter).

**Motion to approve meeting minutes:** Meeting minutes for February approved without corrections. Minutes will be sent to Sharon Lawrence. Noted that minutes might have been approved without a quorum (only two of four members present).

**Board Reorganization and new board members:** the Recreational Facilities Advisory Board is still short one board member, and neither board members Rich Adams nor Carol Husa were in attendance. Board agreed to wait until all appointed board members are in attendance and Mr. Maakestad had some experience with the Board before re-organizing officers.

### **Discussion items:**

4-a) Levee Trail Interpretive signs: *(Background information) Existing interpretive panels were installed in 2003, and are 15 years old. Because they were only designed to be up for 10 years, they are cracked and faded and needing replacement. Replacement panels have been located at the Flood Protection Authority, but Board has also discussed locating digital files before putting up replacement.*

*Michele located digital files from Keith Ragone, the graphic designer for the original project in 2003. She noted that he said a CD of the data would be \$750, but that the files were in a legacy Quark Xpress format. It would cost \$75 per panel for Keith to open and translate the files and output as a .pdf, meaning that the cost of translating the files in total would be about \$4650 or more. There are 62 unique panels installed per the Flood Protection Authority inventory, and there may be more designed files that were never installed. The County has received paid for and received a disk from Keith Ragone.*

- Eddie is waiting for April to contact Pat Stephens of the D&L to schedule installation when winter is finally over. Eddie will also contact IT Director Mauro DiMauro to see if the County can begin the process of converting files internally when IT has spare time.

4-b) River Common: *(Background information) Luzerne County, Wilkes University, Kings College and the Riverfront Parks Committee finalized an agreement to jointly fund programming and maintenance on River Common, with the each university contributing \$20,000 and the County contributing \$10,000 from Act 13 Conservation & Recreation funding for the next five years. County Council approved this agreement on Tuesday November 14<sup>th</sup>. The County has additional obligation for maintenance of the park.*

The biggest issue at River Commons is ice damage to facilities, which is widely prevalent. Events (Winterfest) are on hold until ice recedes. Eddie said he is anticipating using some of the Marcellus Shale rec funds to repair the damage, as well as some possible contractors available for the job. There is no way of knowing what the damage is until the ice melts, possibly another month. Jim Brozena, the former director of the Flood Protection Authority and County Engineer, who has a lot of institutional

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knowledge about the construction of River Common, has said he will meet with Eddie and others to help assess the damage.

4-b) Forty Fort Recreation Fields. *(Background) The West Side COG are having their lawyer (Forty Fort Solicitor) preparing much of the deed work prior to submitting their official request for acquisition of parcels at the Forty Fort Recreational Complex to be used to build a recycling center. Leases for Forty Fort Soccer and Whitewater Challengers are still pending but use of the fields during the 2017 season has gone well with no complaints. Eddie noted, no updates about this*

4-c) Bi-County Downtown Bicycle Circulation Study. No updates. Still waiting for release of RFP/RFQ.

4-d) Skate park: *(Background): River Common is currently being used as an unauthorized skate park which is causing vandalism and destruction. Portal doors have been dented—flood protection depends on ability to roll out gates stored in portal. The City of Wilkes-Barre has enforcement responsibility, but the level of enforcement in place is not impacting the problem. Neither the County, nor the City are likely to take on the responsibility for an additional facility due to perception of risk, and also limited budgets to manage current facilities.)*

No updates: Larry Newman of the Diamond City Partnership, the WB Downtown business revitalization organization has a downtown/close to downtown skate park on his to-do list for this year.

### **5- LC Recreation and Conservation Request for Support**

*Background: There are two Request for Supports outstanding. The First request for support from Marcellus Shale legacy funds was released in 2015, awarded spring of 2016, with funding released in June of 2016. There were about 20 applicants and limited funding, so not everyone received funding. Some County Councilmembers questioned the length of process, results and need for criteria. In 2017 County Council managed a process that was simpler, but again many more applicants than funding. Because it would have been so time-consuming to try to decide between applicants, Council split the funding equally between all applicants regardless of project size, with everyone receiving about \$3500.*

*In the request for support for 2016, funding was divided into two parts, with second part to be received on completion of project and reporting documentation.*

Board members and County officials in attendance, including Mr. McGinley, had an active discussion of the status of the first and second requests for support. We agreed the funding for the first request for support had been encumbered, so it was still available for organizations finishing their projects. Projects had been envisioned to be 18 months at most, so they should be closing soon, and organizations should certainly be informed that it was time to finish up.

We noted that Sharon Lawrence, the Clerk for the County Council, has been managing the program among many other responsibilities. The funding, and the responsibility for closing the program lies with County Council. A specific end date was not set for the program.

Michele noted that we still don't know exactly how many projects have been completed and reimbursed. Eddie said he had a chart of awarded funds that he had sent to Sharon Lawrence to complete so that we would know this, but he did not think he had received updated information. He will communicate with Sharon again.

We discussed the possibility of requesting funds to be returned in the event a project was not significantly completed, as required by the contract signed with County Council. We agreed that this would be difficult to do, and that the appropriate sanction for not completing a project would be to not receive future funding, especially for the smaller projects.

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Successful closing of the first request for support program may have an impact on how much funding is available for recreation in 2018, as applicants that were not able to complete projects will not receive the second reimbursement, letting it be available for other uses.

Tim noted that the second request for support also included a contract that required recipients to complete their specific grant funded project, and that the funding was divided into two parts. A number of applicants turned down the funding initially, because it was limited compared to their project size. Some of these then found additional funding, and asked if they could receive the grant because they had the ability to fund the project.

In discussion, we noted the need for continuing management for both the first and second request for support—for example, how many organizations have received initial funding, submitted final paperwork showing completed projects, received final funding, and closed out their grant. In other counties (Wyoming), the planning department has been responsible for the grant management process. There are other agencies in the County as well with grant management experience. Having an agency manage the grant process does not take authority away from County Council, though most agencies are already busy, and it may relieve Sharon Lawrence, if this is something she and/or County Council wants to investigate. Michele asked what the timeline for the second request for support was, and suggested that the first request should be closed before a third one is released.

### **6- Need for Board Members-Swearing In**

There is still a vacant position on the Luzerne County Recreational Facilities Advisory Board. Carol took a picture of the board when Stephen joined to send to the newspaper as publicity, though this has not gone out yet. At this time there are few applications for positions. When there are a number of applications, the ABC Committee of County Council will hold an interview session. When individuals are appointed they now have to be sworn in. Text of initial oath/document to be notarized provided to Stephen Maakestad was not accurate, but he has received the correct one now, and will (has?) remediated any problems with the swearing in.

### **7- Recreational Facilities in Luzerne County-General**

Pennsylvania Environmental Council is holding their annual Conservation Landscape Goals meeting, which helps to set regional recreational policies in cooperation with partners and PA DCNR.

### **8- New Business**

No new business

**Next Meeting:** April 2nd at 5:30- note time

**Motion to adjourn by:** Michele; all in favor

Meeting adjourned at 7:00PM

**Recorded and submitted:** Michele Schasberger, Vice-president