

Parks, Tourism and Economic Development Committee Minutes

Regular Meeting

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

1. **Call to Order:** The Parks, Tourism and Economic Development Committee (PTED) meeting was called to order at 9:08AM in the County Board Room of the Trempealeau County Courthouse located at 36245 Main St, Whitehall, WI by Jeanne Nutter, Vice Chair.
2. **Certification of Open Meeting Law Requirements:** Kirstie Heidenreich certified that the Open Meeting Law Requirements have been met.
3. **Roll Call of Committee Members:** Members present: Jeanne Nutter, Jean Galasinski, Chuck Walek, Curt Skoyen, and Sara Ecker. Jon Schultz arrived at 9:13AM; Michelle Haines arrived at 9:09AM. Members absent: Ron McKernan. Also present were Department of Land Management staff Kevin Lien, Becky Arneson, and Kirstie Heidenreich, along with Bob Pietrek and Debbie Foss.
4. **Adoption of Agenda:** Jean Galasinski made a motion to approve the agenda. Chuck Walek seconded. Motion carried.
5. **Adoption of Minutes (9-20-16):** Motion to adopt the minutes from September 20, 2016 by Chuck Walek; seconded by Curt Skoyen. Motion carried.
6. **Update from CapX2020 Sub-Committee on Kloss Shelter Improvements:** Kevin Lien informed the Committee that he attended the last Executive Finance Committee meeting and gave them a progress report on the Kloss Shelter construction project. He said currently there are bids out on the project and a site showing for contractors will take place later in the week. He asked that the CAPX2020 funds be extended in to 2017 and the Committee granted an extension to the end of 2017 for construction to be complete and the funds to be spent. Kevin commented that he was hopeful that some of the framing work on the shelter can even get done this fall if the weather holds up.
7. **Status Report from 2017 Park, Tourism, and Economic Development Budget Hearings:** Kevin stated that he has heard that it is proposed that Exec Finance is going to cut the PTED (Parks, Tourism and Economic Development) Coordinator position, the second LTE position, and eliminate the money for the park manager building. Becky Arneson stated that she has provided the Committee with a budget packet and everything that is highlighted in red is proposed to be taken out of the budget. She said the cuts will include the PTED Coordinator, LTE groundskeeper/custodian, all Social Security/benefits associated with those positions, the park manager's building, and all Economic Development, Tourism, Motorcoach, and Bicycling funds. Kevin then stated that he received an email from Linda Mossman that he was asked to be read in to the records. The email read as follows:

“To the Parks, Tourism and Economic Development Committee,

I have asked that my comments be read into the record, sorry I was unable to deliver them in person however, as a tourism business it is extremely difficult to attend morning meetings as we are often times with guests.

I am extremely disappointed to learn that the proposed budget for the department has been reduced to \$84,313.99 with anticipated revenues of \$13,000.00. Ironically there is \$10,000 for expansion with no additional money to staff or promote the park.

Questions:

- 1) Why did the county board push so adamantly to form this committee if there was no desire to fund the project?
- 2) Who will be responsible for the oversight of the park, is Land Use to be responsible without compensation? There is a \$15,660 line item wages & salaries, who is this person and how many hours is this realistically?
- 3) I do not see any budget for tourism or economic development. Additionally the \$5,000 for the three tourism partners has been removed as well. Does the board not recognize the opportunity to generate sales tax through this industry, nor do they just believe that we are so irrelevant that we deserve no further consideration?
- 4) Why should the tax payers continue to fund the per diems (\$4000.) for meetings if there is really no further need for the committee?
- 5) The line item \$10,000 for park expansion-why would we spend money to build something only to keep it a secret?
- 6) Is there any validity to the rumors of the park being sold or given back to the original landowners? I feel that before that decision can be made the board should seriously consider their other land holdings. Why wouldn't we sell land that could be put back onto the tax rolls?

Dick Miller expressed to me that many of you requested to be placed on this committee, so I have to believe that you felt the premise for parks, tourism and economic development is important. With that said you support the original budget as presented to the Executive Finance Committee, so this must be as disappointing to you as it is to me.

There is still time to ask the tough questions, ask for clarification on my questions as well as yours, and bring forth an amendment to the 2017 budget during the November 15th public hearing. It would require 2/3 vote by the board, however with the five members of this committee and Olin as YES we are 50% of the way there. Thank you, of course if anyone should have questions please contact me.

Linda Mossman
Whitehall, WI"

Jon Schultz stated that Linda's questions are very fair and those are pretty immediate questions as we look through the budget cuts. Jon then commented that there are even rumors that Pietrek Park may be sold or given back to the original landowners. He asked Bob Pietrek if he had any comments or thoughts on that notion. Bob Pietrek responded that it will never be sold; it was written in the deed that it would have to be given back to the family. Bob also said that it was written in the deed to be run with the intents of his aunt and uncle (youth education). Bob asked the Committee what department in the County makes between \$100-150,000 a year, because what tourism is bringing in to the County is about that amount. Bob said "the County leadership should be looking at the revenue that tourism and business owners are bringing in to the County and now we have an organization that is trying to chase them away." Jeanne Nutter stated the Bob is preaching to the choir because no one on the PTED Committee was on the Exec Finance Committee and she has no intention of supporting a budget that cuts funding to the park. She said last year when they had the public hearings for the budget, no one came, so she is hoping that this

year people will come and talk about the budget. Kevin stated that the proposed PTED budget cuts are about \$100,000, as the proposed budget was about \$183,900. Jon Schultz commented that moving forward, a proposed budget amendment could be drafted, as with the budget cuts, there may not even be enough money there to manage the park. Kevin stated that current staff received no compensation for their work on the Park this year and it seems unfair that Executive Finance wants to leave PTED with the Dept. of Land Management, but no money for them to be able to compensate someone to manage it. Curt Skoyen mentioned that Kevin was only meant to be an “interim” Park Manager and was wondering if “interim” was clearly defined in the resolution, as Exec Finance seems to think it is a bit more permanent. Kevin stated that it was intended to be an interim position for one year and the County Board asked the PTED Committee to create a department and a new position to manage PTED issues. Kevin said in preparation for the budget hearing and other options, his staff has looked in to other county-owned land that could potentially be sold instead of Pietrek Park being put back on the tax roll. He said if they’re looking at freeing up debt, these lands would be a much better option than the Park. Jean Galasinski said that she will do whatever it takes for the budget hearings on November 15th. She said that she is extremely upset and hurt and feels like the things that we have done have been for naught...she asked why the Committee had been formed if the county government had no intent of supporting it. Kirstie Heidenreich asked the Committee if DLM staff could do a presentation to the County Board on the 15th in an effort to inform the rest of the Board what has been accomplished through PTED in 2016. Jon Schultz made a motion that the Committee encourage staff to prepare a presentation for the County Board on Nov. 15th. Jean Galasinski seconded. Motion carried.

8. **Update on Development of Interpretive Trail at Pietrek Park:** Kirstie Heidenreich stated that she has been working with a company called Wildlife Exhibits LLC out of Houston, MN who has done a lot of work previously for US Fish & Wildlife and the Trempealeau Refuge. They have begun to put together a new park entrance/trail sign, two trailhead signs, and one promotional banner display using \$5,000 of CAPX2020 money still available from the Trempealeau Tourism Council. Kirstie showed the Committee pictures of the initial design work that has been done and let them know that these initial signs are anticipated to be done by the end of 2016.
9. **Discussion of Potential Land Donation Options for a County Park (Sumner and Unity Parcels):** Kevin reminded the Committee that at the last PTED meeting, Gale Gabriel stated that he no longer felt the Sumner parcel was a good fit for a county park. Kevin said that Kirstie had asked Gale at the meeting to consider the option for a park there if staff was able to give him initial design plans and ideas. Gale stated that he would be open to that. Curt Skoyen informed the Committee that at the last Town of Sumner meeting, Chairman Larry Amundson wanted the record to show that he is neutral about a county park in Sumner and had not made a decision supporting either option. Kirstie then presented a potential park plan for Sumner to the Committee and said that the most appealing item about the property is that it would be able to open for immediate use to the existing trail system. The plan allotted for two picnic/scenic overlook areas, two natural spring drinking stations, two primitive restrooms, about 45 primitive campsites, and various existing and proposed hiking/snowshoeing trails. Kirstie also provided the Committee with an article recently published in the Wisconsin State Journal about a 100 acre county park that was just donated by a private landowner in Dane County that very closely mirrors the Sumner property in terms of topography and uses. She asked the Committee if they felt comfortable mentioning within

the presentation to Mr. Gabriel that they are no longer interested in any other property other than Sumner and the consensus was to solely pursue the Sumner property (which was decided in a previous meeting via a formal motion). Kevin told Kirstie to focus on the uniqueness of the Sumner property to Gale in the presentation and to mention that the other properties lack those qualities.

10. **Discussion on the Creation of Trempealeau County Bus Tours/Scenic Roadways Map and Funding:** Kevin reminded the Committee that about \$3,850 had been set aside in 2016 for the creation of a bus tour brochure/map; currently no one is doing the tours and if the money is not spent by the end of the year, it would go back in to the General Fund. Kevin asked the Executive Finance Committee to extend the money in to 2017 and they would not grant that request. Ann Hempel from Land Records was present to inform the Committee that her staff will be able to help Olin with a brochure and use the funds to get it printed by the end of the year. Ann stated that the brochure could be used for more than the bus tours, but could also be used for scenic routes of any kind around the county (motorcycles, cars, etc.). Olin Fimreite was also present for this portion of the meeting and said that he has had almost 15,000 visitors come through Trempealeau County on his bus tours, which brought in a little over half a million dollars.
11. **Guest Speaker on Economic Development: Lisa Herr – 7 Rivers Alliance:** Dr. Lisa Herr, CEO of The 7 Rivers Alliance, was in attendance to meet the Committee and give a presentation on what 7 Rivers Alliance is and the opportunities the County will receive for joining their organization. She explained that 7 Rivers is one of nine regional economic development organizations set up by the state of Wisconsin. They are unique because they are the only economic devtpt. organization that also includes three counties in southeast Minnesota and two counties in northeast Iowa. This area is one “labor marketshed,” with LaCrosse in the center and radiate out, which is an area of about an hour and a half radius. She said the organization focuses on supporting each other in growth, advocates for open communication, and supports and advances businesses in their communities. She said the ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life in this region. Dr. Herr went on to discuss several projects that 7 Rivers is excited about, such as the “Golden Shovel Project.” It is an area that is under 25 acres of contiguous parcels that they work to get “development ready” and then work to promote that parcel around the region to have developers come in and utilize it. An upcoming 2017 project is called “Strengthening Economics Community” which locally would involve Trempealeau, Buffalo, and part of Pepin counties to get grant dollars to set economic priorities for the region. She said one of the biggest problems the region is facing is the fact that immigration of talent is not keeping up with the outmigration of talents. One of our region’s biggest exports is educated students; this area is very good at producing solidly educated and work experienced students and then they end up migrating elsewhere for their professional careers. After her presentation, Jon Schultz asked Dr. Herr for any thoughts she would have on the current budget cuts that the PTED Committee is facing, given that one cut would be to a Coordinator that handles economic development. Dr. Herr said that this is the hardest thing for small counties to fund and it’s the first to get cut. She stated it would be counterintuitive to cut economic development in Trempealeau County, because what do people look for when they’re looking to move it to a community? Recreation, leisure, and quality of life. What do companies look for? Quality of life for their workforce. She said what they’re seeing is an interesting move over the last five years where tourism, hospitality, recreation/leisure, workforce

development, business development are now a triad and interdependent – they are no longer separate and they can't be. To get a new company in this area, the other things have to be strongly developed and linked together. Dr. Herr said if it isn't funded, could there be a graduate student in public affairs to start down the road gathering data? Is there a loaned executive from a major employer that could be borrowed for one day a week to have someone focus on this and begin the work? Jeanne Nutter stated that if this whole idea ends up being slashed and burned, then the County is just a little island in the public sector and there is no connection with any of these ideas and with the private sector. Dr. Herr said an increasingly popular idea is also to share positions between two counties, and have a person work half time in each county.

12. **Economic Development, Recreation, and Tourism Update:** Jean Galasinski presented the new Wisconsin Indianhead Country marketing materials that she compiled for their 2017 promotional materials. She updated all of the existing Trempealeau County information due to many of the businesses being outdated or no longer in existence. Wisconsin Indianhead Country will list the materials in their books that they bring to trade shows and also on their website. Becky Arneson presented promotional materials on "Shop Local" to the Committee that she received information on. She informed the Committee that it was an electronic app that encouraged people to shop locally owned businesses throughout the county. The Committee decided there was too much leg work to put in to creating a full inventory of businesses in the county and informing them of this opportunity within about a week or two of time before the deadline; it's an option to consider for next year instead.
13. **Opportunity for Public Comments:** No public comments.
14. **Set next meeting date:** The next meeting will be on Thursday, November 17th at 1:00PM in the Tremple Room of the Trempealeau County Courthouse.
15. **Adjourn:** Meeting was adjourned at 11:27AM by Jon Schultz.

Submitted by: Kirstie Heidenreich, recording secretary