

Harbor Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 17, 2015, 5:30 p.m.
Council Chambers, South Haven City Hall



City of South Haven

1. Call to Order by Arnold at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Pyle, Stegeman, Stephens, Arnold
Absent: Sullivan, Reineck, Silverman

2. Approval of Agenda

VandenBosch requested the addition of a Recreation Plan Amendment Resolution as Item #11.

Motion by Stegeman, second by Stephens to approve the February 17, 2015 Regular Meeting Agenda with the addition of Item #11, Recreation Plan Amendment Resolution.

All in favor. Motion carried.

3. Approval of Minutes: January 20, 2015 Regular Meeting

Motion by Stephens, second by Stegeman to approve the January 20, 2015 regular meeting minutes as written.

All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Interested Citizens in the Audience Will be Heard on Items Not on the Agenda

There were none.

5. Marina Reports

VandenBosch reviewed the Marina Reports, noting revenue, expenses and cash and investment balances.

6. Reducing Erosion and Sedimentation

VandenBosch welcomed Matt Meersman and commented that we are always looking for ways to reduce sedimentation and the need to dredge the harbor and it sounds like one of the best ways we can do that is support the work that the Conservation District is doing.

Matt Meersman, Van Buren Conservation District: Stated he was here three (3) years ago in regards to wetlands. Spoke about the big announcement in St Joseph in regards to the six million dollars (\$6,000,000) in funding brought in for the St. Joseph River watershed. Noted that the Conservation District is doing something in the village of Paw Paw with a bunch of other partners, explaining that there are two scales; the St. Joseph River watershed falls into the big scale and Paw Paw is on the smaller scale, but the model still fits and works.

Meersman: "If we care about the water we have to think about the watershed. We get out in the landscape; there is a lot of agricultural property on the rivers. Farming practices are not all of it; there is an urban part, too, roads and rooftops."

Meersman spoke to wetland loss as a huge part of the issue of sedimentation. "Studies show that fifty-two percent (52%) of the wetlands of the Black River have been lost." Spoke about what functions the wetlands serve and noted that forty-three percent (43%) of sediment retention has been lost. "We still have sediment issues. We've lost sixty-one percent (61%) of our ability to hold floodwaters. Meersman noted that monitoring reflects what was seen years ago; the corridor is largely vegetated but there is a lot of bank erosion. "This is instream erosion; the water getting into the channel and the channel not being able to handle the volume. A lot of the sediment is from the stream channel itself." Preventing clean water from dumping into the river includes things like rain gardens and farming practices; according to Meersman planting cover crops is the main thing the conservation district pushes. "A non-commodity crop you don't intend to harvest planted before and after the main crop you plan to harvest; even planting a cover crop around blueberry bushes provides something to keep roots in the soil all year long, prevents weed overgrowth and the roots going down into the soil helps promote infiltration," Meersman noted.

Meersman then informed the board about the Paw Paw River project, noting that Maple Lake is the center piece of the village of Paw Paw. "It's a manmade lake; the south branch of the Paw Paw River is heavily drained; there has been wetland loss, the water is slow and the lake is filling with sediment." Meersman pointed out that past practice was to dredge the lake and pile the dredge spoils nearby but with so many prohibitions and restrictions of where dredge spoils could be put dredging became too costly.

Meersman explained the village of Paw Paw took fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) of tax money and put that up as a cash match and applied for a grant to do a watershed project with the Van Buren Conservation District to do outreach to the farmers in the area. "We have a cost share program, not unlike federal programs that are out there." Meersman noted that there is a long line to get into the federal money, with the money the village put up the conservation district was able to get cover crops planted in the first year.

"We used an airplane to fly over and plant cover crops in four hundred sixty (460) acres. We have a tool in the Paw Paw watershed; you can go online and draw a line around the area where you have the cover crops planted and you can see how much sedimentation has been prevented. With seven thousand dollars (\$7,000) we kept about forty thousand (40,000) tons of sediment from getting into the south branch of the Paw Paw River. Although we only have this fifty thousand (\$50,000) for now, we can get these guys started and then they can get in line for National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) money."

Meersman stated that while the money awarded to the St. Joe watershed won't help the Black River watershed any, it will help the Paw Paw River get in line. "We just need to put

together a group of partners to make an application for a grant.” Meersman noted that it’s the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which is like a grant. “Say you could come up with \$20,000 and get some partners; it doesn’t have to be a cash match, it could be time or resources. It’s not a grant; it’s money that is dedicated for Black River Watershed farmers and it makes the line a lot shorter than a state grant. You’re not competing with the entire state.”

Meersman suggested looking at this as a challenge. “You need a champion, could it be the Harbor Commission?” Meersman does not know who or what organization might be here for the Black River watershed and noted that for the St. Joseph watershed it was the Friends of the St. Joe River which was able to bring in partners.

“Another possibility is that half or more of your watershed is in Van Buren County; the Van Buren County drain commissioner has been working with us on a project which was piloted in the same area as the land that drains into Maple Lake.” According to Meersman, a lot of the Black River watershed is heavily drained and people who live along a drain have to pay a drain assessment when work is done in that drain. Most of that work is dredging out the drain, along with culverts under roads, bank stabilization, etc. Meersman noted that drain tax, historically, was based on acres; if you had a ten (10) acre parcel you paid twice as much as the neighbor with the five (5) acre parcel. “Now there are tax classes to address who gets more benefit. New data exists now and we more accurately determine that assessment.” For example, Meersman gave the following example: take two two-hundred acre parcels; one used for road crops and the other for hunting land, fallow land. “Now we are able to look at land cover data instead of tax class. We can tell how many acres are used for agriculture and how much of that is covered with greenhouses and how much is natural land. That’s a start, but management practices now will make the difference in how the property is assessed. Conventional tillage or using cover crops or no-till; we have models to determine how much is being done on each property. The difference in tax status based on practice reinforces good behavior.”

Meersman also noted that the Black River watershed has two counties that drain into the Black River and pointed out that the St. Joseph watershed had two states that drain into the St. Joe River. “It creates challenges but it can happen. We have identified who these farmers are, and actually gone out and talked to them about what they can do and how it can help them. This could be a model for something to be done up here.”

Pyle asked who does the assessing and whether they go out into the field. Meersman responded that assessing is all done at a computer; GIS programs are used along with a simple multiplication formula done in an assessment program. Pyle questioned whether this information is updated annually to which Meersman responded that yes, it is. “It’s not exact, but it really helps, depending on how things change. There is a review process and the farmers can come in annually and it will change according to what they are planting and how they are managing.”

Stegeman commented that he thinks it was six million eight hundred thousand dollars (\$6.8M) that St. Joe got.

7. Turning Basin Permit Proposal

VandenBosch noted that the city’s dredging permit for the turning basin expires on June 28, 2015. One of our strategic plans is to keep a permit in place. VandenBosch contacted

Abonmarche to put together a proposal for such a dredging permit and explained the various costs included in the proposal, noting that part of the bid is for sixteen thousand dollars (\$16,000) and one part is time and material. VandenBosch noted that it takes quite a bit of time to get a permit and we may not have a permit by June; his recommendation is get started and get that permit application going.

Motion by Stephens that VandenBosch move forward with pursuing a permit for maintenance dredging, sediment testing, dredge spoils site selection assistance and MDEQ/USACE (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality/United States Army Corps of Engineers) permit application preparation for the turning basin and Friends Good Will channel which is expiring on June 6, 2015. Second by Pyle.

Stegeman asks about the cost of the sample analysis, as he feels it is a little out of line, and wondered if VandenBosch can work with Abonmarche on that. VandenBosch said he will ask that they get a quote from a local company for the sediment sample analysis. Stegeman said most samples go to a lab up north and includes extraction; we have a local guy who did it for one hundred dollars (\$100) a sample, so we could probably cut that bill by seventy-five percent (75%). VandenBosch agreed that would reduce the cost.

All in favor. Motion carried.

8. Dredging Capital Plan

VandenBosch added engineering (putting together bid specs for dredging, and doing soundings before and after, contractor oversight); permitting and river and federal channel dredging engineering. VandenBosch told the board, "We need to be putting away about \$140,000 per year; based on past experience that is roughly our cost to maintain what we formerly maintained and the federal channel which the Army Corps is abandoning."

Stegeman asked the average depth to which dredging is done and VandenBosch noted that that figure is different upriver of the bridge than downriver and the turning basin is usually dredged to about eleven (11) or twelve (12) feet. Stegeman noted we have one deep draft sailboat in the harbor and asked what it draws to which Stephens responded eight feet nine inches (8'9").

VandenBosch commented on last month's discussion of a different strategy which would include docks in the project and stated that he does not know how that would affect the cost but will talk to Abonmarche. "At the moment," VandenBosch stated, "I would like Abonmarche to focus on our grant projects and the turning basin. There will be savings for dock owners but the question is, are they willing to pay an assessment for it? A lot of details need to be worked out."

Stephens commented that we need to be putting in place a plan to set aside a lot of money to do this project. VandenBosch agreed and went over the figures for the dredging and the engineering costs.

Discussion ensued regarding special assessments. Stegeman asked what kind of outline we would have for a workshop and how assessments would be done. VandenBosch explained it has been done by number of docks in the past, but that he needs to think about how to put such a project together noting that it is not only the assessment side, but the funding side and how to get dredging done on a regular basis. "We've reacted in an emergency situation so

many times,” VandenBosch commented, “What is the best way to maintain a regular maintenance dredging schedule?” VandenBosch noted that he is not sure we need to react quickly because of Lake Michigan high water, adding, “We may need to dredge the one mound we have in the turning basin, but I think talking about a future dredging plan now is good preparation in case the Lake level changes.” VandenBosch pointed out that we need to figure out the most cost-effective way to dredge and put together some options. Stephens asked if we should put together a sub-committee to brainstorm. VandenBosch is open to a special meeting or a sub-committee to discuss how to move forward and put a plan in place. Stephens thinks we should be proactive as opposed to reacting. VandenBosch pointed out there are so many people out of town right now, maybe it would be good to start in April. Stephens said it would be good to know what other harbors do. Stegeman said our biggest hurdle is that we are not a commercial harbor any more.

VandenBosch spoke about the Small Harbor Coalition he is a part of which is trying to find a solution. VandenBosch noted that he needs to start using some of his contacts to see what other people are doing, stating that the city has hired out dredging and talked to the Army Corps, which is fairly inexpensive, but the Corps only wants to do the federal channel. Stegeman said our advantage is that our harbor is small as opposed to other harbors which are more spread out. VandenBosch said he needs to learn a bit about dredging before we start meeting with other people and talking about assessments.

Motion by Stephens to have a workshop in April to determine how to move forward. Second by Pyle.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Stegeman suggested if we have no business in April we could substitute the workshop or couple them together.

Stegeman noted that we know we have the turning basin mound and the other issue at the channel mouth.

9. Budget

VandenBosch pointed the board to page thirty-two (32) of the packet, Marina Fund Budget, and noted that we need money in the next fiscal year to do the work that we are applying for grant funding this year. The necessary reserve fund make it impossible to do the last four (4) items on the list.

VandenBosch also pointed out the handout he provided for the board regarding grants staff is working on right now.

VandenBosch explained the budgeting process, and asked for a motion, noting that goes to the city manager who then takes it to City Council.

Motion by Pyle to recommend the 2015 budget as presented. Second by Stephens.

All in favor. Motion carried.

10. Customer Satisfaction Surveys

VandenBosch suggested the board look at the customer satisfaction surveys and discuss the results next month, noting that he did not put the surveys in the agenda packet due to personal information included.

Stegeman asked if this is a cross-section or all we received and who received surveys. Marple said, "Surveys were sent to all seasonal boaters, and yes, this is all we received." After a question, Marple explained that there are comment cards for the transient boaters to fill out and commented that he needs to increase the emphasis for next year.

Stegeman asked what the return rate is of responses. Marple said we are touching two hundred (200) seasonal boaters; we are about at ten percent (10%). Marple said some of the comments have been emphasized verbally towards him and other members of the staff. "An example is that we have been asked to put paper towel dispenser in the boater restrooms. The way the bathrooms are designed will make it difficult to find a good spot. The most serious incident we had was to have a seasonal boater's dog attack another dog at the marina and I had to ask the folks not to bring their dog anymore and we did lose a seasonal boater. That was the most serious incident we had. "Now some of the boaters have rambunctious dogs, on occasion," Marple said, "I haven't discussed this with VandenBosch yet; some long term boaters, one in particular, his dog is on the edge of a little bit obnoxious, for lack of a better word, and some of the boaters don't appreciate it."

Stegemen suggested using something like <https://www.surveymonkey.com/> in the future for the boater surveys as it is easier to collate the data. Pyle commented that there might be more responses. Discussion ensued regarding using an internet survey.

Motion by Stephens to move discussion of the surveys to the March meeting. Second by Stegeman.

All in favor. Motion carried.

11. Recreation Plan Amendment Resolution

VandenBosch found out in December that to get our waterways grant, which includes the Black River Park driveway, Southside marina and dock engineering, we have to include the harbor in our Recreation Plan. VandenBosch has put together our capital plan and strategic plan and packaged it as a Recreation Plan Amendment. This amendment will be going to City Council on Monday and if approved we are going to try to get it together and package it as the deadline is March 1, 2015. As part of that, VandenBosch noted, the Harbor Commission would have to recommend adoption of the Recreation Plan Amendment

Motion by Stegeman to recommend to City Council the adoption of Resolution Number 15-02, a resolution recommending the Marina and Harbor Amendment to the South Haven Recreation Plan. Second by Pyle.

Discussion ensued regarding a change that was recommended by the commission at the last meeting, which appears in the meeting minutes on page nine (9) of the packet, which Stephens does not see in this amendment. After discussion, VandenBosch said he made that change and thinks he may have provided the wrong version as a handout. Stephens expressed concern with approving the amendment without that verbiage; Stegemen pointed out that we approved the minutes and it is in the minutes.

Member and Staff Comments

Stegeman: Thursday of this week is the Steelheaders_membership meeting at 7:00 pm at South Haven Moose. Jay Wesley is to give an update on the Great Lakes Fisheries. In May we have Dan O'Keefe, the Salmon Ambassadors guy for the Michigan State University Extension; they do the tracking of the tags in the noses of fish that people turn in. It will give an idea where the fish caught in South Haven are originating.

Pyle: Spoke about the need to be sure everyone knows how important the fishermen are; we need to protect that as well as tourism. Stegemen noted that the fishing is changing and we need to be sure people know this is still a destination harbor for fishing. Pyle feels we are going in the right direction with the fish cleaning station upgrade.

Pyle: Asked when the docks will be put in to which VandenBosch responded, "April 1, 2015 as long as the ice is gone."

Marple: Informed that a large number of the stands for the interpretive signs are on order so they can be installed this spring.

Arnold: Noted our next meeting is St. Patrick's Day. VandenBosch noted that he has at least one item on the agenda already.

Adjourn

Motion by Stegeman, second by Stephens to adjourn at 6:37 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary