

DRAFT

Public Meeting of Casco Township Planning Commission  
Site Plan Review Casco Nature Preserve  
April 17, 2013, 6 PM

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bruce Barker, Dian Liepe, David Campbell, Paul Macyauski, and Louis Adamson

**ABSENT:** Judy Graff and Dan Fleming are excused

**STAFF PRESENT:** Alfred Ellingsen, Zoning Administrator, Janet Chambers, Recording Secretary

**ALSO PRESENT:** Pam Blough, Parks Consultant; Bruce Brandon, Parks Committee Chairman; Casco residents David and Debra Schuette, and Bill Chambers

1. **Call to order and review of agenda**  
There were no changes to the agenda
2. **Reading of meeting noticed in the South Haven Tribune on March 31, 2013 on Casco Township Nature Preserve North Special Land Use & Site Plan Review.** Notice was read by Chairman Barker
3. **Public Comment Correspondence;** None
4. **Public Hearing on proposed application** Chairman Barker invited Pam Blough (applicant on behalf of Casco Township) to explain the project. Blough gave a brief history of the funding and planning of the Nature Preserve. A grant from Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund was used to develop the southern half of the park. A Coastal Management Zone Grant has been obtained to complete the next phase of the nature preserve, including constructing a 10' paved pathway to the stairs (which will split off the northwest edge of the existing trail), stairway to the beach with switchbacks, a 25' x 50' (or smaller) observation deck, and a split rail fence at the bluff edge. The north half of the park will be accessed through the existing gate on the south half of the park. It was determined that the best location for the stairs would be toward the middle of the park at a location determined to be the most stable point of the bluff. The full property has been topographically surveyed. It was determined, due to cost, the stairway will be built to public standards, but not handicap accessible. Although there were requests for a handicap accessible path, there is not enough room for a 5% slope without disturbing the bluff along the whole park. For that reason, and cost, it was decided not to pursue a path to the beach. The stairs will be built to public standards, but will not be handicap accessible. The parks committee is working with a structural engineer to determine the construction. Several possibilities are being reviewed. Stairs and observation deck will be made of galvanized steel or aluminum, not wood, allowing for easier adjustment to accommodate shifting and moving of the bluff. Micropiling (DEQ permitted) will be used for the stairs and observation deck. The grant requires that the work be completed by March 1, 2014. The target date, to complete before winter, is November 15, 2013.

Chairman Barker asked about the working drain pipes south of where the house was located. Blough stated the drain system is working, and will not be disturbed. The Drain Commission repaired a blocked area in the drainage system near Blue Star Highway.

Blough said that SHAES has reviewed the plan. There is a Knox-box on the gate for emergency entrance. The paved trails will allow for emergency access. The old gate at the north end of the park is still existing and SHAES has a key to that gate. That gate will not be open for the public, but could be used for maintenance vehicles.

John Johnson, Allegan County Environmental Health Dept., said the only area on the park that perks for a septic system is in the northeast corner of the site. This area will not be used for parking, in the hopes that someday a nicer restroom could be located there.

Chairman Barker expressed concern about the increased usage and currently only 12 parking spaces. Blough said that another grant application was just submitted April 1<sup>st</sup>, and if they are successful, it would be used for additional parking at the east end of the north half of the park. The grant recipient will be announced in December of 2013 at the Trust Fund meeting. The Coastal Management Zone will help look for an alternate grant for parking and picnic areas, etc., if the trust fund grant is not successful.

Macyauski asked if there were plans for further development. Blough said that money is dictating development, one grant at a time. Cost for additional parking would be approximately \$130,000. It would be connected to the existing parking by a short road past a group of trees, the new parking spaces would be spaced between trees. Trees will not be cut down. The Blue Star Pathway is gaining momentum and the Road Commission is thinking about redoing Blue Star with a bike lane. These things could also put a demand on the parking.

Macyauski asked if there would be a fee for use of the park. Blough stated that at this time, it is not the plan to have a fee. She added that the grant specifies it cannot be "members only" and use could not be limited to Casco residents.

Chairman Barker asked Ellingsen if he is aware of any issues with the plan. He stated that everything is in compliance, but noted that parking could be an issue. Blough stated that the Road Commission is not allowing parking along the roadside. She added that there is a "No Special Event" policy. No reservations. Parking will be on a first come basis. She has monitored the park, and has not seen more than 2 or 3 cars at a time. It is not the intent of the parks committee or the board to allow parking all over the park. Campbell stated that if additional parking is not approved, it could be a problem.

Chairman Barker asked if a restroom closer to the observation deck is being considered. Blough said that there will be a cement pad near the bluff for the purpose of placing a portable toilet seasonally.

Debra Schuette (neighbor to the south of the park), asked if parking is put in the north half of the park, would the old gate on the north end of the park be open. She stated that everyone coming in the south entrance does not sit well with her. She added that people who are going to the nature trail half of the park are looking for something different than those going to the beach. Macyauski pointed out that those interested in going to the beach would park at the north end of the parking, walk straight through the grass to the stairs. Campbell added that moving the stairway north would filter more people toward the north part of the park. Blough said there would be pedestrian

openings in a split rail fence used to define the parking area. Macyauski said he was not comfortable with two park entrances onto Blue Star Highway for safety reasons.

Debra Schuette asked about the split rail fence on the bluff. If the fence is 20' from the bluff, and the observation deck is 10' from the bluff, the observation deck will be beyond the fence, therefore encouraging people to go beyond the fence. Blough replied that the fence would be tied in to the observation deck.

Liepe questioned whether there would be a railing on the lake side of the observation deck. Blough said that there will be a railing.

Macyauski asked if the public has the right to walk the beach bordering private property. Blough answered that it is presently being determined by the courts. Some say it is where the bluff starts; some say the ordinary high water mark. Campbell said it is basically 10' from the water's edge. Macyauski asked if there would be signage stating private property. Blough said there are two signs designating private property and public property. Adamson added with the large beach and use limited by parking, there should be plenty of beach room without spilling onto the private beach.

Bill Chambers stated that the on 4/15/13 the DEQ's definines the Ordinary High Water Mark as 577.5' + 2'; or 579.5'

**Resolutions requiring Planning Commission action; Vote on Special Land Use and Site Plan Review Request**

Chairman Barker led the Commissioners through Chapter 15.

**SECTION 15.03 GENERAL STANDARDS**

Prior to approval of a special use application, the Planning Commission shall insure that the standards specified in this Section, as well as applicable standards established elsewhere in this Ordinance, shall be satisfied by the completion and operation of the special use under consideration.

A. In addition to the standards established for specific Special Land Uses in Section 15.04, an application for a Special Land Use approval shall satisfy the following general review standards which are basic to all Special Land Uses:

1. The use is generally compatible with the intent of the Township Master Plan.  
**5 yes, 0 no**
2. The use is designed and constructed, and will be operated and maintained, so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity, will be compatible with adjacent uses of land, and will not change the essential character of the area in which it is proposed.  
**5 yes, 0 no**
3. The use is, or will be as a result of the special land use permit, served adequately by public services and facilities, including, but not limited to roads, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, and schools. Adequate water and sewer facilities must be available.  
**5 yes, 0 no**

4. The use does not involve activities, processes, materials and equipment or conditions of operation that will be detrimental to any persons, property or the general welfare by reason of traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare or odors.

**5 yes, 0 no**

5. The use will be compatible with the natural environment and will be designed to encourage conservation of natural resources and energy and will be compatible with the rural nature of the township.

**5 yes, 0 no**

6. The site plan proposed for such use demonstrates compliance with the specific design standards for the special land use as contained in Section 15.04.

**5 yes, 0 no (pending approval of 15.04)**

#### Section 15.04 SPECIFIC SPECIAL USE STANDARDS

DD. Public parks, playgrounds, play fields, and similar public open space recreation uses, not including campgrounds.

1. Ancillary uses may be permitted if related to the main use.

**5 yes, 0 no**

2. The use shall be located on property with direct access to a County road.

**5 yes, 0 no**

3. Any outdoor athletic or play fields shall be set back a minimum of two hundred (200) feet from any Residential use or District.

**5 yes, 0 no**

4. Buildings for storage of equipment, or other similar buildings shall be located at least fifty (50) feet from any lot line.

**N/A**

5. Lighting for athletic fields shall be oriented away from adjoining properties to minimize glare.

**N/A**

6. The Planning Commission may require suitable buffering from adjacent properties. Such buffers may include benns, evergreen plantings, fences, walls, or any combination thereof.

**N/A**

Commissioners discussed Chapter 17. Discussion ensued about ponding in the southeast corner and drains, and the northeast corner being the only area on the property that perks. Drainage, standing water, and how it would affect the proposed future second parking area, and sufficient parking were discussed.

Chairman Barker stated there must be some kind of plan that was submitted with the Trust Fund Grant on April 1<sup>st</sup>. He asked that those plans (attachment #1) for additional parking be included at the hearing for the Final Site Plan Review. This would avoid the necessity of a third Site Plan Review if the grant is awarded for additional parking.

David Schuette questioned the fact that when nature preserve was first approved the natural wetlands on the property were played up. Now there is going to be another parking lot. He feels more and more uses are being piled upon nature preserve. He feels nothing is being preserved. There is going to be more asphalt, more parking, and more structures on this property. Blough replied there are no natural wetlands on the property. Chairman Barker stated that Schuette's point is well taken and the original discussion did refer to wetlands.

Chairman Barker made a motion to request the plans for parking on the north half of the park be included in the Final Site Plan Review hearing. Campbell 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion. All in favor. MSC.

6. **Public Comment** Debra Schuette expressed concern about too many people accessing the beach through the south side of the park, which borders her property. Blough stated that many people who want to go to the beach will park on the north side of the park (when parking is put in there) and will walk straight across the grass to the beach. Schuette asked if there might be signs pointing toward the beach so that people would not take the nature trail. Blough said there will be signs showing the most direct way to the beach and the way to the nature trail. Also, there will be a sign showing where the nature trail veers off toward the beach from the nature trail. Most people will go right there if they can see it.

Chairman Barker asked that Dave and Debra Schuette keep in touch with Blough and that Blough stay in touch with the Schuettes. It is easier to resolve problems as they come up. Blough added that if there is a problem, taking a picture of what's going on is very helpful. Tom Store, another neighbor of the park, has said he would keep an eye out and get pictures of anything that needs attention.

Macyauski asked about the gate closing. Blough answered that the gate is set to automatically close, but will open to let someone out as a vehicle approaches the gate from the inside.

Macyauski thanked Bruce Brandon and Pam Blough for the excellent job they have done with the Casco Nature Preserve.

Motion to adjourn was made by Macyauski, 2nd by Adamson. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM.

A Public Hearing will be held on Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 PM

The May Planning Commission Meeting will be Wednesday, May 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 PM

Minutes prepared by Janet Chambers, Recording Secretary

Attachment #1: Drawing of parking plans for north half of park