November 1, 2013

Parks Board Members: Susan Merrill, Chairperson
Sam Bixler
Chris Szell
Mayor Lou Bertrand

Beautification Commission Members: Alan Donley, Councilman
Ellen Dempsey, Athletic Director with Hiram College

Official Recorder: Susan Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

Others Present:

General: Chairperson Susan Merrill called the meeting to order at 8:32 am. The board reviewed the minutes of 10/4/13. A motion to accept the minutes as presented was made by Chris Szell and seconded by Sam Bixler. Mayor Bertrand abstained due to his being absent, all other ayes, the motion passed.

Grants: The first order of business was discussion on the two grants for the new Hiram School Park. Chris was still unclear on the funding for the park; it was purchased for $160,000, not the $180,000 as indicated on the grants? Mayor Bertrand explained when the project started back in January of 2008, Council voted to make a finding that the school was a hazardous place; the basement was full of water. The Village then went to the Portage County Commissioners, applied for and received a CDBG grant for approximately $100,000 to tear down the school. The Village received bids to tear down the building of under $90,000 and also removed asbestos for an additional $15,000. Two studies had to be done on the building prior to teardown which was also paid for by a grant of $3,500. The Village then made application to the State for a park. Two different grants were awarded, one for about $16,000 and one for $70,000. At that time, townhouses were proposed for that area in the middle of the Village, the property was rezoned for that purpose and then it fell through. The property had to be appraised through a yellow book appraiser; it was appraised at $300,000. The Village paid the cost of the appraisal. The Village purchased the property for $160,000 with the property owner making a donation to the Village of $140,000. Without his donation, he would have had to pay for the cleanup through a lien on his property. The Village obtained a cash collateral loan to pay for the property with $85,912 being covered by two grants; the Nature Works grant and the Land & Water Conservation grant. The balance the Village would owe for the property would be approximately $76,000. At the time we made application for the grant, they required some sort of plan of what we planned to do. One option that was presented was that the Village could enter into a lease with Hiram College for use as a baseball field including the use as a public ball field. Looking over the grant documents, Chris said the Village applied to the Nature grant for $24,000 and received $15,912 and to LWCF for $70,000 and received the full amount. Susan Merrill questioned in the grant application, the documentation of local funds. It says in the documentation that Hiram College will provide any local funds necessary to the Village to purchase this land in a first step to providing the community with additional recreational facilities. Further down it then talks about a lease. Chris Szell read under question #4 where it states that Hiram is working with the contractor, who took down the building, to use the excess funds to construct a parking lot and paved walkway from the lot to the existing ball field backstop; where are those excess funds? The Mayor was not sure since so much time has passed since the tear down and the Village was the flow through agency. Chris read on where it referenced having handicap accessibility. The language
continues to refer to it being a “public neighborhood park”, not necessarily a ball field. Susan Merrill referred board members to Form 10, page 35 in the LWCF regarding private leases; it must be perpetually operated and maintained solely for outdoor public recreation or natural resource purposes. Her concern is in #3 where it speaks about all leases that convey rights to non-public interests to access or use on lands proposed are listed. The Mayor understands that there are some Colleges and Universities that use public properties for their fields.

Ellen Dempsey said Doug McGee wrote the grant; he would be the best person to explain the reasoning behind why he wrote the grant in that way.

Chris Szell wondered if ODNR would consider a lease with the College as violating our grant agreement. Chris does not recommend asking them; it may raise questions and call into question our grant.

Susan Merrill asked Ellen where the money would come from to maintain a field. Ellen said the College now has a maintenance budget that would cover it. She added that there must be year-round continuous maintenance by the College on a field or you fall behind and never recover.

Chris asked Ellen if she knew what fertilizer is used by the College. Ellen said she would have to ask the landscape contractor. Chris would like to see only organic fertilizers. Children & pets will be using the park.

**NCAA Field Requirements:** Chris passed out aerial maps showing a ball field in two different scenarios. Ellen said the dimensions of the outfield are “recommended”; we will need to have an architectural rendering completed for a ball field. Chris said we have 1.4 acres left for other park activities. Ellen felt this is one piece of many smaller pieces in our area that would eventually connect together with the hike-n-bike paths.

The board went on to discuss the differences between an NCAA field and a little league field. Ellen pointed out that you would not play a softball game on a baseball regulation field.

**Community Meeting Agenda:** Board members discussed what would be needed for the Community meeting set for November 13th at Koritansky Hall. We would like to have a podium with a wireless microphone. Index cards for the public to write down their ideas and provide their email addresses. A power point would be beneficial just to put a picture up of a map of the property. Maybe have copies on hand of our 2020 Comprehensive Plan on CD for anyone interested. In addition, it would be good to also have post it notes, stickers and poster board for gathering up the public’s ideas and separating them into categories.

The first order of business at the meeting will be to introduce the Parks Board members. Second, a brief explanation of the property; do not bring up the topic of a ball field; just ask the public for their input and ideas. The Mayor will be given five minutes to provide an overview of what steps were taken to acquire the property and where we stand now with its development.

Next Meeting will be on Thursday, December 5, 2013 at 8:30 am.

**Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Sam Bixler and seconded by Susan Merrill. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:43 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted by: 

Susan J. Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

Approved:

Susan Merrill, Chairperson