

MINUTES
April 20, 2021
Special Committee of the Whole – Hybrid Meeting
Joint Meeting between Batavia Park Board and Batavia City Council
City of Batavia

Please **NOTE:** These minutes are not a word-for-word transcription of the statements made at the meeting, nor intended to be a comprehensive review of all discussions. They are intended to make an official record of the actions taken by the Committee/City Council, and to include some description of discussion points as understood by the minute-taker. They may not reference some of the individual attendee's comments, nor the complete comments if referenced.

Vice-Chair O'Brien called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

1. Roll Call

Members Present: Chair Wolff (joined meeting at 6:40pm); Ald. Miller, Baerren, Russotto (online), Knopp (online), O'Brien, Callahan (online), Malay (online), Meitzler (online), Uher (online), Cerone (online) and McFadden (online)

Members Absent: Ald. Beck and Chanzit

Also Present: Mayor Schielke; Laura Newman, City Administrator; Scott Buening, Director of Community Development; Rahat Bari, City Engineer; Anthony Isom, Assistant to the City Administrator (online); and Jennifer Austin-Smith, Recording Secretary (online)

Batavia Park Board: Allison Niemela, Josh Wyant, Debbie Gentry, Kevin Riley, Joyce Jezeer, Pat Callahan, Brittany Meyer, Bill Inman, John Tilmon, Kim Hanson, Tara Grey

2. Discussion: Batavia River Corridor Master Plan – Hitchcock Design Group

Lacey Lawrence, Hitchcock Design Group, presented a PowerPoint presentation utilizing the shared screen feature of Zoom. The presentation included the following information:

- Project Purpose
- Process
- Schedule
- Connect Phase
 - Survey
 - Website
 - Social Media
- Questions
 - Brainstorming Workshop Session

The Batavia Park Board and Committee of the Whole (COW) discussed the questions supplied by Hitchcock Design Group. Lawrence read the question, *'What do you think are the priorities of the community from this Master Plan as well as what are key drivers that influence our*

implementation as well as key outcomes you would like to see as part of this Master Plan? The responses are listed below:

- What is it going to cost? We all want to see improvements and know what an economic boom it could mean for our community and the potential for tax revenue but we have to keep in mind the taxpayers who would be footing the bill for all of this.
- Connection to nature is important and we have tremendous opportunity with that. We need to tap into the Fox River corridor to invite more people to Batavia. Money is always a concern but we could generate revenue by bringing people into town and spend money in our town.
- This has some real possibility to generate some additional tourism-like behavior on a regional basis.
- Having the community made aware of the challenges we face with the development of the river corridor. The challenge is to create a Master Plan that clearly delineates the causes and effects of each aspect so the community could be well informed as it moves into implementation both of cost and outcome (if this then this).
- The interconnectivity of decision making related to recommendations and how they impact and are intertwined with one another to perhaps cause a variety of outcomes just with the initiation of a single decision.
- Making the river more accessible to the residents of Batavia. We have an economic engine that has not been utilized. The river could be used for recreational purposes and economical purposes.
- Overall view for the river as a whole and how that becomes utilized or protected. This is long-term plan with a lot of goals that has to be brought together and receive enough community support. The biggest thing has to be the community's buy-in on where this has to go.
- We need to have a comprehensive plan that could utilize the river and see in the future as far as what we could do with the community downtown but from a Park District perspective how we could program the river and the river walk. What the community needs to see is a real action plan that says by this time we want to do this with the river. By this time we want to do this with some of the surrounding areas by the river. The Park District has been buying property by the river off of Route 25. What are we going to do with that? Is it just a green space? What are we going to do with the dam and Depot Pond and when? There is a cost with all of this and the cost is not being discounted. We paid for a Master Plan that says ABC and D and they all need to have dates attached to it. Some may say "we are going to bring this to the Council or to the Board by this date" or accomplish something by this date. People will start to see tangible results based on the money that we paid for this Master Plan.
- One of the priorities to succeed would be a level of cooperation and collaboration with the surrounding communities so what we are doing makes a cohesive sense of the river upstream and downstream, which then makes it a regional destination for all of us.
- Concrete actions. Engage a wide range of community interests and priorities: economic, recreation, environmental, walkability, and bikeability.
- The community is looking for what can we do with the Depot Pond if the dam is removed. Who owns the dam, who manages the dam, what happens if the dam is removed, and what is the water level? Until we know those kinds of things it is hard to

predict what recreation we could have and what kinds of businesses will come down. We need to address those questions and give the community a good answer before we can move forward.

- Connecting the river walk and making it a straight trail down. Safe recreational opportunities, save the depot pond, and sustain our natural environment in that area. Listen and engage with the residents and keep residents informed along the way with consistent messaging from both bodies. Include our expert commissions for ideas.
- Start with the survey to see what to incorporate. Providing options on what happens if the dam comes down.
- People are concerned about the Depot Pond and how to maintain it and maintaining the facilities that we do have at the river walk. Communication with people is important and the more transparent the better to get community support.
- Restoring the ecology of the river is important, removing the dam, but not at the expense of the pond. The pond has to be a priority because it is the history of Batavia in our community.
- In support of keeping the Depot Pond. A challenge is everything ties together and the dam and the Depot Pond is a great example of that.
- Fox River needs to be a destination and bring people into the downtown, which will bring sales tax and property tax revenues.
- There are a lot of people in town that have no idea that we have a dam, what it does, and why it needs to be repaired or removed and how it affects the Depot Pond. We need to educate the community.

Lawrence summarized what she heard throughout the meeting stating Batavia is steeped in history and add that into the plan as well as providing a detailed action plan with dates and costs. Include a long transaction as well as low hanging fruit, something that could be accomplished day one out of the gate to show progress towards are long term goals. Communication with the community as well as education is going to be critical. Regional destination and work with adjacent communities to create a regional destination within this whole corridor. Providing additional recreational opportunities and programming. Also the economic benefit this river could generate for the community and ecology, keeping the pond while modifying and removing the dam to improve the ecology of the river.

Mayor Schielke shared Batavia is here due to the Fox River. The river was used as an industrial source for our three very large windmill factories along it, which in the course of history produced more windmill manufacturing kits than any other place on the face of the earth. The Depot Pond was hand dug around 1870 by horses pulling plows and in 1958 it was featured on the front cover of the Saturday Evening Post. We have a history in Batavia unlike any other. He is very pleased that the Park Board and the COW have joined together and we have hired professionals to come in and pre-plan how we can really take advantage of this river and its strong identity to this town. It is a historical landmark. This is an exciting new chapter of Fox River history in Batavia in the years ahead.

3. Adjournment

There being no other business to discuss, Pat Callahan closed the Park Board meeting at 6:54pm, made by Tilmon, seconded by Riley. Vice-Chair O'Brien asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:54pm; Made by Wolff; Seconded by Cerone. Motion carried.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jennifer Austin-Smith, Recording Secretary, on May 13, 2021.