

A regular meeting of the Alma Parks Committee was held in the Alma Municipal Building on December 6, 2022. A quorum of members was present.

Present: Roger Allman, Bill Gorton, Josh Higbie, Jamie Jerome, Blaine Lafler, Aeris Ripley, and Luke Wright.
Absent: Kim Alonzi, Ty Warczinsky, and Andi Whitmore.

Others present: Curtis Dancer and David Ringle.

Alma City Manager Aeris Ripley called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Ripley shared information about the Michigan Spark Grants program, noting there will be three rounds of available funding with the first round being awarded in January of 2023. Round two will be awarded in spring of 2023, and round three in the summer of 2023. Ripley said he and Public Services Director David Ringle are working with OHM Advisors to prepare a grant application for the first round of funding. Grant applications will be based on two main projects: updates to the amphitheater and other structures in Riverside Park, and an extension of the River Walk around Euclid Ball Field and along the river to St. Louis city limits.

Ringle provided maps and presented ideas for the Riverside Park improvements and the River Walk extension from Euclid Ball Fields. Discussion followed about the proposed route.

Motion by Lafler, seconded by Jerome, to support submission of an application for SPARK Grant funding for the rehabilitation of the Alma Riverwalk boardwalk adjacent to Riverside Park and the rehabilitation of the pavilion and associated assets within Riverside Park.

Yes: Allman, Gorton, Higbie, Jerome, Lafler, Ripley, and Wright.

No: none.

Absent: Alonzi, Warczinsky, and Whitmore.

Discussion followed about the bicycle trail and connections to other trails.

Motion by Jerome, seconded by Wright, to support submission of a grant application for Michigan Spark Grant funding to extend the River Walk from Euclid Ball Fields adjacent to and along the Pine River to St. Louis city limits. Motion carried.

Yes: Allman, Gorton, Higbie, Jerome, Lafler, Ripley, and Wright.

No: none.

Absent: Alonzi, Warczinsky, and Whitmore.

Ripley presented a list of goals and objectives from the current Parks Master Plan for members to review. He asked members for input on park assets that need attention, rehabilitation, or replacement.

Gorton explained that he had visited each park and took notes and pictures of items he believed could use improvement. He reviewed the items on his list. Discussion followed about some of the items he listed and park bathroom open hours, bathroom vandalism, and disadvantages of the location of Mill Park.

Jamey Jerome left the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

Wright said he had noticed that park signage was in bad shape. Discussion followed about possibilities of contacting local groups for assistance with some of the easier improvement projects.

Ripley said he will also be applying for funds from the Gratiot County Parks Millage Grant. He will be asking for \$80,00 to help fund a pocket park in the alley between the Strand Theater and the Arts Council building. The request will include drainage, stamped concrete, decorative poles for banners, bollards at each end, and lighting. The proposed park will be multifunctional, and he expects the total cost will be approximately \$150,000.

Ripley went on to say the group will need to consider, in the future, possible uses for the former sugar beet factory site. He said the property is not viable for residential use, but could be used for industry, or for recreation. He asked members to think about possibilities.

Ripley asked Allman to present information on the return of Evenings in the Parks. Allman said the Pine River Arts Council has been working on bringing back the event. It would be every week, same day, in the same venue. He said the Council would like to use the gazebo in Wright Park, and they will be asking the City to consider waiving the rental fee for the event. The Council has another meeting coming up, but Allman said he wanted to bring the matter before the Parks Committee for consideration, and if they are agreeable, the Council will continue to move forward with the project.

Ripley said he will check policy regarding the park rental fee. Additional brief discussion followed.

Motion by Allman, seconded by Gorton, to adjourn the meeting at 6:51 p.m. Motion carried.

Yes: Allman, Gorton, Higbie, Jerome, Lafler, Ripley, and Wright.
No: none.
Absent: Alonzi, Warczinsky, and Whitmore.