Hiram Recreation & Park Board  
2nd Community Meeting  
Council Chambers  

March 19, 2014

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

Council Members Present:  
Tom Wadkins, Chairman  
Chris Cobb  
Rob Dempsey  
Paul Spencer

Official Recorder:  
Susan Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

Non-Village Residents Present:  
Tim Kasper

General: Chairperson Susan Merrill called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm and introduced the members of the Park Board. She asked that anyone wishing to give a presentation of the possible use of the park property to please raise their hand and they will be called upon and asked to come to the front of the room to give their presentation.

Mr. Gary Spencer, a Village resident since 1939 who lives on Kenyan Drive. He envisions this property as the “main” park for the Village; much more accessible to the majority of residents. He spoke about the shared use of the property between the College and the Village for a field for ball games and little league games. It costs money to install a field and maintain a field. The property has poor drainage. A gazebo for maybe a community band and other events or a small amphitheater for cultural events would be nice. Hiram was never really laid out for a “Town Square”.

Mr. Tim Kasper, a Township resident who lives on Cheryl Drive. He has three children; his wife works at the College. He would like to see open space, a prairie, a playground or central gathering place. A trail way, a pavilion or a small lodge would be great. Maybe the Village could have a partnership with the Township for a community park. He did not think moving the current park was a cost effective move.

Mr. Chris Szell, a Village resident and Park Board member gave a PowerPoint presentation showing the benefits of having the property converted into an open prairie for native wildflowers. Ohio Prairie prepared a quotation of $7,685 for the initial costs of installing a prairie. The maintenance for a prairie would be to perform a burn every three years. This would be performed by someone with a license and only under the right conditions. The field station at Hiram College has an extensive prairie program; we can work together. Prairies can be done on a small scale; it could be one component of the overall site.

Mr. Steve Merrill, a Village resident presented his ideas for the park. He would like to see incorporated a “fitness walk” or “fitness path” if you will. He obtained prices to install a fitness walk of approximately $6,500 plus 50 bags of concrete and 30 hours to install the exercise stations. It comes with a 10-year warranty.
There was a comment made by a resident, who did not give her name, she would like to see some memento placed on the property reflecting that the Hiram Village School was there. Another comment was made indicating the school actually served as a high school before it was an elementary school. Tom Wadkins added that there was a memorial tree planted on the property in memory of a student.

Mr. Sam Bixler, a Village resident “forever” and a Park Board member said these questions and concerns need to be addressed before moving forward with any plans.

Mr. Tom Wadkins reiterated that the park property would not exist without all the work done by the Mayor.

Mayor Lou Bertrand spoke briefly on the costs associated with the property. The cost of demolition was $100,000. The property was valued at $300,000 with the Village paying $160,000 after the property owner agreed to a tax deductible gift of $140,000. The two grants received to help purchase the property for a park totaled $85,912. The Village owes $74,400, which was a cash collateral loan secured through the bank.

Mr. Tom Wadkins said the College wants to use it for an NCAA ball field; there is no commitment made at this time.

The Hiram Community Trust funds were put in place by the former principal of the Hiram School.

Mr. Gary Spencer wondered whether the property should be rezoned to protect it from development or deed restricted.

Everyone was asked to fill out a post-it with ideas for what the property should be used for; what the property should not be used for and their concerns. Once they had their ideas on paper, they were asked to place them on three labeled poster boards and the Park Board members then tallied up all the ideas.

Property should be used for:
- Fourth of July festivities
- Trail around the perimeter (3)
- Ball field
- Open public gathering space
- Open park land/Natural/Prairie (4)
- Gazebo/Stage/Performance facility (4)
- Playground/Play area/Picnic area
- Ice skating in winter/Sports/Winter sports-cross country
- Meadow/Gazebo/Exercise path
- Dog park/Natural area
- School Commemoration (2)
- Park w/Co-op of Village/Township/College

Property should not be used for:
- Just as open space/Not the way it is (2)
- Parking lot (5)
- Keep mowing unless playfield
- Ball park/College baseball field/NCAA (8)
- Only 1 use, prefer multiple uses (3)
- Apartments
- To make money

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Concerns:
- Prohibitive College use (inaccessible to residents) (4)
- Leased to College (limited public use) (3)
- Make sure area is used
- Remove or move parking lot
- Finances (2)
- Trees should be preserved (i.e. Memorial Tree) (7)
- Money owed on property (how would we amortize the $74,000 loan)

There was general discussion centered on an NCAA ball field. Cooperation with the College would be encouraged, including cooperation with music and theatre departments and how an outdoor venue could serve the College and Community. There was discussion about prairies and the fact that they do have problems with invasive species of weeds such as multi-flora rose and thistle if not managed properly.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Susan J. Skrovan, Fiscal Officer

Approved:

Susan Merrill, Chairperson