

May 7, 2018

Attendees:

Mr. Suhay
Mr. Wayt
Ms. Weiss Carson

Joan Heppert, Recording

Regular Meeting
of the
Russell Township Park Commission

West Woods Visitor Center

The regular meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

2018-22 Mr. Wayt moved to approve and sign the minutes from 3/5/18 as presented and was seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y, Ms. Weiss Carson Y. Motion passes.

2018-23 Mr. Wayt moved to approve and sign the regular and special minutes 3/12/18 as presented and was seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y. Motion passes.

2018-24 Mr. Wayt moved to approve and sign the minutes 4/9/18 as presented and was seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y, Ms. Weiss Carson Y. Motion passes.

Mr. Wayt inquired to Ms. Weiss Carson if the tax exemption was received for Modroo and she noted the refund was received and deposited. Mr. Wayt noted that the Hinkle reporting was completed on April 30th and that met the deadline.

2018- 25 Mr. Wayt moved to approve and sign check # 1050 - 1052 dated 5/7/18 and was seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y, Ms. Weiss Carson Y. Motion passes.

2018- 26 Mr. Wayt moved to approve up to \$100.00 for advertising for year end and was seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y, Ms. Weiss Carson Y. Motion passes.

Mr. Suhay initiated a recap of the April 18th Russell Township Trustees meeting. Mr. Mueller wanted \$1,500 to get the 511 park board started to cover a phone line, stationery and to establish a checking account. Mr. Suhay stated when it came time to vote, Trustee Madden and Gabram voted no. Financial funds were voted down for getting it started Mr. Suhay added. Ms. Weiss Carson added that in speaking with Mr. Podojil, he simply said there was no contact at all with the trustees since last year.

Mr. Wayt stated that several people in the audience walked Modroo several weeks ago as part of the annual stewardship. There were no new concerns to address at this time. Mr. Wayt noted that last year a neighbor had a patio that extended on park property and this has been corrected.

Mr. Wayt noted that the minutes were current on the website and the Modroo annual stewardship letter is available. The survey results and comments are also available. The Modroo natural resource evaluation was done a couple of years ago and has been added to the web. A volunteer waiver has been added as well. Some notable information about the survey: just under 88% said the parks are important or very important to their quality of life. Mr. Wayt stated that 50% said that they don't use the parks because they don't know where they are. He said that there is a map that Mr. Studen made available on the website under documents. The top two choices if funds were available were: 60% said walking trails at additional parks, and 53% said improvements at Modroo. The top three improvements at Modroo were: 1. 61% natural walking path around perimeter 2. Wildlife corridor at 45% and 3. Benches around the park 31%. Only 12% had an interest in a paved path. In regards to additional taxes and land purchases; 56% of the respondents said they would be willing to spend an additional \$50 per year for improvements and 54% were willing to spend an additional \$50/year for additional land purchase. Mr. Suhay added some of the comments were very insightful and helpful and some were amusing.

New business was led by speaking of the trash issues at the Uplands from Deepwood to Russell Road. Mr. Wayt contacted the township and it is an ODOT road. Mr. Wayt and his family will be going out on 5/12/18 to clean up this area and mentioned the waiver on the web if any volunteers would like to join in and help. Trash bags and reflective vests will be available.

2018-27 Move to approve up to \$50 for expenses for clean up on 5/12/18 was moved by Mr. Wayt and seconded by Mr. Suhay.
Vote: Mr. Wayt Y, Mr. Suhay Y, Ms. Weiss Carson Y. Motion passes.

The Life of a Park Planning Project was obtained by Mr. Wayt from the Geauga Park District. They plan for a two year cycle. This information will be valuable as we continue with the 53 acres at Modroo.

Mr. Wayt moved onto discussion about the November levy and stated that this board has been operating as openly as possible. Consideration has to be given to preserve the land we already have at this time. There will be no vote tonight and Mr. Suhay was asked to explore what is needed to put on a levy. Mr. Wayt addressed the audience and asked for input over the next month to see if this is the right direction for this park board.

- Charlie Butters mentioned there was a previous agreement with the Township Trustees and the park board regarding the ½ millage and suggested to follow up on this as it is state law. Donna Weiss Carson was told by the auditor that it is at their discretion. Charlie mentioned an open court case involving Chester Township. Mr. Wayt said he will follow up on this over the next month.
- Greg Studen said that the relationship between the 511 park board and the 1545 park board are critical for the levy going forward. Greg mentioned there is a public perception problem. Greg mentioned that perhaps more should go to the trustees meetings so there can be a better understanding of the direction of these two boards going forward. Mr. Wayt acknowledged that it is difficult to get good information regarding the actions of the 511 park board.

Mr. Wayt thanked the Shane Wholken and Joe Leslie from the WRLC and others from the community that walked the Modroo property for stewardship. He stated the email that was recently sent out regarding tonight's meeting came from Ms. Weiss Carson and not from the board. He stated that he is not sure how to make this homestead property work, but will continue to be open to listening to ideas in the best interest of the Russell residents.

Ms. Weiss Carson informed of the focus meeting on April 12th. Attendees were Jack Schmitt, Howard Shanker, Donna Mintz and Ms. Weiss Carson. The following objectives were discussed:

- Revenue bearing activities to make the homestead support itself.
- Partnerships
 - Cleveland Clinic
 - Eddy's Fruit Farm
 - Village Art Center
 - Rescue Village
 - Make a Wish
- How is the community going to be involved?
 - Initially the neighbors would be brought in and given a tour and presentation.
 - Meet with the trustees to educate and gather their support.

Ms. Weiss Carson turned the meeting over to Joe Leslie of the WRLC.

Mr. Leslie's presentation noted the following:

- The vision of the home and barn parcel was presented in April 2017.
- Map shows 53 acres, 13.5 acres with the house and 5.5 acres with the barn
- What's new is the funding through the state of \$325K
- Options for funding the balance are:
 - State funded monies
 - Selling off the barn parcel could bring several hundred thousand
 - 1.25 M needed as well as additional monies to maintain the property over the years
- Goal would be to have this park board be the owner, pay for the balance of the property, and also come up with a reserve
- Additional \$50K improvements are pending and are the commitment to the park district from the WRLC.
- \$925K less the barn of \$250K + leaves a balance of \$675K and, additionally, what is needed for an endowment. The goal of the WRLC would be \$100 to \$200K for the endowment.

Mr. Wayt inquired as to what amount the Western Reserve Land Conceservancy board would require for an endowment on a property of this size and Mr. Leslie responded that without a partner the WRLC board would require seven figures instead of a few hundred thousand due to the indefinite amount of time that they would be responsible for owning and maintaining. Mr. Suhay inquired if this were money needed to be in the bank from the beginning and Mr. Leslie responded they would count donations/pledges over a time period at face value.

- Mr. Leslie stated the park board has too much property to exist without any kind of funding, in his opinion. The community has to support this park district with a levy or something else.
- If the land acquisition monies are used, then the WRLC makes a commitment to raise that back to use as an endowment/operating fund. Donna Mintz will go over more details on keeping this a self-sustaining property.
- Zoned residential on the homestead, and will be zoned as a park whether it be active or passive Ms. Weiss Carson noted.
- Concept of a winery didn't go over so well. Concept of an event center with tents, cars every weekend didn't go over well.
- Concept of a farm stand and bed and breakfast was well received.
- The home as it is laid out lends itself well to smaller events there. If a wedding were desired, provisions could be put in place to meet the interests of the community.

The meeting was then turned over to Donna Mintz who has been working on this plan for several months making the Modroo homestead a self sustaining asset to the community. The business side of the plan contains numbers and figures that she has prepared. The vision entails the following:

- Home – sought after destination for vacation, wedding or a farm stay experience which is trending upwards.
- Return of the open farm stand fills the growing need and passion of our community for locally grown herbs, fruits and vegetables.
- The ~13 acres around the house can serve as classroom which involves a huge community involvement in education.
 - Garden planning workshop
 - Edible weed walk
 - Compost workshop
 - Yoga at the farm

- Introduction to preserving
- Medicinal herbs and remedies

Donna converted her Chagrin Falls, 5 bedroom home into a bed and breakfast and designed a 2 acre garden that was known as Eaglewood Manor and Garden Farm. Advertising was done only on homeaway.com and had guests reserving week long stays from May through October. Reviews were read from her property. The average nightly rate was \$281. The Modroo costs would be a weekly fee, cleaning fee and taxes. Ms. Mintz estimated on the low side of \$3000/week, \$300/week cleaning plus taxes bringing in an estimate of \$3,500 to \$4,000 per week. One difference is she lived on the Eaglewood Manor property and with Modroo that would not be the case giving more opportunity.

The financial details will be forwarded for review. Partnerships are needed with people that get along and want to see this happen for Russell Township for this iconic piece of property. Donna Mintz estimated the income will exceed the operating costs.

Donna Weiss Carson stated she spoke with Mary Modroo on the operating costs. Current electricity is \$3,200 per year, gas of \$3,000, landscaping is \$6,500 and misc repairs of \$2,700. Ms. Weiss Carson mentioned the \$2K lease for Donna Mintz. Ms. Weiss Carson stated that the roof has been updated within the last four years and most of the electric and plumbing has been updated.

- Barbara Berkeley mentioned the house isn't furnished. She inquired who is going to manage this enterprise and how will this person be paid as this is a full time job. Lastly, you need to be realistic with the expectations of the upkeep on a property of this age.
- Joe Leslie stated when looking at the concept of maintenance verses trying to allocate funds for capital improvements, you need to have your eyes wide open. He stated the commitment to help get the home furnished. Mary Modroo has done a phenomenal job with the home.
- Martha Dempsey has concerns over the acquisition fund all being poured into Modroo. The Russell resident's want to maintain green space and this was completed already by acquiring the 53 acres and has concerns over losing the vision. There is more of a concern to putting conservation easements on the properties we already own.
 - Donna Weiss Carson stated that we have over 400 acres. Every time we acquire property we are taking it off the tax roles and many people are not happy about that.
- Eileen Fisco mentioned the possibility of giving a couple a place to live and run the property.
 - Donna Weiss Carson responded that Donna Mintz would be paying the park district \$2K/month to lease the property.
- Greg Gillstrom was struck by the irony of this conversation. With the original purchase of Modroo property the desire was additional green space. Now we are being taken over by commercial enterprises. This is a commercial discussion. It's an okay house on a flat piece of property. There are many concerns including traffic and he believes this is being terribly underestimated and this would benefit one person and not the community.

Donna Mintz said this would stay as a residential house. The only thing that changes is the farm stand and it goes back to its original state and will bring a lot of people together.

Bart Alcorn has expressed interest in running the farm stand to support local products just as they run Eddy's Fruit Farm. It's a nice farm stand there are several little rooms that he is open to the arts and craft ideas for different events to help the community. The plan would be to run on Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. or so. It is a unique piece of property and is very nice. It would be an investment on their part to come in and get things started. Mr. Alcorn acknowledged a lease would be paid and there are current discussions.

- Donna Weiss Carson stated that Cuyahoga National Park that has two bed and breakfasts there.
- Mr. Suhay inquired if this lease would be year by year?
 - Mr. Leslie stated that if it is not self-sustaining then it would be a problem. Looking at the numbers, he believes it to be more than self sustaining.
 - WRLC stepped into the purchase because the community spoke to us and we took a risk to do this because we think it's an asset and felt we were helping the community, he said.
 - Most of these endeavors are break evens and sometimes losses for park districts; and when I say that I'm talking about this building here (the West Woods).

Mr. Wayt thanked Mr. Leslie, Donna Mintz and Bart Alcorn for their work and stated he can see their vision and understands it. This vision could be an asset for the township. The concern is whether a park board with no levy and no funding is the right vehicle for this vision. Mr. Wayt went on to say there are a lot of smart individuals with the WRLC and they would require a seven figure endowment to take this on. Should the \$225K go to a 145 year old farm house or be spent on 15 to 20 acres that could possibly be obtained with that money. There are concerns for the operating expense.

Mr. Suhay stated that he has concerns for the money. I need to see the money before I commit to any project like this. The home is 145 years old and a vision for a constant influx of many people. It's a very big undertaking. We need to put a levy on and need to figure out what's going on with the 511 board, the trustees, and our own board as well.

Donna Weiss Carson discussed assumptions concerning the 2 operating plans referenced. The first plan is the Russell Park Operating Plan in which the house and farm stand rental would provide \$28K in revenue a year making it self-sustaining. This revenue would cover insurance, grounds maintenance, minor repairs and provide a surplus of approximately \$12K a year to be held in the Modroo Rainy Day Fund for capital improvements. Grounds maintenance cost would much depend upon the level of grounds improvements to be made surrounding the house. The goal is low to no maintenance.

The second plan is Donna Mintz' own Bed and Breakfast Operating Plan. She estimates at least 20 weeks of weekly, family occupancy. The WRLC and she would furnish the home and she would operate the bed and breakfast under a lease agreement to Russell Park Board. She would be responsible for electricity, gas, insurance, minor maintenance/decorating and her own operational expenses.

- Pat McCarthy inquired about the 511 levy.
 - There are no levies at this time.

Mr. Mueller spoke on behalf of himself; not as representative for the Russell Township trustees. He is thoroughly convinced that this is a good plan. If you generate sufficient funds to certainly handle the day to day expenses, plus more. The alternative is the house, barn and some of these buildings are gone and in private hands. What some of you are talking about then will have no say. You could be looking at six or seven houses. He suggested that anyone interested in keeping this house in the public domain to voice your opinion. When the signs went up initially they said save Modroo, not save the land. He mentioned an idea to pass the levy is to say that everyone in the township can have a wedding there. Please talk to the other two trustees. He cannot answer any questions about the 511. He was the one that made the motion to give the \$1,500 to get started. He appreciates what the Russell Park District is doing, and Mr. Wayt thanked him for coming out tonight.

- Matt Sobel is impressed with the openness and was impressed with the wisdom of the content. Look at the financials.
 - Donna Weiss Carson stated the numbers were just put together today and changed our minds as to not publish them at this time.
- Charlie Butters inquired about the high intensity use? Has anyone called the county?
 - Donna Weiss Carson has a call into the county on this issue.
 - Joe Leslie believes there are ways around a new sewer system which include port a potties.
- Ben Kotowski mentioned that with the property you have right now, a levy is needed. That property has to be maintained. Cash flow is needed to accomplish the bare minimum. Townships are very different. A court case was mentioned where the township lost at the Supreme Court level due to one item grown on that property making it an agricultural use. Having this controlled use at Modroo is to our benefit.
- John Wagner mentioned the possibility of farming the property for revenue.
- Charlie Butters mentioned that the land acquisition fund might restrict to only purchasing “land” and not a house. Check the ballot language.
- Greg Gillstrom asked to open this up to competitive bidding, minimize the impact on the community.
- Martha Dempsey stated that you cannot compare the success of Cuyahoga National Park to a little township park and is apples and oranges.
- Howard Shanker inquired about easements on the property.
 - Joe Leslie responded that we have 13.5 and 5 that does not currently. If we can’t work something out here is has to go back on the market. We are over the time that we have to pay back the loan on this property. He is guessing then the home and barn would come down said Mr. Leslie. The WRLC has to get the return on their investment.
- Ben Kotowski likes the idea of sending out request for proposals. It’s not just about revenue, it’s also about service.

Mr. Wayt stated that’s a valid point in scoring RP’s. I want Russell Township to have green space. Everything I’m hearing is very much commercial in nature, he stated. He continued to say the ideas for the property are wonderful, but the question remains if we are the right vehicle for that.

- Jack Dempsey inquired of a back- up plan?
 - Donna Weiss Carson said that would be to give it back to the WRLC or partner with Geauga Parks.
 - Mr. Wayt has had a conversation with Geauga Parks and they have made it clear they are not interested in this property.
- Martha Dempsey commented on the past volatile situation of this park board. Currently this is a great board, but has concerns about what will happen in five years. People turn over and this is under the Judge’s control. It’s a lot of money and a big commitment.
- Eileen Fisco inquired about pros and cons. Her objective is for the green space and no additional taxes.

Mr. Wayt inquired about the timeframe for the WRLC. Mr. Leslie responded he would like to see a decision in June and would like to walk away with the impressions that people are for the plan rather than against it. This will be a hard goal to go back to donors and request \$700K in order to finish the acquisition without a high level of support. Mr. Wayt mentioned that he hasn’t heard anything tonight that would change his mind. Another option that hasn’t been talked about is forming a 501(c)(3) and donating the raised funds to the nonprofit. Mr. Suhay added that he is on the fence on this. He thinks it a great idea, but has concerns about the money. Donna Weiss Carson thanked everyone for coming. She thinks it’s an opportunity that we should take advantage if the WRLC can complete the funding. She thanked Donna Mintz for a wonderful job in building the cost and expense schedule. All of the comments are appreciated.

The meeting was closed at 8:40 p.m.

Commissioner

Commissioner

Commissioner

Warrant Listing:

5/7/18	Blades Lawn Care	\$305.00	#1050
5/7/18	Joan Heppert	\$630.00	#1051
5/7/18	Scott Wayt	\$320.00	#1052

