

**CITY OF WIXOM
49015 PONTIAC TRAIL
GUNNAR METTALA PARK SWAP COMMITTEE MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2016**

ROLL CALL:

The Gunnar Mettala Park Swap Committee meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. with the following individuals in attendance:

CITY COUNCIL: Patrick Beagle and Keenan Gottschall

**PARKS & REC.
COMMISSION:** Maryann Chupa, Lisa Ferrari, Tom Menzies, Tom Marcucci, Mary Walsh, Jason Martinez and Mark White

CITY STAFF: Clarence Goodlein (City Manager), Deb Barker (Business Development Liaison) and Carmine Avantini (City Planner)

ABSENT: John O'Brien (Chairman, Parks and Recreation Commission) and Fred Lorenger (Parks & Recreation Commission)

OTHERS: Deanna Magee (Community Services Director), John Cadwell (Treasurer, Indian Wells Homeowner's Association) and Nancy Fisher (Recording Secretary)

Changes or Additions to the Agenda:

There were no changes made to the agenda.

Call to the Public:

Charlotte Chmielnicki, 2678 Bass Wood Lane, Wixom. Would they like to have a sports facility in their backyard? When she bought her condo, she was charged a \$10,000 premium for its prime location and was told that there would never be any construction behind her since it was wetlands. Years ago, she noticed flags going up in that area and her neighbor, Carl Schultz, told the flagmen that the land was too wet to support construction. The water has not receded since that time. She does not want the noise and traffic that would be inherent with what is being proposed. There is so much vacant land where this could go and it would not affect the community. How will it affect her property value? If there is vandalism in the park, install a gate to the park. The existing noise is nothing close to what a sports facility would provide.

Lee Snow, 2670 Bass Wood Lane, Wixom. He has lived there for 15 years. He does not remember the park ever being filled to capacity or requiring any kind of expansion. He does not believe City residents want an expansion. He had to pay \$10,000 extra for his homesite and was told everything on the other side of the creek was untouchable. Now, it is okay for the City to do that? He thinks there is money involved. Why is it okay for the City to destroy EPA-protected land?

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies noted that support of the park is not necessarily what is being considered and that there are other things being considered.

Greg Wills, 2304 Pawnee Drive, Wixom. He has lived here for 20 years and resides in the Indian Wells subdivision. The Cavallero's cannot get enough money and he believes that their 'carrot' is a sports complex valued at \$2 million. But where is the demand? There are 122 acres on Wixom Road which require development and which can contribute to the City's tax base. What value does the City assign to the trees, wetlands and its parks? What about the traffic? Beck Road is bumper to bumper from Maple Road to the freeway. There are 294 apartments on the southeast corner. There is no room for this. This project would involve 300 houses which equates to another 600 cars. Maple and Beck Roads cannot handle that kind of increased traffic flow. Who will pay for the road expansion in 5 years' time? There is already enough road congestion. He walks his dog through the park and coaches kids at the soccer field. The park works fine. Why cut down trees? Where are the studies justifying a need for a sports field? He has not seen them. Previous City meeting minutes reference criminal activities. He is unaware of this and does not hear any sirens. He chose to live in Wixom because he did not want to live in a cookie cutter community. Wixom is not Farmington Hills or Novi. Visit the park and listen to the frogs sing. Is the City being transparent with its handling of this issue? There have already been two poorly communicated meetings and tonight's meeting is not on the electronic bulletin board. His homeowner's association president found out about it and publicized it to the residents. If the City really wants community input, you need to get the residents involved.

William Wyllie, 2093 Teaneck Circle, Wixom. Is this a special committee? City Councilmember Gottschall said that it is a special committee which was appointed by the Mayor at a City Council meeting.

Valerie Johnson, 2414 Wenona Drive, Wixom. Her home backs to the park. She agrees with the previous comments made. She does not want this and the City does not need it. Keep the green space and the wetlands intact. She left her name and number to be called to serve upon the committee. However, she was not contacted because they know that she is against it. If you want it in your backyard, then build it there.

Steve Lowe, 9370 Yorick, Wixom. He notes there are very few people from Wixom present tonight. The City has a transparency issue. Is the developer present tonight? Is this a volunteer committee? Transparency needs to be paramount on behalf of the developer, the committees and City Council. There should have been signs posted at the park and in front of City Hall for the meetings. This proposal will put way more cars on Beck Road.

Robert Newcombe, 2800 Apache Trail, Wixom. He moved here 29 years ago. Destroying the park would be like living in Southfield. The northeast corner of the park is the most interesting part and it is a natural treasure. It is a swamp forest that is irreplaceable. Any land can be turned into a soccer field. There is so much wildlife present there including salamanders, tree frogs, many varieties of turtles, wood ducks, woodpeckers, finches, two species of owl, turkeys, chipmunks, etc. A new soccer field is not worth the extermination of these species.

Harriet Bialy, 2900 Merganser, Wixom. She has lived here since 1974. That pond is well known as a peeper pond. All the older residents know this is the most picturesque, beautiful corner of the City. Are the Cavallero's here tonight? The City just paid off the millage for bike paths which are not yet complete (they stop at an odd point). She has several family members who were municipal employees and she has never heard of park land being swapped out for development. She disagrees with the statements made in *The Spinal Column* that the park is a crime magnet.

Jeff Sovel, 2901 W. Maple Road, Wixom. The emails are propoganda and are clearly intended to persuade and not to inform including use of terms such as 'usable acreage' instead of actual acreage. There is only a proposal from a realtor with estimates and no developer. There was a drawing depicting green and pink shaded areas.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Martinez noted that the City was approached by a realtor and this was only an idea. The acreage depicted on the pamphlet was very fluid and could be whittled and shaped into any size. The realtor's proposal was merely based on other previous projects he was involved in. City Council would be at a disadvantage to not even consider the proposal.

Mr. _____ [last name inaudible] noted that there may not be a developer yet but that is why there is a realtor involved. The drawing clearly suggests that the acreage any developer would receive is larger than what they would give. The way this is being spun is very deceptive.

Dick Harrick, 656 Shady Maple Drive, Wixom. Who benefits financially from this land swap? Why is there not anyone on the Committee who is from the area if they are so concerned about it?

Pat Abele, 682 Chestnut Drive, Wixom. They are talking about putting 100 homes on a small street leading to the park. She is very concerned about more traffic and more homes. She has four grandchildren who go to Walled Lake Schools. At 2:30 p.m. when cars are leaving, it is dangerous. When the church lets out, the police are there and there is no protection for the children. They cannot handle the increased traffic.

Kevin McCallum, 2660 Warrior Drive, Wixom. He moved here 7 years ago and lives on a cul-de-sac near the pond. It is a very quiet setting with peepers, deer and coyote. ITC wanted to purchase the land and beautify the area, making it a natural habitat. Now, this will be destroyed. His homeowner's association has spent a lot of money in return for what ITC got. He wondered why they could build something on the northeast corner of Beck and Maple Roads. However, when there is a will, there is a way. When he goes outside at night, it is quiet and all he hears is peepers. We do not need all this development. Build it over on Wixom Road. What is in it for the residents or for City Council? He would not benefit and it will likely devalue his home. As it is, he leaves his home early in the morning to avoid Beck Road traffic. If he returns home between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m., it is backed up from the expressway. He is angry about this and the way it was proposed. The realtor wants the money but it is not good for the community. He used to live in Rose Township when they proposed expanding the landfill there. All the residents were against it and wanted the land kept natural. However, the Township overturned the residents' wishes. He hopes that does not happen here.

David Giordano, 2350 Wenona Drive, Wixom. He has lived there for 30 years. He lives in the last home before Beck backing to the park. What attracted him to his home was the beautiful park with neighbors on all sides. This does not concern only the residents bordering the park but all Wixom residents. The traffic would be horrendous. Has there been and will there be a traffic study conducted? How long will it take to do a traffic study? He just noticed another new development going in on the south side 200-300 yards before Wixom Road with probably close to 100 homes. Who is benefiting from this proposal and what is the estimated revenue? Much of that revenue would be devoted to road infrastructure. A lot of his Latino friends use the park and he is glad to see that families are using it and having picnics there. He does not hear police cars with sirens. Everyone should use the park.

Ashley Dragan, 971 Calpernia, Wixom. It would be a disaster to get rid of the park. It would be crazy to get rid of a small parcel on which ITC has an easement and which was appraised at \$165,000. This is in the Norton Creek watershed and is an impaired waterway. There are grants and other ways to improve it. This is unreasonable.

Determination of a Quorum:

A quorum of the Gunnar Mettala Park Swap Committee was present for this meeting.

Correspondence:

1. Email from M. Thompson regarding proposed park swap

Presentation

Wixom 360 Degrees Wellness Initiative – Leesa, Owner of Verdurous Me Active Wellness Center

Ms. Barker introduced Leesa, the owner of Verdurous Me Active Wellness Center, a new business on the south end of Wixom Road near Grand River. Leesa was present at the City Council meeting when several residents voiced their disapproval of the land swap involving the park. She could see that City Council was interested in pursuing it. Everything she does is about community with a goal of being a win-win solution for everyone. She believes all sides should be heard. Her wellness center comes from her time in Italy. She noted that other communities have tried to maximize space and wellness initiatives. She looked at what would make the park land swap beneficial to the community and at all the variables. She wants to be more involved with the City. She focused on four different aspects for the community if the proposal is approved by voters including: walking paths, fitness stations, an area for children and bike paths.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies interrupted Leesa's presentation to note that the intent of this group is to come together to see whether it makes sense. Leesa's presentation is examining potential opportunities and what the City might do with the park. Council member Gottschall noted that this Committee was appointed and that even members on the Committee may not see eye to eye on this issue. Leesa is a private resident. Even if the land swap is not done, some of her ideas could be applied to the current park which could use a face lift.

Leesa said that the City could do safety nights for children with ADD, ADHD or sensory issues and that it is important for special needs kids to have community. The bike trails could be used for ski/walk paths during the winter. She is not trying to sell anything and is only seeking a win-win solution.

New Business:

1. **Consideration of a proposal to swap part of the existing Gunnar Mettala Park for a new park and athletic facility**

City Manager Goodlein noted that the purpose of tonight's meeting is a workshop to discuss the proposal to take some park property and combine the Cavallero property which would ultimately be sold and developed either way. Is this in the City's best interest? This Commission has no decision making authority and is meeting for discussion purposes only. It will discuss the findings and report those to City Council who will decide whether this will become part of a ballot initiative. If so, the citizens will be asked to authorize City Council to conduct the land exchange.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies reiterated that everyone on the Committee has his or her own opinions but the purpose of tonight's meeting is basically fact finding.

Ms. Barker pointed to large maps depicting the site of the proposed land swap including the park area. One is a 2005 map which depicts the property that the Cavallero's wanted to sell. Robertson Brothers put

together a proposal at that time. She showed the realtor's proposal. However, it is up to the residents and City Council to decide what goes in there. The City would choose the developer. City Council's objective is to see what is best for the City and its residents.

In response to a question from an unidentified member of the public, Council member Gottschall said that the realtor is Mr. Seevers who is affiliated with Century 21 in Livonia. Mr. Seevers is a former Farmington Hills City Councilman and former Oakland County Commissioner. He was involved in the development of projects similar to this.

City Manager Goodlein suggested starting with a discussion of the actual property. Mr. Seevers suggested some sort of athletic complex. That may be a misnomer since it would likely contain a lot of infrastructure. He would provide the property part of the existing park to be combined with the Cavallero property. The community would decide what it wants; i.e., soccer, fitness, baseball, etc. The proposal involved land which has drainage, irrigation, parking and a comfort station with restrooms. The City can either accept or reject this proposal. The park provides an area where children can recreate. However, it is currently not usable during the spring due to drainage issues. Mr. Seevers' initial ideas were not endorsed or accepted. The density would be determined by City Council. Any determination about commercial property would also be determined by City Council as the project moves forward. The City's staff was interested because it is a unique way to provide other types of outdoor recreation opportunities in the City. It is not intended to destroy the natural beauty or hand the park over to somebody but to make the land better or more usable for the residents. The public has articulated their concerns. Does the Committee see any strengths in the proposal? No one wants unmanageable traffic. He is aware of the development on the southeast corner of Beck and West Maple. The City would not proceed unless they can manage the traffic. A traffic analysis must be performed.

Council member Gottschall thinks it is premature to make a recommendation at this point. He thought this Committee would split into subcommittees. He thinks this is a good exercise to discuss improvement of the City's parks which are in need of a face lift (buildings, fields, etc.). He recommends conducting a community survey and needs assessment. The City could either move along with a vague idea or develop a plan to take before the residents. He inquired whether there is a real budget. Ms. Barker said that Mr. Seevers estimated that between \$2-2.5 million could go into the park. Council member Gottschall said that at the rails-to-trails meeting, they are looking at parking for a trailhead which he thinks should be added even if this proposal does not go through. City Council should close on the rails-to-trails soon and then paving would commence. It needs different entry points.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Marcucci wonders about fixing up the existing park without putting houses on it. Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies noted that prior Parks & Recreation Commissioners have been raising monies for the Oakland Technical Center and looking at getting equipment. He suggested taking perhaps \$100,000 for kids to put there. Also, perhaps a splash park. The realtor's list includes: two baseball fields with drainage and lighting, eight soccer fields, a storage building with a comfort station, a concession building, tennis courts, a road connection to downtown and retention of the existing buildings. Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies asked for feedback from the other Committee members present tonight.

Council member Beagle noted that just because the realtor has made a proposal does not mean that he supports it. They have not yet done a soil test. His job is to figure out a plan that could enhance the park system and then the public will vote on that proposal. The residents have the final say. He can do anything the City likes and will listen to the City.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner White noted that he is a former high school coach for Walled Lake Western and believes the City needs usable, viable field space. Currently, there are no usable lacrosse

fields. The two fields at Gunnar Mettala are unusable. If there is a way to make it palatable to the developer, the public and the City Council, he thinks it is worth the investment of time to do so.

Carmine Avantini is the City's City Planner and has been for the past 15 years. He has worked with the Parks & Recreation Commission through two park Master Plans. He redeveloped 30 parks and playgrounds. There is a process which involves the public. However, this is awkward since the City was approached by a realtor and the developer is typically involved up front. The process usually starts with a landscape architect who looks at what natural features you want to save or protect. He recognizes this park needs improvement although it could cost far less than the \$2 million proposed. It is a good idea to have homes look out on a park which cuts down on crime and vandalism. A design professional would provide cost estimates which can be negotiated. When you develop a ball field, at least half of the cost goes underground in the form of drainage and you do not even see it. What is an appropriate balance between improvements and housing units? In the end, there would be a complete plan with cost estimates and public input. Then it would be voted upon by the residents.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Marcucci pointed out that the City's Commissioners are unpaid volunteers.

City Council member Gottschall would like to determine the next step, including perhaps the creation of subgroups to examine costs and potential grants for the current park, conduct site visits to other parks and do a needs assessment of all Wixom residents. City Manager Goodlein noted that the next step would be to break the Committee into work groups organized by task. He also suggested having Mr. Seevers deliver a couple different renditions which portray the land more vividly, representing the location of the park and how the land would be put together in relationship to the major roads and existing homes. Alternatively, the subgroups can consider making recommendations on how to enhance the existing park with no development along with the cost for accomplishing this. It would be important for the Committee to know how much it would cost to improve the fields, irrigation, a comfort station, etc. This would allow for comparison between that and the proposed land swap.

City Council member Gottschall recapped that things that should be considered are: the cost for the fields, site visits to other local parks (examining equipment and layout) and a community survey.

Council member Beagle suggested examining the difference in cost between turf and astro turf in order to potentially eliminate the cost of maintenance, the cost of a splash park and any associated costs including insurance. He suggested all the Committee members email City Manager Goodlein with available dates for 3-4 weeks out for the next meeting.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Walsh said that she likes walking and enjoys the trees. She noted that her sister cannot walk on uneven ground and she would like to see the City have good walking paths which are nice, friendly and enjoyable.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Marcucci suggested trying to save the wetlands as much as possible and maybe drop from 120 to 40-50 homes.

John Cadwell is the Treasurer of the Indian Wells Homeowner's Association. He asked what the time constraints are for this project including the ballot initiative. Is there time to address all of these issues? City Manager Goodlein said that it would have to be completed by the first to second week in July which allows for time to deliver the ballot language to the County Clerk.

City Manager Goodlein confirmed that the subgroups will be: 1) park configuration (whether it involves a land swap or a the existing park as is); 2) a simple straightforward cost analysis vs. amenities (soccer

fields, baseball fields, additional parking, etc.); 3) site visits to neighboring parks (configuration and location relative to residential communities and if close to wetlands how those will be preserved); 4) design (how many walking trails, fitness area, attractions and young children's area for both a potential land swap and the existing park?); 5) determine the pulse of everyone in the community, in addition to those residents living nearest the park. People can volunteer for these groups.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Lisa Ferrari sought to confirm that even if a land swap is not done, when the Cavallero's sell their property, they are still planning to build a substantial number of homes there. Ms. Barker said that is true and it could be 50-60 homes.

Parks & Recreation Commissioner Menzies clarified that the subcommittees will be looking at: 1) cost; 2) a public survey; 3) park configuration; and 4) site visits and that the latter two may be coordinated. City Manager Goodlein suggested that a coordinator be appointed to direct the subgroups once they are formed. Council member Gottschall suggested that when Committee members send their emails regarding available dates for the next meeting, they should also list which subgroups they want to be on. City Manager Goodlein said that this will be posted on the Parks & Recreation Commission web page and he will notify residents in the Indian Wells and Indian Springs subdivisions.

Call to the Public:

Steve Lowe, 9370 Yorick, Wixom. Mr. Seever kicked an ant hill. There is a Parks & Recreation Director and a Parks & Recreation Commission and that it is not Mr. Seevers' job to design the park. The City staff and committees should do this together and there should be a 5/10/15-year plan. The City may need to pay a consultant to arrive at a cost estimate. He suggests this Committee be dissolved and that Mr. Seevers' proposal should be addressed by City staff and City commissions.

Jeff Sovel, 2901 W. Maple, Wixom. The City does not seem impartial. The City's email said they are excited. There is a drainage problem with the park. The City should not sell out its quality of life.

Greg Kelly, 2403 Pawnee, Wixom. He is very passionate about the park. There is a sense that the City Council and the Committee is excited about increasing the City's tax base. However, the City needs to look at the residents' quality of life. You do not enhance the park by cutting down trees and filling in wetlands. If the Cavallero's want to build on their own property, good for them. He does not want to subsidize their development with the City's park land. The City can enhance Gunnar Mettala Park but be smart about it. Ask whether you need to spend money on engineering and visit other parks. There is already a park there. Leave it as it is.

Mike Dorman, 2192 Hedigham Drive, Wixom. He lives west of Wixom Road off Maple. There is no realtor, no developer and no money other than resident money to do this. There is no need to set up a bunch of committees. However, resources exist internally. The City needs to tell Mr. Seevers to pony up \$30,000-\$40,000 to conduct wetland and woodlands studies, a traffic study and look at alternatives. The City should also do a park Master Plan and future land use study.

John Abele, 682 Chestnut, Wixom. He agrees with most of what has been said tonight. People keep talking about improvements to the park. He is more interested in it as a park for everyone including little kids. He has lived here 15 years and has 4 grandchildren. He has used this park a lot and he loves it. He was hoping the play scape would have been replaced; however, it has not so he takes his grandchildren to Walled Lake Elementary School. He noted that only a limited number of people benefit from new sports fields. He would like a park which everyone can use. More fields can be added to Gunnar Mettala Park. He would like to see Gunnar Mettala Park left as it is with walking paths.

Cheryl VanDeventer, 955 Rikki Ann, Wixom. She would like to see the park remain natural and within the City's control. The City cannot sell its birthright. It needs to keep its big spaces. She suggested considering Eagle Scouts for projects within the parks and perhaps even having them serve on some of the committees. She would like to see a couple of emergency call boxes in the park. She fell off her bike in the park and people came from everywhere to help her.

Carol Michaels, 606 Shady Maple Drive, Wixom. How many other parks does the City have like Gunnar Mettala? Parks & Recreation Director Deanna Magee said that Gilbert Willis Park is 46 acres.

Terry Gottschall, 1206 S. Creek Drive, Wixom. She wants to thank Leesa for taking a positive, proactive approach and believes that she deserves acknowledgement.

John Lee, 2810 W. Maple, Wixom. This Committee has been given a task with no direction. He thought it was about a land swap for park enhancement; however, he is hearing personal desires. That is what the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Planning Commission are for. Look at the cost of the park and the cost of maintenance as well as the cost of development on the property you are exchanging. Houses do not pay for City taxes. Three years ago, the City was asked to pass 3-1/2 mills which would carry it through to the next election. However, the City still needs that. What does it cost the City to add new homes?; i.e., roads, police, fire, etc. Those are much longer term costs.

Valerie Johnson, 2414 Wenona Drive, Wixom. The article in *The Spinal Column* was slanted. How will the City guarantee that the survey questions will be fair and unslanted? The people have spoken here tonight and their desires are clear. Parks & Recreation Commissioner Chupa thinks that the survey questions will be fair and noted that not all the Committee members are in favor of this proposal. She noted that many times things in the paper are slanted but that is beyond the City's control. She feels the parks need to be made intergenerational. The survey should be straightforward. This was only presented to the Parks & Recreation Commission in January by the realtor and these are his ideas. They have no control at this point over what has gone into the realtor's proposal and this is only the second meeting. The Committee members will work on the various subcommittees.

Greg Wills, 2304 Pawnee Drive, Wixom. The survey sounds like it should be about the park and not about putting development in to pay for the park. Some people have said that they would like it to be a peaceful park. Those are his sentiments. He sees trees from his backyard. Someone on the Committee mentioned poor drainage on the soccer fields. He believes that can be enhanced. There is one trail which runs through the wetlands and it is not being kept up. The residents want the nature and beauty of the park. How does the City fix the park and make it better without artificial turf and improve its natural attributes? (winding trails and birdhouses).

Lynn Terwin, 2606 Maple Forest Court, Wixom. She walks her dog. Who is taking care of the American flag? It is tattered and she is horrified.

Ashley Dragan, 971 Calpernia, Wixom. The discussion keeps drifting back to how to build houses on park land. With grants and an impaired watershed, that is not what you want to do. This would add irrigation and phosphates. You want a natural area. Preserve the land and keep it natural.

ADJOURNMENT:

This meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was motioned and adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Nancy Fisher
Recording Secretary