

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, October 21, 2020

Place: Held virtually (via Zoom)

Board Members:

Present: Peter Kushner, President; Chris Shook, Vice President; Christopher Bovid, Secretary; Kathy Shook, Treasurer; Diana Morton-Thompson; Eric Boersma

In Attendance: Approximately 16 people (includes Board members)



I. **Call to Order:** Peter Kushner, 7:00 pm

- Welcome
- Zoom meeting procedures overview
- Plan to continue to meet via Zoom at November 2020 meeting; we hope to be back in-person at Winchell Elementary School's library in January but if not we will continue virtually
- November guest speaker – Kalamazoo Stillhouse
- Safe Routes To School / Traffic Calming efforts still underway
- One of the rewards of having Neighborhood Plan passed is funds to complete one of the Neighborhood Plan goals ("Quick Win" project). Must be visible and semi-permanent. One of the goals that stood out from the Neighborhood Plan was to connect neighborhood parks and natural areas. ODWNA Board is working on doing that 1.9-mile trail from Kleinstuck Preserve to Asylum Lake Preserve via wayfinding signs and in-street markings. 95% of the route follows a current bicycle route. One of the many goals was to run the path by the neighborhood pocket parks. Goal is to have this completed via June 2021. Need neighborhood feedback for name of route, sign and road marking designs, etc. Details for giving input will be posted by ODWNA on its eNews and website soon. Diana Morton-Thompson is the chair of the environmental responsibility committee which will be implementing the project.
- The City of Kalamazoo reached out to ODWNA regarding a watershed / stormwater drain project by the County Drain Commissioner (originally done in 2007/2008); goal is to bring community awareness to stormwater pollution. That project is being focused on again. On the ODWNA web site and Facebook page with the proper contact person and more details about how to volunteer on that project.

II. **Treasurer's Report**

- Thank you to everyone who has paid their dues.
- Everyone in the neighborhood is automatically a member however paying dues (which covers whole household) gives voting rights (2 per household) in the organization.
- Payment methods

III. **Neighborhood Business (Old and New):**

- None

Notes from our Guest Speaker:

- Kalamazoo County Commissioners: District 2 – Zac Bauer; District 3 – Tracy Hall
- County Commission is the legislative body for the County; 11 members elected for 2 years from districts created by population
- ODWNA is part of two districts; dividing line is Sheffield Ave – east of there is District 2 and Zac Bauer; west of Sheffield is District 3 and Tracy Hall
- Tracy Hall:
 - Chair of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners
 - West of Sheffield to Drake and then South to Kilgore then to Burdick, part of Vine, and WMU
 - Finishing up second term (was voted in as Chair in July)
 - She is a hockey goalie
 - Honor to be on the Board of Commissioners
 - Mandated by the State Constitution as to what the Board is allowed to do
 - 11-member, partisan board
 - All would probably agree that the most important thing they do is oversee the County budget
 - Several weeks are spent on the budget
 - Lucky that this county that there is an elected County Administrator
 - Several advisory boards are appointed by the County Board of Commissioners
 - That is where the Board obtains a lot of citizen input
 - Prior to being on the County Board, Tracy served on the City of Kalamazoo Commission
 - Lives across the street in Oakwood on the corner of Amherst and Laird (she lovingly calls it the "proletariat neighborhood")

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes



- Zac Bauer:
 - Appointed to the Board about a year ago
 - Recently won the primary but is not up for re-election currently
 - Graduate of WMU and Wayne State University Law and Business School; now works for LISC
 - Previously lived in Milwood neighborhood
 - Recently moved with his partner to over by Kleinstuck
- POWER POINT PRESENTATION:
 - County Mission & Strategic Focus
 - In the pursuit of extortionary governance, Kalamazoo County government provides equitable programs and excellent services to promote the health and safety of everyone in Kalamazoo County
 - I. Deliver consistent high-quality program and services
 - II. Strengthen engagement in our community
 - III. Build a relationship-focused culture
 - As demonstrated in the budget packet, each of departments ties their budget with these three goals
 - 2019-2020 Kalamazoo County Priorities
 - New Justice Facility
 - I. \$95M; Going to Bond in the Spring
 - Address Homelessness and Affordable Housing
 - I. Keystone Home for Veterans
 - II. LGBTQ Homeless House
 - III. 100 homeless vouchers annually (to families with children)
 - Consolidated Dispatch
 - I. Provides funding to the five Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs)
 - II. Was passed by the voters of Kalamazoo County in August 2020
 - i. City of Kalamazoo
 - ii. City of Portage
 - iii. Kalamazoo County Sheriff
 - iv. Western Michigan University
 - v. Kalamazoo Township
 - III. Saves the county government about \$1M
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - I. Questions continually came up about how to instill this
 - i. City recently hired a Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion position
 - ii. County will be doing the same this spring
 - iii. The Board members will be doing anti-bias training
 - iv. Important because this is a diverse community
 - v. This will be a work in progress for some time
 - vi. Staff and administration all the way down to department heads have taken this seriously
 - What Does the Kalamazoo Board of Commissioners Do?
 - Legislative Oversight
 - I. Approve & Maintain Fidelity to the County Budget
 - II. Budget Year 2020: \$109M
 - Constituent Services
 - I. Ensuring that constituents can access county services
 - i. Health & Community Services
 - ii. Integrated Services of Kalamazoo (new name for Community & Mental Health Dept.)
 - iii. County Parks
 - iv. Public Housing Commission
 - v. Animal Services
 - vi. Planning & Development (land planning and economic development)
 - Tracy Hall
 - 269-720-2247
 - Tracy.Hall@kalcounty.com
 - Zac Bauer
 - 269-547-8397
 - Zachary.Bauer@kalcounty.com

GUEST SPEAKER Q&A:

Chris Bovid:

Q: Who is corporate counsel for the County?

A: Cole Stoker out of Lansing has been contracted corporate counsel, however there is actually currently a posting for that position with the County if anyone is interested.

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes



Q: What will happen with the old County Court building when the new one is complete?

A: The old building was actually sold to Plaza Corp a few years ago. There has been a long-term lease between the County and Plaza Corp for continued use of the building that is going to be terminating shortly.

Katie Bloom:

Q: Regarding the Kalamazoo River and Morrow Dam release: Could either Commissioner address what they see the role of the County is in this and how to go forward from the County's perspective (because it does affect our health and well-being)?

A: Tracy Hall says they are working on doing a joint letter to the owner of the dam because it is atrocious. Our parks are jewels for us, and we are lucky to have the Kalamazoo River and its native plants here. But we know that sediment is flowing downriver and will be going to Plainwell and Allegan, so she wants to do this letter not just from the County Board and the City Commission but also jointly with other units of government as well. Maybe that will get some media pressure and the State (EGLE) and/or the EPA might then step up to do something about the problem. The owner of the dam is a subsidiary of the provincial government of Ontario, Canada.

Q: Two weeks ago Ms. Bloom had 17 deer in her back yard. She says the urban deer here present such a bigger problem than she ever noticed when she lived in South Dakota. She has heard from others that this has been an issue with the deer here for 30 years and nothing will ever get done, but she sees the financial detriment from it and believes something must eventually be done. Is there a role for the County to step forward and start some type of a proposal jointly with the City to address that and if so, would either of the Commissioners be willing to take an active role in that? What do they need from the communities to make that happen?

A: Zac Bauer says he is from the thumb of Michigan and his family has many hunters and he has always been amazed by how many deer we have here in the City. Washtenaw County has done some work on this issue as well as Ann Arbor has struggled with it. They have taken more of a humane approach than other areas (some of which have done a DNR sharpshooter to do a cull). Having this population of deer with all of the cars means potential for accidents, and having the heavy concentration of deer in the same area can lead to chronic wasting disease, etc. It would be better to address it proactively now than wait until it becomes an even bigger problem.

Pete Kushner adds that since he has lived in Kalamazoo, the deer population has gone from a curiosity to minor nuisance to being a major nuisance everywhere, all the time. He has tried personally through the ODWNA to jump start these conversations with the City three or four times. It's not as much a "cull" question as a "wildlife management" question. There are plenty of municipalities elsewhere that have dealt with this and can present information on costs, approaches, etc. He's happy to run the point on this but can't get anybody to grab the rope on this from the City. The answer from the City tends to be "this is a regional problem, and we need everybody involved." Deer don't travel more than a few miles so there is little reason to have to bring in an outside municipality to address problems with the deer in the City of Kalamazoo.

Zac Bauer adds that there is also a question of jurisdiction to see who has authority to address the problem.

Pete Kushner asks whether he can get Zac and Tracy to commit just to find out what needs to happen and how the process can work and then let the ODWNA know those answers.

Tracy Hall thinks it does start with some coordination. She suggests that perhaps Zac can sit down with the City and if that happens then perhaps they will feel some pressure to do something. Tracy has a bleeding heart and loves the deer but also recognizes that if someone has a concern about health and safety that as Commissioners they have a duty to look into trying to figure out how to help with it.

Pete Kushner adds that, coincidentally, our January guest speaker is Don Poppe from the DNR who will discuss urban wildlife management. Pete Kushner requests that if either of the Commissioners reaches out to the City on the issue and gets answers, please let the ODWNA what path might work where others have not so far.

Sam Grossman:

Q: A few months back there was a Kalamazoo College-based deer study. He would like to know what the people running that study have done or are doing with the results of that study.

A: Pete Kushner said the students running the study were coordinating that through the Kalamazoo Nature Center. A few years ago the Kalamazoo Christian High School did a study as well. We don't know what is being done with that information.

Tracy Hall adds that perhaps Zac can invite some of the City Commissioners to the ODWNA January meeting to hear the DNR's perspective on urban wildlife management.

Sam adds that both the City of Jackson and the City of Ann Arbor did culling but the DNR did have to do a survey (helicopter survey?) first. Then they hired sharpshooters. That's how it got done in those instances.

Pete Kushner said there are 7 or 8 other neighborhood association leaders who were concerned about the same issue.

Zac Bauer adds that our County Treasurer has a beautiful garden and is very frustrated by the deer that she has in her garden every morning when she wakes up, so there is a lot of support to do something.

Pete Kushner said most people are willing to have an open and honest discussion about how to deal with this issue.

ODWNA Association Meeting Minutes



Pete Kushner:

Q: If the County budget is \$109M, do they know what the City's budget is?

A: Tracy doesn't know what it presently is and can't recall what it was when she was on the City Commission a few years ago, but believes it was around \$89M.

Q: What are the largest areas of cooperation with the City (as opposed to just the outlying areas)? What are the areas where there are problems trying to get together?

A: Tracy says with 11 commissioners you might have 11 different answers. One of the major overlaps is homelessness. Can't walk to and from the County administration building without witnessing the problem firsthand. The County really has the role of 'convenor' of the municipalities to address the problem. About 50% live in the City and about 50% are not in the City. There is some overlap there, but Tracy would like to see more cooperation and collaboration in order to make a dent on the issue.

Tracy also says the flooding downtown is a major problem. Wants to know what the Drain Commissioner can do to assist the City in this (because while it is a City problem, a lot of it is caused by out-of-county reasons).

We have 90,000 units of government in the United States. Even here in Kalamazoo it gets confusing when we have the City, the Township, and the County all with the same name.

Zac says that everything in our State government is regionalizing. You see that in a lot of the planning work (SWMI First or the Economic Development Corporation) so everything that has to be done as a County needs to be done thinking how to do it with your other municipal partners. Water doesn't care where you are, it is coming. We have had a 33% increase in rainfall this year. You know that our major thoroughfares are flooding every spring and it is flooding people's basements (especially in District 2). We all know our homes are our biggest investments; people use those assets to send their kids to college and for retirement; so the County commissioners have a duty to help alleviate those problems.

Zac also says economic development is important to do in a coordinated fashion. Some of that is being down with Brownfield Redevelopment and Light Industrial development. We need to provide things that attract businesses to come here and develop.

Pete Kushner:

Q: How often or possible is it for the County to partner with the local municipalities to combine funds for potentially better solutions?

A: Tracy says one example is about a year ago the City and County and Township and Portage all ponied up a few thousand dollars each to commission a study through the Upjohn Institute to look into affordable housing and homelessness. Any time you do it there might be legality issues but she's not afraid of complications. It might make administrators/managers heads spin a bit but that's ok. Recently Zac and Tracy dug into what could be done right now to help homelessness in the short term. As a result, the County Administrator went right to the City to work toward that.

Zac says that with public safety, they coordinate on just about everything from possession of criminal evidence to processing of crime scenes (perhaps the best example right now). There are many other things that are very logical. Every time there is a Board meeting there is a packet that comes together, and everyone seems to have about five inter-governmental agreements.

IV. **Additional Public Comments:**

- P. Kushner thanked everyone for attendance and participation
- P. Kushner gave reminder of guest speakers for ODWNA November Meeting: Kalamazoo Stillhouse

V. **Adjournment:** 8:11 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Christopher Bovid, ODWNA Secretary