

Schneider distributed packets of information materials for the strategic planning session to the board, Peterson, and Snyder.

The first topic for discussion was land acquisition. Schneider reviewed progress on updating the board's Long Range Land Acquisition Plan and showed the board a GIS map of the county that outlined department lands and easements along with state DNR properties. The plan will eventually include digitized township maps and should be completed next winter.

The board currently has 1,785 acres under conservation easement and owns or manages another 5,525 acres of developed parks, preserves, nature center, historical markers, wetlands, and public hunting areas. Discussion was held concerning potential donations or bequests of lands that Schneider has been working on.

Board policies and bylaws were discussed starting with the Residence Policy. The board reiterated their intent that a full time employee be required to live in each park residence. Future retirements and position replacements could affect how this policy is enforced.

The board's Overtime Compensation Policy was reviewed. This policy has not been adjusted for many years and may need some changes to remain in compliance. Board Bylaws were discussed and it was noted that the last changes were implemented in 1994. Schneider suggested there were a number of changes needed, especially 'house keeping' items. The board suggested that in light of current state and federal statutes, the County Attorney should be asked to review and comment on the Bylaws and Overtime Compensation Policy. Schneider will make that contact and have this done.

Other policies listed included Park Opening Date, Cell Phone, Purchase Card, Safety Management, Exposure Control Plan/Bloodborne Pathogens, Wage Plan, and Law Enforcement and Defensive Weapons. The board suggested a more detailed review of one of these policies at a time during future board meetings. Some board members may want to assist in reviewing the policy prior to the meeting in preparation of any suggested changes.

Capital Improvement and Equipment priorities were discussed. Improvements at the Nature Center have received considerable attention in the past year due to exhibit replacement and age of the facility requiring certain repairs. Exterior painting and repairs are needed as soon as possible. Staff was made aware of several areas where water was entering the facility at window locations, and several areas of trim were peeling and in very poor shape. Schneider will be getting quotes for these repairs and painting. Other items to keep in mind include the roof and the remaining paved area of the parking lot and entrance road that are rapidly deteriorating. It was estimated that paving repairs would be needed between 2015 and 2020, and roof replacement could be needed between 2016 and 2018. These costs could run \$150,000 to \$200,000.

Park improvement projects were reviewed on a spread sheet projected to 2015 and on a detailed list for each park area. Projects were prioritized by need and available grants and local funds. These projects are funded out of the Reserve Fund which receives its revenues from various park revenues. Approximately \$100,000 will be needed to retire the bond issue for the Snyder Bend improvements through 2019. That leaves about \$150,000 of local revenues to use and/or match for other projects. Local REAP funds are also available, but it appears the state legislature will be reducing those funds in the near future.

Upcoming priority projects include: Little Sioux Park – Trailhead shelter/restroom/lodge facility, playground mulch; Southwood – Primitive type cabins; Snyder Bend Park – Pump house replacement, park expansion; Brown’s Lake/Bigelow Park – Camper’s building replacement and campground renovation, accessible fishing jetty, boat ramp restroom; Little Sioux River – Canoe launch access improvements,

Equipment replacement schedule was reviewed through 2018. It was noted that the department could keep up with necessary replacements with an annual appropriation of \$90,000 from the Board of Supervisors, and this funding would be critical in future years. Items on the CIP and Equipment lists may move around as needs and priorities change during a given year.

Discussion was held on classification of county conservation areas. This stemmed from concerns of listing an area as a “park” which has certain connotations to people, while allowing some uses and activities that could be perceived as incompatible with a park. Schneider provided the group with a Resource Management Policy used by Linn County which uses labels such as “park” but allows other uses through land management ‘zones’. This allows for a ‘hunting zone’ or ‘preserve zone’ in a park and a ‘recreation zone’ in a preserve. Some board members liked the idea of changing the name of some of existing areas to Recreation Area from Park to help indicate a better perception of uses allowed. It was the board’s consensus to continue with our present classifications for the time being.

Future budget needs and revenue streams were discussed. It was noted our current funding stream for CIP projects (park revenues into the Reserve Fund) was the only reason the board has been able to complete the upgrades and new facilities in our areas making our system one of the best in the state. The Board of Supervisors is to be commended for allowing this funding stream in 1991. Availability of these funds also allows the board to have readily available matching funds for grants. Such a sustainable funding source allows the board to make appropriate plans for improvements and carry them out. This funding is especially critical during these difficult budget times and when many federal and state grant programs are being reduced or eliminated.

Snyder led discussion regarding potential use of proceeds from the annual Nature Calls fund raiser event. The event has always announced that proceeds would be used for nature center exhibits and programs. Now that the exhibit project is complete, Snyder asked the board to consider specifically allocating an amount toward programming which could include a summer naturalist position along with special speakers/programs at the nature center. Much discussion ensued. It was moved by Grupp, seconded by Taylor, that in the future the board allocate \$5,000 from Nature Calls net proceeds to use for Naturalist education programs, including temporary position wages. Motion carried 4-1, Gray nay.

Snyder presented information from the Siouxland Community Foundation and asked if the board would be interested in moving some of their endowment funds to this Foundation to manage and market our endowment. Donations to our endowment through the Siouxland Community Foundation could receive a tax credit, but it would charge our endowment account 1% per year for management. The board suggested the Woodbury County Conservation Foundation invest some of their funds and see how the system works.

Brief discussion was held on future staff retirements. It was noted that six employees are currently eligible to retire, and depending on the timing of any retirements, it could cause some problems with

continuity of our operations. We are not able to develop any detailed exit strategy for these employees since we are limited in the number of staff in our department. There are good employees on staff who are interested in advancing, and this could potentially assist with the loss of knowledge that will be experienced. The hope is that future retirements will be known well ahead of time and spaced out conveniently for the board to manage.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.