

**Parks and Recreation Board
of the City of Onalaska**

Monday, September 26, 2016

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1 The Meeting of the Parks & Recreation Board of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 5:15
2 p.m. on Monday, September 26, 2016. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a
3 notice posted at City Hall.

4

5 Roll call was taken with the following members present: Ald. Jim Binash, Gretchen Newhouse,
6 Andrea Benco, Ohbe Johnson. Victor Hill arrived with the meeting in progress.

7

8 Excused Absence: Brian Udermann

9

10 Also Present: Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Parks Maintenance Supervisor Mark
11 Hanson

12

13 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

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15 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Ohbe, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as
16 printed and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

17

18 On voice vote, motion carried, with one abstention.

19

20 **Item 3 – Public Input (Limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

21

22 Andrea called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that portion of
23 the meeting.

24

25 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

26

27 **Item 1 – La Crosse County Blufflands presentation – Charlie Handy**

28

29 Charlie Handy, La Crosse County Planner, said the La Crosse Area Blufflands plan that was
30 presented to the board earlier in 2016 was a draft at that time. The plan was adopted the LAPC
31 in July. Charlie noted he had distributed to board members copies of Chapter 6
32 (“Implementation”) of the plan and he read the following: *“The crucial next step is formal
33 creation of the Blufflands Coalition described in Chapter 2.”* Charlie explained that the
34 Blufflands Coalition is a cooperation of a number of agencies already working in the blufflands.
35 Charlie said a Memorandum of Understanding must be drafted, and all the agencies working in
36 the blufflands will be asked to sign the MOU. The coalition includes Charlie, Dan, La Crosse
37 Area Planning Committee Executive Director Tom Faella, Town of Shelby Representative Ralph
38 Heath, City of La Crescent Representative Bill Waller, La Crosse Parks and Recreation Director
39 Steve Carlyon, City of La Crosse Associate Planner-Community Development Representative
40 Lewis Kuhlman, Mississippi Valley Conservancy Representatives Carol Abrahamzon and Pat
41 Caffrey, and Winona County Representative Eric Hanson. Charlie said there is no “point

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42 person” to address the blufflands and noted that La Crosse County has tasked him with handling
43 the “bridge-type staff work” until a half-time staff person is hopefully hired in 2017.

44

45 Charlie addressed funding recommendations, noting the plan recommends that the coordinating
46 activities of the Bluffland Coalition will be funded primarily through local general fund property
47 tax revenue committed by charter members of the coalition. Charlie said secondary funding
48 could come from grants, fundraising and other contributions, adding that that is the coalition’s
49 primary goal. However, first it is essential to get through the primary source. Charlie said the
50 goal is to make the coalition a sustainable organization that has a “pretty standard set of funding
51 every year.” Charlie referred to a table of sample funding commitments and said the coalition
52 would like each municipality to invest locally, meaning \$1 per person per year. Charlie noted
53 that the City of Onalaska’s population is approximately 18,000 and asked that the city consider
54 investing \$18,000 in its annual budget in the blufflands. Charlie said the coalition’s goal is to
55 advocate for this request, adding he likely will be the individual serving in this capacity. Charlie
56 said each municipality is being asked for a per capita annual commitment of 40 cents to fund
57 coalition staffing and initiatives. La Crosse County’s population is 20 cents per capita. Charlie
58 said this is for an annual commitment to staffing and matching dollars for grants and projects.
59 Commitments to invest in local bluffland acquisition and improvement could be satisfied over a
60 five-year period, with expenditures varying year to year. Charlie said the coalition would like to
61 see this commitment be sustainable, adding that he is asking the City of Onalaska to commit
62 \$7,200 annually to fund coalition staffing and initiatives. Charlie noted there is approximately
63 \$40,000 in the La Crosse County Administrator’s Budget and said he confident that
64 approximately \$45,000 has been raised for 2017.

65

66 Charlie referred to the coalition’s 2016 action plan, which includes:

67

- 68 • Approval of the Blufflands Plan
- 69 • Endorsement/approval of Blufflands Plan from the LAPC member communities
- 70 • Discussions about any new bluffland acquisitions to include all stakeholders
- 71 • Municipalities utilize Blufflands Plan to inform the 2017 budget
- 72 • Convene a work group and create a work plan to craft a MOU that will establish the
- 73 Blufflands Coalition
- 74 • Establish sign standards

75

76 Charlie said there have been meetings regarding signage with local municipalities and the La
77 Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Charlie said there appears to be “open-
78 mindedness” regarding placing Blufflands Coalition marketing on signs located in the blufflands.
79 Charlie said the most significant issue identified in the plan for 2017 is signage at the trailheads.

80

81 Gretchen noted that vandalism along the trails is a significant problem and said this is a reason
82 why signage is absent.

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83
84 Ald. Binash asked if the mission statement of the bluffland is basically for recreational purposes
85 through the bluffland.

86
87 Charlie said recreation is as important as conservation, noting the plan designates areas that are
88 more suitable for conservation and areas that are more suitable for recreation. Charlie said there
89 was an emphasis during the planning process to increase the elevation of the importance of
90 recreation so there are more users. However, Charlie also pointed out that there is a high
91 concentration of use on the trails that are well-marked and “well-advertised.” These are areas
92 where overuse is presenting some serious challenges. Charlie said the goal is to advertise some
93 of the lower-use locations and spread out the use.

94
95 Andrea noted there is no MOU and no guidelines that would assist the board in determining
96 where the funds will be committed. Andrea told Charlie, “You want us to commit some money
97 tonight, but I guess I’m a little hesitant not knowing what we’re committing it to, partly because
98 our budget situation is horrible. We have been through the budget process, and we’re just
99 waiting to find out what gets cut. When can we expect the memorandum come out? When
100 would we know a little bit more about who we’d be dealing with and what kinds of things we’d
101 be agreeing to do or partake in?”

102
103 Charlie said, “Before next year’s budget. I say that tongue in cheek, but it’s probably pretty
104 accurate. It’s going to take about a year to get that Memorandum of Understanding done well.
105 That’s why we need a staff person to do it, so that’s what the money is for: to have a staff person
106 do this work, to draft the Memorandum of Understanding, to help pay for – if we need to –
107 meeting rooms to help keep this coalition moving forward. We might have an organized
108 summit, if you will, to have all these municipalities and their policy makers come and talk about
109 the Memorandum of Understanding. That’s going to take some funding. That’s really the best
110 answer I can give. I would say it’s probably 75 percent staff and 25 percent administrative
111 dollars for grants and room rental and things like that.”

112
113 Ald. Binash asked Charlie how to best explain to the Common Council that this would benefit
114 the City of Onalaska.

115
116 Charlie said, “It’s a unified approach. It’s taking all of these separate entities that are working
117 toward this goal and giving them a more unified, prioritized goal. It’s advocacy, if you will, for
118 the La Crosse region. That advocacy could go to the DNR. It could go to the State Tourism
119 Department. It could go to the International Mountain Biking Association. It could go to some
120 national cross-country skiing organization to try to draw those people, those dollars, those grants
121 to this region. If you have any experience trying to find funding in this day and age, coalitions
122 are the way to go. They really improve your standing and your scoring criteria when you’re
123 applying for these things. If you’re talking about tourism, it’s the same thing. People don’t

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124 come to the Town of Holland. People don't come even to West Salem. They come to the La
125 Crosse area. This is a way to really help the region as a coalition and bring those dollars in. I
126 guess the thing that I would say that maybe starts to surprise some people is last year on Super
127 Bowl Sunday there was more money spent by outdoor recreation enthusiasts on outdoor
128 recreation than there was by football enthusiasts on football. That's where the money is. If you
129 want to do a statistical analysis on who has that expendable income, that's the demographic
130 population that has it. ... Outdoor recreation is a way of life. People are living it and spending
131 money in it."

132

133 Dan said he believes that this item should be taken to the Finance and Personnel Committee if
134 the Parks and Recreation Board supports it.

135

136 Charlie said he is seeking \$7,200, noting that the City of Onalaska had funded \$10,000 last year.

137

138 Dan said the \$10,000 had been budgeted through Planning in the 2016 Capital Improvements
139 Budget.

140

141 Charlie noted he had spoken with Mayor Joe Chilsen and said Mayor Chilsen supports this
142 request. Charlie also said he welcomes advice from the board regarding bringing advocates
143 before the Finance and Personnel Committee and the Common Council.

144

145 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Gretchen, to send to the Finance and Personnel Committee,
146 with the support of the Parks and Recreation Board, a recommendation to budget \$7,200 for the
147 Blufflands Coalition.

148

149 Gretchen asked how the Blufflands Coalition's work differs from that of the Mississippi Valley
150 Conservancy.

151

152 Charlie said, "It's really no different. They're one of the agencies that does a lot of this work.
153 The City of La Crosse does a ton of this work. There is somewhere around \$190,000 in their
154 budget annually in the blufflands. You have had an agreement with the Mississippi Valley
155 Conservancy, so the City of Onalaska does quite a bit of work in the blufflands. The Outdoor
156 Recreation Alliance is very active in the blufflands, so it's not changing at all what everybody is
157 doing separately. What it's doing is it is focusing those efforts towards, let's say a five-year
158 goal. We have a five-year set of priorities in this plan to do this work. But then we also have a
159 staff person to go and find other revenue streams to make this work more effective. The
160 Mississippi Valley Conservancy has a set of goals and priorities that they make decisions based
161 upon. That will work really well in the areas of the blufflands where we want to do conservancy
162 work."

163

164 Gretchen noted that MVC also does some trail work.

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165
166 Charlie said that that is not MVC's primary goal, noting that difficulties have arisen when MVC
167 has purchased a set of properties with stewardship funds, with the goal of establishing a bicycle
168 trail on the property. Charlie said it is not possible to put a bicycle trail on the property once the
169 stewardship funds are utilized due to the ties that are part of the stewardship funds. Charlie said
170 the Blufflands Coalition will have to work with the Department of Natural Resources on some of
171 the purchases and negotiate a different agreement. Charlie noted the Blufflands Coalition will
172 attempt to prioritize the purchases and complete them "with the right tools."

173
174 Andrea said she believes the Blufflands Coalition will unify what occurs "from top to bottom
175 throughout the whole system."

176
177 Charlie said that individualism also is important, noting that this is reflected in the budget.

178
179 Andrea asked how the Parks and Recreation budget will be affected if this item goes before the
180 Finance and Personnel Committee.

181
182 Ald. Binash said the Finance and Personnel Committee might attempt to locate funds from the
183 General Fund.

184
185 Andrea asked if funding for playground equipment will have to be cut so that there is funding for
186 the blufflands.

187
188 Both Ald. Binash and Dan said they cannot say that with certainty. Dan said, "It's a request
189 that's going to have to be made. That's the process and the steps we need to take at this time."

190
191 Ald. Binash noted that Mayo has purchased 187 acres to include the bluffs along Sand Lake
192 Road. Ald. Binash also noted that Mayo may only build up to 30 percent grade, adding "they go
193 all the way over onto Green Coulee, too. It's a good possibility they may consider some trails
194 and some things going on through the bluffs."

195
196 A question was asked regarding seeking a specific funding source.

197
198 Dan said the Capital Improvements Budget is the only option to which the board could go. Dan
199 said, "I just think we need to set it there. It can give us the option and the latitude rather than try
200 to tie us into one area. If we can look at the funding in multiple different locations, we can do
201 that."

202
203 On voice vote, motion carried.

204
205 **Item 2 – Holiday Heights Park drainage concerns**

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206
207 Dan referred to two photographs taken September 23 showing Holiday Heights. One photograph
208 is of the canoe launch, which is now at the end of the asphalt. The other photograph shows the
209 playground, which has been affected by the significant amounts of rainfall in the area in
210 September. Dan said some of the residents in the area expressed concern over the amount of
211 standing water, noting that a resident had exited the walking trail in early September and dipped
212 a pint cup of water into his cup. Dan estimated there were more than 50 mosquito larvae sitting
213 in the cup. Dan noted Mark had contacted vector control with La Crosse County and said Parks
214 and Recreation must work with Public Works regarding options, including possibly creating
215 swales to direct the standing water toward the La Crosse River.

216
217 Victor asked if there is mulch that needs to be replaced.

218
219 Dan said sand has been placed in this area. Dan described part of the playground area as a
220 “trouble spot” that has drawn sitting water after a rainfall even during drier than normal
221 summers.

222
223 Andrea said the park is not the cause of the mosquitoes, pointing out that it is located in a poor
224 spot.

225
226 Mark noted he had spoken with La Crosse County Vector Control Manager Dave Geske, who
227 told him that the Holiday Heights park “is one of the worst mosquito breeding places in the
228 county.” Mark also said Dave Geske told him that while La Crosse County treats this area, there
229 is no more funding to do so by September.

230
231 Victor asked if the space in question could be better utilized and suggested relocating the
232 playground equipment.

233
234 Dan noted that the equipment is more than 14 years old and said it is not feasible to relocate the
235 equipment.

236
237 Mark noted that the park is utilized frequently.

238
239 Gretchen said one of her students was interning at a nonprofit organization based out of Chicago
240 that relocates playground equipment to disadvantaged neighborhoods either in the United States
241 or internationally.

242
243 Dan said he wanted to bring this matter to the board’s attention.

244
245 **Item 3 – Omni Center Financials**

246

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247 Dan reported the following:

248

- 249 • The Omni Center finished with a deficit of approximately \$120,000 in 2013, \$54,050 in
250 2014, and \$4,200 in 2015. The shortfall through August 31 is \$43,393. However, there
251 is no room tax for the month of August. Dan said, “That would put us roughly \$9,000.
252 We’re closer.” The shortfall in August 2015 was approximately \$34,000.
- 253 • The city has budgeted approximately \$30,000 more for the Omni Center in the 2017
254 budget.
- 255 • Wages came in under budget in 2012, 2014 and 2015.
- 256 • Expense accounts came in under budget in 2012, 2013 and 2015.
- 257 • The Omni Center has been using less energy, thanks in part to the new chiller system.
258 LED lights will be installed at the facility, which also will assist in lowering energy costs.
- 259 • The city paid an average of 78 cents per therm in 2014. However, that rate dropped to 55
260 cents per therm in 2015.
- 261 • There was a decrease of more than 30,000 kilowatts in May 2016, when maintenance was
262 being performed on the back arena, compared to May 2015. However, the Omni Center
263 was charged 15 cents a kilowatt hour in May 2016.
- 264 • Utility costs are approximately \$185,000, which is the Omni Center’s largest line item
265 besides staffing. Dan said Buildings Manager Brian Babiash has been working with Xcel
266 Energy on attempting to improve energy efficiency.
- 267 • Ice rental taxable through August totaled \$17,066.99. Ice rental overall is more than
268 \$16,000 less than 2015. Dan admitted, “We’re not renting as much ice as we have” and
269 attributed the decrease to reduced ice usage in the summer months as well as a nearby
270 facility that knows other facilities’ rates and charges reduced rates. Dan noted a number
271 of groups who utilized the Omni Center during the summer months no longer do.

272

273 Victor asked if the groups that have left contributed a substantial amount to the bottom line.

274

275 Dan said he believes every group that utilizes the Omni Center contributes to the bottom line,
276 stating, “You start taking 10 hours here, 12 hours here, 15 hours, 20 hours a month, that has a
277 substantial hit to the budget. When you look at that first line on the graph and it’s \$2,000, based
278 on a \$185,000 utility bill, our cost for that facility is [in the range of] \$500 a day just to have the
279 doors open. So when we struggle in a month in one account to bring in \$2,000, that’s a tough
280 pill to swallow. We’re adding more. We’re trying to do more things.”

281

282 **Item 4 – Report from La Crosse County Bluffland Steering Committee**

283

284 No report.

285

286 **Item 5 – Report from Onalaska Enhancement Foundation**

287

Reviewed 9/28/16 by Dan Wick

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288 No report.

289

290 **Item 6 – Report from Great River Landing Committee**

291

292 Victor said the committee had viewed slides of the project at its September 8 meeting and noted
293 that the project is more than \$20,000 over budget due to archaeological costs. Victor said there
294 also was a discussion about future phases.

295

296 Ald. Binash said the roof soon will be installed and noted that paving should be completed by
297 October. Ald. Binash noted that the landscaper will be at the site three consecutive weeks. Ald.
298 Binash also noted that funds from the Special Projects Fund will be utilized to address the extra
299 costs. Ald. Binash added that the project is expected to be completed by December, and that the
300 restrooms will remain open during the winter months.

301

302 **Item 7 – Director’s Report**

303

304 **a. Parks Update**

305

306 Mark reported the following:

307

- 308 • A group from the United Methodist Church had cleaned the Medary walkway and Rowe
309 Park.
- 310 • Staff will attempt to address the excess water in Pierce Park by utilizing French drains.
- 311 • Staff is behind in mowing.
- 312 • Shelter usage will be nearly complete by October 15. The exception is with shelters that
313 have furnaces.

314

315 **b. Recreation Update**

316

317 Dan reported the following:

318

- 319 • The tackle football, flag football and volleyball programs seem to be successful.
- 320 • The 2016-17 Fall/Winter Activity Guide has been sent.

321

322 **c. Aquatic Center Update**

323

324 Mark noted that the Aquatic Center has been shut down and said staff will begin winterizing the
325 facility within the next 10 to 14 days.

326

327 Dan noted that approximately 300 dogs had participated in the Diggity Dog Dip on September 3
328 and said Diggity Dog Daycare had contributed approximately \$1,000. In addition, the event also

Reviewed 9/28/16 by Dan Wick

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329 brought in approximately \$400 in concessions.

330

331 **d. Omni Center Update**

332

333 Dan reported the following:

334

- 335 • There have been weddings at the facility three of the last four weekends.
- 336 • The Craft Fair will be held October 8-9.
- 337 • The new boards will be installed in Arena 1.
- 338 • A STAR ice training class on ice maintenance will be held at the facility in late October.

339

340 **Item 8 – Discussion on fee waivers/discounts for Park & Recreation programs including**
341 **Omni Center rentals**

342

343 Dan said he has been working on a fees policy and he told the board he wanted to discuss the
344 possibility of giving discounts or waiving fees.

345

346 Gretchen asked Dan if he is talking about individuals, groups or both.

347

348 Dan said, “All of the above,” noting he had received a request to donate 70 tables to an event that
349 was offsite. Dan said there are established fees and asked, “Are those the fees we’re going to go
350 with? Are we not deviating from that?”

351

352 Victor asked how the city benefits from granting discounts or waiving fees.

353

354 Dan said it is a goodwill gesture, noting that the Parks and Recreation Department receives
355 multiple requests. Dan asked, “If this board establishes fees, are those negotiable?”

356

357 Ald. Binash said he would approve of offering a discount on rentals of certain items to groups
358 that have consistently utilized city facilities.

359

360 Victor suggested that each request should be examined on a case-by-case basis and said he
361 believes there is a need for a consistent policy.

362

363 Ald. Binash said he believes it is “good business practice” to give a repeat customer a discount.

364

365 Gretchen asked if the city would be liable if a citizen utilizing a Parks and Recreation
366 Department chair on private property falls off it and is injured. Gretchen suggested allowing
367 groups to utilize city-owned tables on the condition that their members be required to give back
368 something in return.

369

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370 Victor asked Dan if he is willing to take on the prospect of managing several volunteers for a
371 project.

372

373 Mark said this already occurs with smaller groups such as National Honor Society, but added he
374 is unsure if he wants this to occur with larger groups.

375

376 Andrea said she believes offering discounts and waiving fees is harmful to the Parks and
377 Recreation budget in tight budget years. Andrea said challenges could arise if one group is given
378 a discount but another is not. Andrea also pointed out there are citizens who might not support
379 some of the organizations requesting discounts or waived fees.

380

381 Dan said he is reluctant to set a percentage because if this percentage is known a group that
382 comes in and receives a 10-percent discount also will enjoy a 10-percent reduction in ice rental
383 rates.

384

385 Andrea said, "To me, it has to be uniform. There has to be something that guides when it
386 happens because it can't be arbitrary. It can't be something that we can't justify."

387

388 Dan said he receives weekly requests for donations items such as tables, chairs and shelters. Dan
389 also noted that Administrative Assistant Louanne Pierce Keane coordinates all donations.

390

391 Andrea said she has found in her experience that it is difficult to put together a large group of
392 individuals and work on a project. Andrea said that while she believes several groups would be
393 eager to participate if the board decides to implement an exchange policy, she is unsure that the
394 productivity level would be sufficient.

395

396 Victor said the easiest way is to consider each request on a case-by-case basis. Victor said a
397 discount or in-kind service could be offered. Victor also said requests could be brought before
398 the board and members could make a recommendation.

399

400 Ald. Binash asked Dan if the Parks and Recreation Department budget reflects expected income
401 for rentals such as tables and chairs.

402

403 Dan said that revenue is directed toward one of those accounts.

404

405 Andrea said shelter rentals and Omni Center rentals also are part of the discussion.

406

407 Dan said someone who is coordinating a fundraiser could suggest that the Parks and Recreation
408 Department donate one of its fields.

409

410 Ald. Binash said, "If that's the case, my opinion would be to keep it as it is."

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411
412 Dan asked if the board is comfortable with utilizing a case-by-case basis and said it seems as
413 though board members are comfortable with this.

414
415 Andrea said she is comfortable as long as there is some guidance.

416
417 Dan said, "Before anything is adjusted, before any discount is given, it's taken to your supervisor
418 to have that vetting process, similar to what we've done here."

419
420 Andrea said she would feel more comfortable offering a discount to a group renting tables for an
421 Omni Center event rather than an event that was offsite.

422
423 Dan said he hopes to present the policy to the board at its October 24 meeting.

424
425 **Item 9 – Closed Session**

426
427 To consider a motion to convene in Closed Session under Section 19.85(1)(e) of the Wisconsin
428 Statutes for the purpose of deliberating or negotiating the purchasing of public properties, the
429 investing of public funds or conducting other specified public business, whenever competitive or
430 bargaining reasons require a closed session:

- 431
432 • Tornado Youth Hockey

433
434 If any action is required in Open Session, as the result of the Closed Session, the Board will
435 reconvene in Open Session to take the necessary action and/or continue on with the printed
436 agenda.

437
438 Motion by Gretchen, second by Ohbe, to convene in Closed Session.

439
440 On roll call vote: Ald. Jim Binash – aye, Gretchen Newhouse – aye, Andrea Benco – aye, Victor
441 Hill – aye, Ohbe Johnson – aye. In Closed Session at 6:40 p.m.

442
443
444 Recorded by:

445
446 Kirk Bey