

Harbor Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 16, 2012
5:30 p.m., City Hall Council Chambers
South Haven City Hall



City of South Haven

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

Roll Call

Present: Jeffers, Pyle, Silverman, Strong, Sullivan, Arnold
Absent: Stephens

Also present: Brandy Gildea, Parks and Recreation Supervisor

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Silverman, second by Sullivan to approve the agenda with the following addition:

- Item 7. Van Buren County Conservation District

All in favor. Motion carried.

3. Approval of Minutes: September 18, 2012 Meeting

Motion by Silverman, second by Sullivan to approve the September 18, 2012 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

None at this time.

October 16, 2012
Harbor Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes

5. Marina Reports

VandenBosch gave an overview of the Marina Reports, noting that there is still time to get deposits for seasonal rentals of slips. After questions, VandenBosch explained that the deadline for deposits is in November. VandenBosch noted that the months of April, May and June were good especially compared to last year. The months of August and September were very low and the difference may be using the State reservation system. VandenBosch pointed out that the boat launch did very well; last year we did not have the cards but this year we do and the system is back up. VandenBosch reviewed the River Maintenance Fund, noting that there will be some money available for dredging. The board discussed how the costs of dredging will be shared; half of the cost will be paid by the River Maintenance Fund.

Silverman wondered if dredging is done on both sides of the bridge, but not getting to the high spots. Silverman said the Harbor Commission recommended to the City Council two meetings ago that City Council start developing a funding source for dredging. Silverman noted that the special assessment process is lengthy, due to discussion on who to assess, and the public wants to weigh in on that. VandenBosch noted that a special assessment is generally tied to a specific project.

VandenBosch noted that the City is taking bids for dredging the main channel and there is a permit for the Maritime Museum Marina; there has not yet been an estimate of costs. As the work progresses, VandenBosch has talked to the engineer about putting together a bid for the other marinas, and there has been some discussion about spot dredging. VandenBosch agreed that there are several places that will need spot-dredging. That would be a future bid when we have a permit or are close enough to have a permit.

Responding to Silverman's questions, VandenBosch said that a special assessment is tied to a project; once we have an estimate of cost we can determine the fairest way to fund that. Silverman said it may be a good time to bring a request to legislators before the November election. VandenBosch noted that any individual can approach a legislator, while the board can try to approach them with a motion or a letter which the board approves. VandenBosch also noted that this is a very busy time of year for those in government office.

Silverman mused on the definition of a commercial harbor. Strong noted that according to Coast Guard standards charter fishing boats are not considered commercial. Sullivan commented that it may be based on the tonnage. Strong reiterated that the Coast Guard has certain standards and charter fishing boats do not fall under their definition of commercial.

Motion by Silverman, second by Sullivan that the South Haven Harbor Commission request that our federal senators and representatives support the funding by the federal government of the dredging of the South Haven Harbor from the bridge through the pier heads.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Silverman will communicate that motion to the offices of our senators and representatives. VandenBosch will get the engineer working on a bid spec and cost estimate to do the spot dredging that will need done in the river. Silverman pointed out another area that will need spot dredging just outside of the bridge in front to Jensen's.

VandenBosch updated the board that the North Marina building was demolished today; so the project is started and the heat is on.

VandenBosch pointed out the projections of Lake Michigan water levels. The board discussed some of the difficulties being experienced by boaters in the river.

6. Recreation Plan

VandenBosch introduced Brandy Gildea, Parks & Recreation Supervisor, who explained that a Recreation Plan is a requirement for applying for State grants. The Parks Commission has started to look at capital improvement that might be able to be done in the parks and beaches. Gildea requested comments and recommendations of possible projects. Silverman asked if he can e-mail his comments to Gildea; Gildea responded positively, noting that the Plan will be going to the Planning Commission and be open for public comment in the near future.

Sullivan noted that he was very impressed with the Plan; learned that there was a Black River launch near the bridge. Gildea responded that launch site is in the township. Gildea said she can pass on comments on any aspect of the Plan to any of the involved entities.

Pyle commented that when we did projects on the history of South Haven in school, it was always difficult to find information; noted that there is so much information here that could be used by the schools. Silverman noted that making teachers aware that it is available as a resource is valuable. Gildea said when we do the public hearing we may do it with both the School and the City.

7. Van Buren County Conservation District

Matt Meersman, Watershed Coordinator: Explained that the Conservation District got a grant a couple of years ago to focus on outreach for protection of the Black and Paw Paw River watersheds. Meersman was referred to this group by Harbor Commission member Mary Stephens and recommended that "you could be a great audience for the data set that we have available". Meersman noted that South Haven is at the receiving end of the draining of the thousands of acres of the Black River watershed.

Meersman explained that wetlands serve two important functions; the first is to capture some of the sediment as it goes through the wetlands and the second aspect is to act as a sponge for much of the water from a rain event and release it over the next five (5) days.

Meersman noted that this study gives the hope of a long-term strategy, one that will not solve your problem this year or next year. This long term strategy can help the City target focus on things upriver that you could do with respect to wetland restoration.

Regarding the special appeal to legislators, Meersman stated that it has gotten harder and harder to get money for dredging. For the work Meersman does, the government does not want to give dollars for projects that are a band-aid kind of fix. Something that is actually getting to the root of the problem, that shows how important this watershed is to these two counties and shows that there can be a long-term fix, you might be able to leverage some funds for some projects that will help with the dredging or the need for dredging.

Meersman pointed out that not all wetlands are created equal. Spending some resources on educating landowners that own properties that are good at sediment retention. Conservation easements can be put on their wetlands, and there are tax advantages for the landowner and the advantage to the City is the knowledge that those wetlands will continue to be there. The Wetland Reserve program pays farmers to restore land back to wetlands. People that have marginally productive ground can certainly find this program to be worth looking at. Parcel data from Van Buren and Allegan has enabled Meersman to find out who the owners are of these wetlands and he has made those available in table form on the handout he distributed.

Silverman asked for a word description of a wetland. Meersman stated that a wetland is defined by water that is present at or near the surface part or all of the year. Other features include that the land has wetland plants or has hydric soils, a type of soil that develops under conditions of saturation, flooding, or ponding long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions

Silverman asked what a farm would have to do to convert corn fields back to wetland. Meersman responded that sometimes it is as simple as breaking tile lines and/or ditching. The great thing about the wetland reserve program is that it pays 100% of the costs of restoration and then provides a certain amount of money to maintain it. At that point it becomes permanent wetlands; you can hunt it, walk it or sell it, but you cannot drain it again for building or agriculture.

Silverman asked how many acres would need to be put back to wetlands to make a measurable difference. Meersman said he cannot, personally, answer that question, but would like to do a study of a small area sample area to get a better idea. Meersman said that most presenters he has heard talk about the places the native people used to ford the river; at that time 99% of the rainfall that fell soaked in and was distributed to the river through the groundwater. During that time, there was no measurable change in water level from season to season. VandenBosch pointed out that the water would be colder and there would be more of a trout stream.

Meersman said you can get at a lot of problems through projects with the wetlands. There are funds out there to help with conservation easements. Many of the large wetland owners are receptive to keeping them that way. Most of the acres that were gobbled up were during the time that it was very popular to drain wetlands.

Meersman showed a map showing the significance of the wetlands, red, green and orange indicate significant wetlands. VandenBosch asked how we can support this. Meersman said the Conservation District could provide you with a mailing list and a list of some of the programs that are available. The strategy would be to send a list out from the Harbor Commission, making landowners aware of the tax incentives and other financial incentives. There are programs out there to keep wetlands if they exist or restore them if they do not currently exist.

Silverman noted that putting farmland back into wetlands would eliminate some of the sediment in the river. Stream flow maintenance is another important function that is important in controlling the flow in the river. VandenBosch noted that it would improve fishing. Meersman said South Haven Harbor could benefit from this program. Meersman noted that the case can be made that these activities will benefit the City of South Haven.

VandenBosch asked if there is a group we can support. Meersman noted that the Two Rivers Coalition, a non-profit group; they don't have a lot of funds but they can put on presentations and are working incredibly hard on this.

Pyle asked about impact of run off from farms upstream. Meersman said which are higher priority wetlands; the ones downstream of the polluted areas are the ones he supports. Within the City, Meersman noted, the Celery Pond is the biggest resource. The Celery Pond is doing a job; it is working for us, it is capturing a ton of sediment, only the hardiest plants can survive in that wetland because it is being hammered so hard.

Meersman explained that the biggest funding source is the United States Department of Agriculture. The wetlands can be restored simply for pollution reduction. Meersman said if we could just put a 100' buffer around the existing rivers and streams, this would at least get some of the sediment out of the water before it gets to South Haven.

Meersman distributed cards with his contact information and noted that he and Erin Fuller, Black River Watershed Coordinator, are both available for questions at any time.

Member and Staff Comments

VandenBosch: Reviewed the information about the dredging permits and bids.

Arnold: None

Jeffers: None

Pyle: When will the launch ramps be taken out? VandenBosch said staff has been asked to keep them in as long as possible. Pyle noted that there is a river tournament November 24. Pyle noted that if there is snow, the parking lot would need to be plowed and the docks in.

Pyle suggested something like solar parking meters along the headwall for people to come up along the headwall where boats could pull up for a few hours. VandenBosch noted it has been talked about a little bit but discussion did not really come to any conclusion; believes it would be easy to do. Pyle also noted that they get people coming in to their store after hours looking for a place for the night.

Pyle also noted that the next meeting is scheduled for Nov. 20, which is right before Thanksgiving and she will be out of town. Strong stated that he will be in the Upper Peninsula, hunting.

Silverman: Asked who staff is working with on the bids for dredging. VandenBosch noted Abonmarche is putting together the bid documents and King is interested in bidding. Silverman asked if they can also provide an estimated bid for dredging individual private slips so that the public has an idea of what it will cost them to get their slip dredged. VandenBosch related it to doing street projects, where an individual wants to put in a new driveway in an area where streets are being worked on; the City gives the individual the contractors contact information. VandenBosch said he thought it would be fairly easy to get such a bid, for what it would cost to dredge a slip. VandenBosch noted it could be condominium marinas, as well as individual slips. VandenBosch said our permit includes harbor line to harbor line and our marinas; it does not include the private marinas. Silverman noted the tediousness of doing joint applications; is there a way to expand the City's application without expanding the work. VandenBosch said part of the permit is responsibility for dredge spoils. The City has to identify exactly where dredge spoils have to go. The purpose of the permit is to identify responsibility for taking care of dredge spoils. The City may not want to take on the spoils of each individual property owner.

Strong: None

Sullivan: Asked whether there will be any dredging upstream for future bids. VandenBosch said either there will be a separate bid for future work, or there will be a unit price that could be applied to future work. Staff is thinking about the future projects; all of the marinas and the areas we talked about spot-dredging. After a question regarding whether there could be a contract for multi-year dredging contract for maintenance, spot-dredging for five (5) years or the length of the permit, VandenBosch said we could ask but there are variables such as fuel prices that change from year to year. Sullivan asked whether sediment traps are included in the bid documents. VandenBosch noted that the sediment traps could be but there is one near Kalamazoo Street which has some landscaping nearby and it created a lot of mess last time.

Adjourn

Motion by Strong, second by Sullivan to adjourn at 6:54 p.m.

All in favor. Motion carried.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Marsha Ransom
Recording Secretary