

Chassell Township Planning Commission
March 7, 2024
Minutes

Attendance: Brian Waters, Doug Hamar, Steve Spahn, TJ Palosaari, Rich Smith, Lynn Gierke (for Dan Palosaari), and Keith Meyers. Absent: Dale Peterson and Daniel Niemela.

Brian convened the meeting at 7:01 p.m. and the pledge of allegiance was given.

Agenda: Brian moved approval of the agenda. Steve provided the second. The motion was approved unanimously.

Minutes: Lynn moved approval of the February meeting minutes. Rich provided the second. The February minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comments: Keith informed the commission about a grant proposal he is writing to seek funding from the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission to seek funding for electrical work and an LED lighting retrofit at the Chassell Heritage Center and to provide power for a planned stairlift to increase accessibility at the Heritage Center. Keith also informed the commission about the pancake and French toast breakfast at the VFW on the morning of April 20th with the project at the Heritage Center being the beneficiary of the proceeds.

Road Commission: No report.

Capital Improvements: Lynn reported that the DPW staff were close to having their review completed.

Park and Recreation Committee: No report

Recreation Facility Issues: None

Old Business:

- a. **Chassell Mercantile Update:** Keith reported that the public information meeting was held on February 14, 2024. The meeting was well attended and all the comments voiced were in support of the project. The presentation was given by Dan Palosaari's architect, James Marusich. Information about the project was posted on the Chassell Township Facebook page and it was overwhelmingly liked with just a few criticizing either the design or change. One commenter suggested a conflict of interest which was responded to directly as not being the case. Graham Jaehnig wrote a front-page story in the Daily Mining Gazette which appeared on Tuesday, March 5, 2024. The response provided to the suggestion of conflict of interest was reported verbatim. John Schmitt with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) is in discussion with existing restaurants about expanding into Chassell into the project. There is potential interest, and the availability of the new Hub Grant program may help with equipping as up to \$20,000 is available for

grants from this program. Jeff Ratcliffe with KEDA and David Rowe with the MTEC SmartZone are working on the details of this grant program. We will discuss formal site development approval and a recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals under New Business.

- b. Snowmobile Trail:** The Park and Recreation Committee met on Monday. Steve, Brian, and Keith along with Dave Mattson, Ryan LaPorte (President of the Keweenaw Snowmobile Club), and Pete Torola (Houghton County Road Commission member) to discuss the potential route. Ryan feels that he has a route all the way from Tapiola to where Cote Road meets the Upper Worham Road. We discussed the use of roads with Pete. Seasonal roads are no problem. Upper Worham and Worham Roads would not be preferred. We discussed the route out of Chassell as potentially running through the old dump to the gas easement. We will need to explore if use of this easement is a possibility and then connecting from there to the junction of the Cote Road and Upper Worham. Funding to pay landowners for easements is possible through the MDNR. The next step will be to talk with landowners.
- c. Centennial Park Engineering Study:** UPEA should be able to finish this up now that plans and specifications have gone to the MDNR on the waterfront boardwalk and concrete walkway from the pavilion to the lake.
- d. Bridges Out of Poverty:** Keith met with Kevin Store from the Copper Shores Community Health Foundation. As a result of that meeting, Keith drafted the purpose and key provisions for the blight mitigation fund and forwarded those to Kevin for inclusion in the agreement. The draft agreement has been circulated for review. Brian moved forwarding the agreement to the board for its final approval. Steve provided the second. The motion was approved unanimously.
- e. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Site:** Keith reported that the county has received \$545,000 in funding that will be available for demolition. We have continued to emphasize the need to address this property and the county has it on a list of thirteen projects. The demolition and clean up associated with the thirteen projects are \$703,000. Sam Stonelake with the Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance (KEDA) has gotten an estimate of \$41,000 to clean up the site. As they are short of about 22.5% of the needed funding to clean up all the sites, KEDA has suggested that the township put forward funding to help close this gap. Keith has discussed this with Dave Mattson, and he will recommend an amount to help fund this difference at next week's board meeting so we can get this site cleaned up and ready for development. We have already completed a letter signed by Dave indicating that no special approvals are required by the township for the clean-up and that the township fully supports the clean-up. There was no additional information about where the Raasios stand with their already submitted development plan. T.J. indicated that he knows Jason Hulkonen who bids their projects, and he will reach out to him.
- f. Portage Paddle Sports:** Brian discussed his idea about possibly retrofitting the existing outdoor restrooms as space for them once the indoor restrooms are available. Brendan has indicated that he needs about five hundred square feet and only about half of that is available, which may be too small for his needs. We will take a closer look and discuss it with Brendan.
- g. Water Trails Program:** Keith spoke today with Barb McEwen about the March 11th deadline for the Copper Shores Community Health Foundation Recreation Grant

opportunity and sent her a follow up email with the proposal we had submitted and offered to provide her a letter of support.

- h. Bark Park and Historic Trail Signage:** The signage is now in place at the entrance to the park, but still needs to be placed ahead of the pavilion after crossing the rail-trail and at the hot pond. Industrial Graphics will be back in the spring to install these.
- i. MDNR Spark Grant Project Schedule:** Keith reported that the Plans and specifications for the boardwalk and walkway went in on February 27th. Once approved, these will be bid by UPEA. The restroom design is still in process. Chris and I will be participating on a call with Jerry Wuorenmaa with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) to discuss compliance oversight with contractors as WUPPDR received Spark funding since we did. This will allow for greater flexibility in our design budget. We are looking toward the fall on the adjustable boat ramp dock, ice rink boards and pavilion curtain deliverables.
- j. Baraga/Chassell Trail Project Collaboration:** Due to the lack of snow, the Trail 15 work can wrap up during 2024. With regard to the rail corridor, we now know that the MDNR owns it. We are pushing the MDNR on the brushing (maybe we can partner with them on this) and on bidding the rail removal. We need Ron Yesney's (MDNR) and Andy Powers' (MDOT) feedback on the Attorney General review of next steps. We have offered to help with brushing along the corridor before things leaf-up through an e-mail today from Jeff Ratcliffe at KEDA.
- k. Centennial Park Rules Sign Update/Long & Short-Term Rental Registration Form:** These are finalized and will be brought to the board for approval at next week's meeting.
- l. Veterans Banners:** Doug reported that he had spoken with Paulette and Donna talked with the Veterans Administration. They will be meeting tonight to discuss this with Braden Archambeau, who heads up the VFW post.
- m. CD# Boat Cleaning System:** The board voted to commit the matching funds at its February 14th meeting. Now we wait and see if the Keweenaw Invasive Species Management Area (KISMA) receives the grant award.
- n. Kick Sled/Skating Track on Pike Bay:** We need to identify a vehicle to which we can add Dave's tracks to for grooming. Keith reached out to Marco Guidotti who is going with Mike Randel about the kick sleds as a potential project for the construction trades class. Keith noted that he ran into Corey Soumis from the ISD at the Sauna Forum in Hancock and he is interested in this as a student project.
- o. Visit Keweenaw Destination Grant Opportunity:** Keith reported that this is due on April 1st. Looking at the possibility of a kayak launch attachment to the waterfront boardwalk. Keith went on to discuss his groundwork on the Natural Resources Trust Fund and Recreation Passport proposals to further develop the Sturgeon River Launch, particularly working with Dan Palosaari on developing cost estimates on the parking development and pit toilet.

New Business:

- a. Historic Trail Buckthorn Bash Volunteers:** We are looking for volunteers to assist with cutting buckthorn from the historic trail on March 21st. Sigrid Resh from KISMA is leading the effort.

- b. Mercantile Site Development Approval and Recommendation:** Keith made the following motion: “The Chassell Township Planning Commission approves the site plan submitted by Dan Palosaari and James Marusich for redevelopment of the Chassell Mercantile site (legal description CHA-8-1, Lot 1, BLK 8, Village of Chassell; parcel 003-208-001-00) and the adjacent property (CHA-8-2, Lot 2, BLK 8, Village of Chassell) for a twenty-two unit project.” Doug provided the second to the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Keith made the following motion: “The Chassell Township Planning Commission recommends that the Zoning Board of Appeals approve a parking variance for the Chassell Mercantile Redevelopment Project to allow for two parking spaces for two-bedroom apartments and one parking space for one-bedroom apartments.” Brian provided the second to the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

- c. 2023-2028 MDNR Recreation Plan Approval:** We needed to do an accessibility assessment of all our recreation assets. Using the Superior Alliance for Independent Living (SAIL) report as a baseline, Brian, Keith, and Lynn met with Karin Cooper from U.P. Engineers and Architects to review and score the assets and this was added to the plan. Bethany also updated the map as requested by Merrie Carlock with the MDNR. Formal approval of the plan came this week.
- d. Hamar Creek Restoration Project:** We will be meeting with Casey Huckins from MTU this month on a partnership to pursue a brook trout restoration on Hamar Creek. The focus is on the stretch below the rail-trail, but we have also involved Eric Zadorecky in the project as well to gain his thoughts and potential participation. Mike Soumis attended the meeting and shared history about the creek as he lived upstream from the Chassell-Painesdale Road from 1949 to 2004. Mike recalled fish spawning in the creek in the fall, but the replacement of a box culvert under the road changed fish access beyond the road. There was a good deal of discussion about how flooding over the years has turned the creek below the rail-trail into a meander that is not friendly to fish moving up from the lake.
- e. April Remote Worker Event:** Keith announced the remote worker networking event will take place on April 4th at 6:00 p.m., one hour ahead of our regularly scheduled planning commission meeting. This will be a terrific opportunity to meet local remote workers and for us to share what the planning commission has been working on. Pizza and beverages will be served.

Brian moved for adjournment. Steve provided the second. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.