

Special Meeting – Pilcher Park Renovations
March 21, 2016

At the call of President Glen Marcum, the Joliet Park District Board of Commissioners met for a Special Meeting on Monday, March 21, 2016 at the Pilcher Park Nature Center, 2501 Highland Drive, Joliet, IL. The meeting began at 6:00 pm.

Pledge to the Flag

Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Marcum, Schultz, Broderick, Gulas, Mutz

Commissioners Absent: None

- A. Discussion of the Pilcher Park Road Renovations and Infrastructure Improvements
 1. Rodney Tonelli – Ruettiger, Tonelli & Associates Inc.

President Marcum introduced Rodney Tonelli from Ruettiger, Tonelli & Associates Inc. Mr. Tonelli introduced Joe Hammer from Ruettiger, Tonelli & Associates Inc., who is also present to answer questions.

Mr. Tonelli stated that the Joliet Park District staff requested that Pilcher Park was looked at as a whole when considering the improvements. Goals for the project include ways to rehabilitate roads and trails, address natural drainage concerns while considering the surrounding ecosystem. Other goals include improving access to different parts of the park, additional parking and security improvements.

Mr. Tonelli reviewed the existing map of Pilcher Park. Mr. Tonelli covered the entrances, roads, trails and the major areas that are in poor shape due to water drainage.

Mr. Tonelli went over proposed conditions for all options. Proposed Conditions for all options would include: limiting the Flowing Well access road to only park staff; Flowing Well will be accessible to the public by using the internal loop, converting the two way road to the Hoberg property into a trail, repaving the Nature Center trail, repaving existing parking lots and adding additional parking lots, add security gates to West entrance and Gougar Road entrance which would be closed at night, new sidewalk and north access parking lot to link Forest Preserve trail, convert North access road into trail, use grind asphalt for upper loop trail and close out the connecting trail in upper loop due to the amount of water drainage damage.

At this time President Marcum acknowledge anyone who needed to leave because they were taking the bus could speak at this time.

Susan Jaraosinki stated that she is a board member with Will Grundy of Independently Living. Ms. Jaraosinki feels that Snack Hill should be redone and thinks that the Board should listen to the public about what is good for the park. Ms. Jaraosinki would like to see more washrooms, benches and water fountains.

Mr. Tonelli noted that Proposed Conditions - Option One, would be to repave existing roads.

Mr. Tonelli reviewed Proposed Conditions - Option Two. Option Two would convert the section of the road behind the Nature Center to a trail and convert the one way road in front of the Nature Center to a two way road. Staff is aware that this section of Pilcher Park is rare and unique. At the same time, the water drainage and what is best for the ecosystem needed to be address while developing a plan that is best for the entire park.

Mr. Tonelli acknowledged that even though there are changes the options are increasing access in different ways. An alternative is to convert Snack Hill Road to a trail making it accessible.

Commissioner Broderick asked about the trails surface being wheelchair accessible. Mr. Tonelli stated that it is ADA compatible.

Commissioner Broderick asked about the washrooms. Mr. Tonelli stated that he was not asked by the Joliet Park District to look into washrooms but Mr. Tonelli said that the District would need to inquire about the sewage.

Commissioner Schultz commented about how the plans to convert a section of the road into a trail would save on long term maintenance cost. This would give the District the ability to spend money on an additional playground and bathrooms in the park. In addition, public can still access the wooded areas of the park.

Mr. Tonelli commented on how the focus was to come up with the best plan for the entire park which the Joliet Park District can manage but still address all park users.

B. Opportunity for the Public to Speak – 3 minute time limit

Rhonda Price, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, expressed her views about how the Board needs to consider the people in the wheelchairs and how accessible the paths are to people with disabilities. Ms. Price thanked the Board for listening to the public.

Pat Vann expressed her concerns about the poor conditions of the roads and trails.

Teri Coleman commented on the condition of the trails and how hard it was to push a wheel chair and stroller. Ms. Coleman also stated that there are not enough bathrooms.

Earley Colman, Pilcher Park Oversight Committee, stated that he wants the park restored back to the jewel that it once was. Mr. Coleman commented about the Board's promise for transparency and public comment and would like Snack Hill opened. Mr. Coleman supports the ADA concerns and feels the new material for the trails is not ADA compliant.

Bernard Bryant asked if the project would be put out to bid. The Board stated that it will be put out to bid.

Dale Hanselbring feels that the current proposal is a bad idea. The public needs the ability to drive through the park because not everyone has the time to walk through the park.

Lynn Gow thanked the Board for having the meeting at the Nature Center. Ms. Gow stated that the park needs the pullovers for fishing or for letting traffic pass. The Board needs to consider how the plan affects the fire roads and more shelters and bathrooms are needed at the west end of the park.

Susan Rink, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, thanked the Board. Ms. Rink requested a thorough investigation on the accessibility according to ADA.

Elaine Sommer, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, thanked the Board. Ms. Sommer commented that it looks like the public is losing 40 % of the trail and this is a big deal for people.

Tabitha Boshears, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, commented on her concern about John McGovern's letter regarding the plan being "likely" ADA compliant and asked the Board to take the ADA concerns seriously.

Pam Heavens, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, stated that John McGovern's letter means nothing. Passed meetings Ms. Heavens commented on how the Board needs to be ADA compliant.

Andrea Magosky, commented on the history of Mr. Higginbotham and how Pilcher Park belonged to him and was an arboretum.

Rita Renwick, Will County Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, stated that the members of the Will County Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society voted to approve the plan which the Board approved for the Pilcher Park improvements. Ms. Renwick discussed the benefits to the park with the removal of the road. Ms. Renwick stated that she has a nephew in a wheelchair and he is able to use some of the trails in Pilcher Park and how the park can host ADA events.

Cynthia Rataj, Nature Center staff, stated that Trinity school children with disabilities come out and enjoy the park. Ms. Rataj commented on the amount of littering that goes on and read a list of items that are recovered throughout the park especially where pullouts are located.

Sarah Broadnax commented on the importance of fishing and wanted to hear plans for the pond and creek.

Chuck Engroll commented on how he is for the opening of Snake Hill and against the closing of the road. Mr. Engroll would like to see the roads maintained and feels it is a poor choice to close Flowing Well road because there is a lot of traffic and there needs to be more than one exit. Mr. Engroll also would like more shelters, security and patrol.

John Depue stated that he is in favor of the road and trails being repaired, installing a better drainage system and closing the park at night. Board should also consider an adopt a trail program.

Jay Gregory commented that the grindings of the trail is not ADA accessible. The District should consider offering golf carts to the public. Mr. Gregory stated that some of the drainage issues are under the City of Joliet. I voted for the repair of the roads not for the removal of the roads.

Pat Mudron, Joliet City Councilman, thanked the Board. Mr. Mudron is very familiar with the trails and roads and understands that there is only so much money for all the referendum projects. Mr. Mudron stated that he heard the three goals for Pilcher Park and since the Park District hired a professional to develop the plan, the Joliet Park District should continue with the approved design.

Susan Majcher noted that she has multiple sclerosis and cannot walk through the park and the road should stay and be repaired. Ms. Majcher stated that many things have been taken away from Pilcher Park and that the park has been neglected.

Jeff Lindstrom thanked the Board. Mr. Lindstrom read a copy of the ballot from the referendum. The ballot did not say to remove roads and maybe money from other projects need to be given to Pilcher Park.

Marjuen Mannah, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, commented on how the road should not be taken away because it is hard for some people to take the trails.

Olivia Crurckshank, Will Grundy Center for Independent Living, stated that she uses the park many times and it would be terrible if the road was taken out.

Mary Martin commented that it would be very hard to push a wheelchair on the trail surface that was described. Ms. Martin would like to see the road remain open.

Debra McDonald commented on how there is not enough garbage cans.

Nancy Fischer said that she would like to see more day to day maintenance for the park. Ms. Fischer commented that the parking by the dam needs to be address along with cleaning the dam. Lastly, Ms. Fischer commented on a post still standing where the bridge used to be and the poor conditions of the barriers at Snack Hill.

Helen Strass thanked the Board for the public meeting and asked the Board to hold another meeting. Ms. Strass would like to see the middle trail in the north part of the park kept and maintained and commented how the real problem is that Pilcher Park has not been maintained. Ms. Strass is supportive of the security gates, cameras and patrol in the park.

Ethel Person asked to meet at the Bird Haven Greenhouse for the next meeting because it would be easier for people with wheelchairs and canes. Ms. Person commented on the gang activity in the park.

Bill Bromer, University of St. Francis, commented that he brings his students to Pilcher Park for 23 years. Mr. Bromer is for the removal of the road to protect the forest. Mr. Bromer stated that there are too many roads and trails in the park and the exhaust from the cars are bad for the living organisms.

Dr. Rita Rogan commented on ADA compliance/504 Section. When you convert the road to a trail, the trail must follow the ADA codes for wheelchairs use. Dr. Rogan asked the Board to reopen the vote for the Pilcher Park plan.

LaMellis McCorminck, President Parkwood neighborhood, appreciates the turnout and follow-up to hold a meeting after the Referendum passed. Ms. McCormick would like to see our park maintained.

John Sheridan commented that the roads should be maintained. Mr. Sheridan noted that the material being discussed for the trails is not suitable for wheelchair use when wet.

Patti Bergren expressed concerns about the equestrian use in the north part of the park. Ms. Bergren is for the security gates.

Michelle Stukel commented that the outer loop has been closed for twenty to thirty years. Nothing is being maintained and there is more and more of the park being taken away.

Ron Johnson noted that he lives in Highland Park and would like to hear what the Board plans to do next.

Janet Harper expressed that her concern is the security of the park and is supportive of the security gates.

Other residents commented on the amount of liter throughout the park and security concerns.

C. Board Comments

President Marcum stated that all five board members were born and raised in Joliet and love the park too. Mr. Marcum invited the public to the board meetings which are held every fourth Monday at Presence Inwood Athletic Club Board Room beginning at 5:00pm. The Board's next step is to take into consideration all of the comments however there would be no decision at the March meeting.

D. Adjournment

With all the agenda items discussed, a motion was made by Commissioner Mutz, seconded by Commissioner Gulas, to adjourn the meeting. The time was 8:03pm

Respectfully submitted,

Theresa Talarico
Board Secretary