

**Comstock Charter Township  
Parks and Recreation Department  
Annual Report 2017**

**Introduction**

The Parks and Recreation Commission commissioners elected to a four-year term in November 2016 were Judy Joling, Linda Law, Sharon Spears, John Weir and Teresa Young. Officers for the 2017 year were Chair, Linda Law; Vice-Chair, Judy Joling; Secretary, Teresa Young; Treasurer, John Weir. The following is a summary of all formal actions taken and can be found in the 2017 monthly meeting minutes. Please note that many of the board decisions are made after extensive discussion among commissioners as well as with other parties when needed.

**Monthly Meeting Business**

**January**

Robert Morris Park Fishing Pier Grant: A public input meeting is planned for February 13, 2017 at 7:00 P.M. (notifications placed in the Kalamazoo Gazette and Township website). The DNR grant proposal is due in April 2017. Parks Director Street will prepare a project description.

**Motion by Spears/ support from Young to approve holding a public input meeting.**

**Motion to approve holding a public input meeting:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

**February**

Public Input Meeting (7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.): A public input meeting was held regarding a "Fishing Deck Project" for Robert Morris Park. Parks Director Vanessa Street presented the project as might be described in a grant application and citizens in attendance then provided feedback. Due to the questions and concerns of citizens and the later commission discussion, additional information and more public input will be sought at future meetings before proceeding with a grant application.

**To meet the April 1, 2017 application deadline, Motion was made by Weir/support from Joling  
to proceed with the application with option to rescind. 2 Yes/2 No.**

**The motion was not carried.**

2016 Annual Report: Commission Chair Law had distributed the 2016 Annual Report at the previous board meeting and asked the board to review it and send to her any changes which were reviewed.

**Motion by Spears/support from Joling to accept the 2016 Annual Report as presented.**

**5 Yes/0 No**

**March**

2017 Programming: 2017 currently planned programming was provided by Parks Director Vanessa Street. Included this year is a proposed "Joint (4-districts: Portage City, Kalamazoo City, Kalamazoo County, and Comstock Township) Free Day", scheduled for June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

**Motion by Weir/support from Spears to approve the June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 day as fee-free day  
at Robert Morris Park.**

**5 Yes/0 No**

Facebook Page: Parks Director Vanessa Street provided information proposing establishing a Comstock Parks and Recreation Facebook page to enable better communication with residents and non-residents. Parks Director Vanessa and Parks Coordinator Rachel Hopkins would be the Facebook page administrators and anticipate posting information on the site ~once/month. The page would have a link to the Comstock Township website.

**Motion by Joling/support from Spears to approve creation of a Comstock Township Parks and Recreation Facebook page.**

**5 Yes/0 No**

Purchasing Approval – Woodchips: Parks Director Vanessa Street provided a quotation for the purchase of woodchips for Robert Morris Park and Wenke Softball Complex playgrounds. Both playgrounds lost woodchips due to water “wash-outs”.

**Motion by Spears/support from Young to approve purchase of the woodchips for the playgrounds.**

**5 Yes/0 No**

2017 Park Visits: The Comstock Township Parks and Recreation Commission Board must visit parks (at least) once per year. A 2017 Park Visit Schedule for May through August was provided by Commissioner Linda Law. The respective monthly Parks and Recreation Commission meeting will be held after each visit. Commissioners are asked to take notes of their visits.

**Motion by Weir/approval from Joling to approve schedule as presented.**

**5 Yes/0 No**

#### **April**

AED Units: Because emergency response times to our parks can range from 8-10 minutes, Parks Director Vanessa Street requested the purchase of two AED units, one to be located at Robert Morris Park and one to be located at the Wenke Softball Complex. Units will be housed inside the concession buildings, accessible to staff. Signage will note AED location. Park staff are already trained in CPR and AED use. These units are expected to last for 8 years, and are the same type purchased by other Comstock Township groups.

**Motion by Spears /support from Joling to approve the purchase of two AED units for a total of \$2644.80.**

**Motion to approve purchase of the two AED units:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

#### **May**

Commissioners visited the Jan Schau Wildflower Walk, the River Villa Preserve and, the Community Garden prior to the meeting. Suggestions were offered to enhance the parks.

#### **June**

Meeting was held at the Wenke Softball Complex. Park Visit Discussions – Wenke Softball Complex; Fleetwood and Green Meadow Parks.

#### **July**

Meeting was held at Robert Morris Park. An open public comment session was held regarding the proposed Accessible Fishing Platform.

Fire Chief Memorial: Commissioner Law proposed that a memorial for Fire Chief Edward Switalski be included at a Comstock park (e.g. tree, plaque, or bench, dedication, etc.), but will coordinate with the Comstock Fire Department’s memorial plans.

**Motion by Spears/support by Young to approve Commissioner Law pursuing establishment of a Memorial in coordination with the Comstock Fire Department.**

**4 Yes/0 No**

Park Visit Discussion – Robert Morris Park and McLinden Nature Trails

DEQ Site Visit Request: Commissioner Law requested approval to proceed with applying for a DEQ site visit for site assessment for a fishing deck at Robert Morris Park, at a cost of \$100.

**Motion by Joling/support by Spears to approve spending \$100 for a DEQ physical site visit at Robert Morris Park.  
4 Yes/0 No**

**August**

Meeting was held at Merrill Park. Parks Visit Discussion: Celery St. Park, Cooper Park, Peer Park, Neil Street Ball Diamonds, North and South Wenke Parks, and Merrill Park.

North Wenke Tree Memorial: Parks Coordinator Rachel Hopkins reported that the request for a memorial at the park from D. Bobber and J. Holroyd could simply consist of a tree of our choosing, without a plaque. Note that currently there are no specific township guidance documents for such memorials.

**Motion by Joling/support from Spears to pursue further discussions with the requestors about the tree type, professional planting, and maintenance. Motion approved:  
5 Yes/0 No**

DEQ Site Visit/Fishing Platform – RMP: Commissioner Law noted that the fee for the DEQ site visit, which is required to “green light” the DEQ’s site application process, was \$250 for a township entity not \$100. Parks Commission approval for the higher amount is therefore needed.

**Motion by Joling/support from Weir to approve payment of the \$250 fee for a DEQ site visit at Robert Morris Park. Motion approved:  
5 Yes/0 No**

Midlink Green Meadow: An independent estimate of the cost to relocate the Green Meadow Park baseball field, parking area, and fencing far exceeded the cost figure presented at the July 10, 2017 meeting. Other costs in terms of downtime and neighborhood needs also must be addressed. Nevertheless, continuing the discussions were supported.

**Motion by Weir/support from Joling to continue discussions with Rob Britigan regarding Midlink's Green Meadow parkland transfer proposal terms and conditions. The motion was approved:  
5 Yes/0 No**

**September**

2018 Budget: Parks Director Street described the budget worksheet handout line items proposed for the 2018 Comstock Parks & Recreation budget (worksheet provided in Board packets). The proposed budget plan is considered “forward-looking” to meet near-future needs of Comstock Parks & Recreation. Commissioners reviewed, discussed, and approved the worksheet draft with corrections.

**Motion by Spears/support from Weir to approve proceeding with the 2018 budget draft worksheet with corrections for presentation to the Comstock Township Board for consideration.  
Motion to approve proceeding with the 2018 Parks & Recreation budget proposal:  
5 Yes/0 No.**

**October**

Budget Line Items Adjustment: Parks Director Vanessa Street presented three budget line item adjustment proposals.

**Motion by Weir/support from Spears to approve line item adjustments as presented.  
4 Yes/0 No**

2018 Meeting Dates: Parks Director Vanessa Street presented a list of proposed Parks Board of Commissioners Meeting Dates for 2018. After discussion, the Commission members present preferred that the usual "second Monday of the month" meeting schedule continues to apply for 2018, even though the January and March the meetings will need to be held at a different room location.

**Motion by Young/support from Spears to approve the 2018 Meeting dates as amended.**

**4 Yes/0 No**

2017 Purchases: Fleetwood Playground Replacement Part and Wenke Softball Complex Restroom Partitions.

**Motion by Weir/support from Spears to approve the purchase of the play structure footing part at Fleetwood Park.**

**4 Yes/0 No**

**Motion by Weir/support from Young to approve purchase/installation of restroom partitions at Wenke Softball Complex.**

**4 Yes/0 No**

### **November**

Security Cameras: Director Vanessa Street received two quotes (so far) for security camera/systems for Wenke Ball Parks, Robert Morris Park and Merrill Park. After lengthy discussion by the Commissioners, it was decided to consult with additional experts in the field (including police) for more information to better evaluate the security systems to assure that our specific site needs are met. Note that other townships' parks have different types of systems/security. Commissioners are requested to provide any pertinent information they may have as soon as possible to Parks Director Street.

Other: A big Thank You! is extended to Parks Director Vanessa Street and Parks Coordinator Rachel Hopkins, Commissioners Linda Law and Sharon Spears, and volunteers who hosted, planned and participated in the very successful Celery Street Park Day!

### **December**

2018 Fees: Parks Director Street provided a list of the Comstock Township Parks & Recreation Department Activity Fee charges in 2017 for review and consideration for setting 2018 activity fees.

**Motion by Weir/support from Spears to approve keeping the same 2017 fees for the activities in 2018 as presented. The motion to approve the 2018 fees:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

2018 Commission Officer Elections:

**Motion by Spears/support from Young to approve keeping the same 2017 officer roles for 2018.**

**The motion to approve the 2018 officer roles:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

End of Year Purchases: Parks Director Street suggested considering the following end of year purchases: 1) a portable 10'x20' canopy (for 4 planned neighborhood park day events per year) and banners @ \$1100 (note: this is less than the cost of renting a canopy for the events for one year). 2) metal septic risers at Robert Morris Park to avoid recurring damage and costs that occur to the current plastic risers from lawn mowers @ \$4000 for 6 risers. 3) portable 6' pitching mounds (requested by players), the same as those used at the tournaments, at a cost of \$3300 for four mounds. 4) a 10'x10' shed for field grooming equipment storage and mound storage at Wenke Softball Complex, at not more than \$2000.

**Motion by Weir/support from Joling to approve the end of year purchases as presented (Total: \$10,400). Motion to approve End of Year purchases:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

Security Camera Discussion: Parks Director Street consulted with law enforcement and security providers about security options and provided information about systems for purchase consideration. Commissioner Young emphasized that it is important to be clear that the Parks & Recreation Commission security objective is to deter vandalism at the Comstock Township Parks. After discussion, the Commissioners chose an appropriate system for purchase.

**Motion by Weir/support from Joling to approve purchase of a system as presented by Parks**

**Director Street. Motion to approve system purchase:**

**5 Yes/0 No**

## **Parks**

The board actions throughout 2017 represent only a partial amount or outline of the Parks and Recreation Department's activities for 2017. Following is a summary of many of the year's activities; much of it is taken from the Director's monthly written report, therefore actions will be basically in consecutive order. Please note that this is not an all-inclusive narrative.

### **Robert Morris Park**

Robert Morris Park was one of the parks plowed in the winter because of the disc golfers, ice fishermen, and sledding activities at the park. A salt-spreader has been installed on the back of the plow truck, which has helped significantly in reducing the ice along the entrance drive

There was interest by park patrons for discs to be sold at the concession stand. The image has been designed by our sign maker (Marc at Sign Center), to correlate with the overall image of our Parks & Recreation publications and signs. A local disc golf professional aided in the selection of the best disc to sell for park patrons. They cost was established at \$12.00 each, and patrons can select from driver, mid-range and putter discs.

Certified playground woodchips were spread at the small playground unit at Robert Morris Park.

Staff started at the park May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Staff is scheduled to have CPR training June 14<sup>th</sup>. AED were taken to parks once AED signs were put up at both Wenke fields and Robert Morris.

Vandalism occurred on the disc golf course and entrance gate. Disc golf hole #6 was stolen from the park, report was made on 5/22/17 (case #175011 Deputy Steve Compo). Larry Labond and his club K'aces replaced the basket. A separate incident on 5/26/17 at approximately 8:00pm a vehicle ran into the West side of the gate (case# 175158 Deputy Bryan McLain). The gate has been welded back together and the post cemented back into the ground.

A few incidents of vandalism were discovered in May. The "Thank you for visiting" sign was stolen. The self-pay post and guard shack were broken into.

A Johnsonville/Meijer BBQ was hosted for fire department in honor of Chief Switalski Wednesday August 9<sup>th</sup>.

A disc golf tournament was held September 9<sup>th</sup>. The last day for staff is September 17<sup>th</sup>, and the park will be winterized shortly after. Whitney Plumbing and Electric were the contractors for the job again this season. Painting the fence along H Ave. was started in the fall.

The DEQ permit application for a fishing deck process continued. Prien & Newhoff did the required drawings for the application. DEQ made a site visit.

### **Wenke Softball Complex**

Recycling was implemented at the softball fields (and Robert Morris Park). Four containers were placed at each park, two for plastic and two for aluminum. The number of water & Gatorade bottles collected at the Softball Fields I greatly reduced the amount of trash. The recycling was taken to the transfer station. New concession menu items for the season were brats and breakfast sandwiches/burritos.

The certified playground woodchips were spread at the small playground unit at Wenke Softball Complex.

The new restroom partitions were installed late fall. The bathroom walls were painted with a protective paint that reduces the amount of mold on the walls from moisture build-up.

### **Green Meadow Park**

Several teams this single field for practice. Currently there are 60 dates reserved for this season, and more are expected as the summer approaches. Most of the reservation dates were from the Kalamazoo Maroons, with a few dates reserved by teams that play in the township leagues. All were charged \$25 for practice time. The grass area was rented to the FC Elite Soccer Club in the evenings for soccer practice.

The gravel parking lot was graded once most of the rainy season passed.

Field rental revenue from teams using the Green Meadow ball field for this season was \$1,700.

The ball field was winterized with bases removed and final nail drag of the infield to prepare it for the winter.

### **Merrill Park**

Gull Lake Schools held their annual salmon release day at Merrill Park on April 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. This was the fifth year of the event, where the students raise salmon at the school and release them in the Kalamazoo River during a picnic day at Merrill Park.

High winds on 3/8/17 knocked down a tree at Merrill Park that was leaning into the river. Removal was delayed until the ground was firm.

The Parks Department has taken over the former maintenance building. The baseball field equipment and extra stock was moved into the storage area.

There was vandalism at the restrooms. The toilet paper dispensers were ripped off the walls. There were items flushed down the toilets that required plumbing service. All vandalism was reported to the police.

A playground safety representative from GameTime Company visited Merrill to evaluate the current playground equipment. He recommended not to reuse the equipment at another park for several reasons. The equipment no longer meets safety standards. With the structures being over 25 years old, he does not typically relocate play structures over ten years old. Examples are: the gap between the guard rail and support beam is a head-trap risk. Swings can no longer be attached to play structures, they must be free standing. The metal platforms and screws are rusted. The chance of the unit deteriorating further during relocating is high.

The township has officially entered into an agreement with the State for the Merrill Park grant project. Work on the details for engineer and architecture started immediately. Once completed and approved the project will go out to bid, and early spring was set as a start date.

### **Cooper Park**

The Maintenance Supervisor, Richard McCulloch, monitored the dam monthly for structural changes. There were no changes to the dam over the winter months.

DEQ was contacted regarding the concern from a resident about the lilies in the pond. Photos of the lilies were sent to the DEQ representative. The DEQ's representative did an initial assessment and stated that if the water lilies flower, either white or yellow, they are indigenous species. If they are not impeding boat traffic, etc. they probably don't meet any criteria for eradication. If they are on private property, the residents can get a permit if they are concerned.

New swing seats for the swing set were ordered, to replace the old, cracked ones. Sand was added to the playground in the fall.

### **Peer Park**

Volunteers from Eaton were interested in spreading woodchips and a landscaping boarder around the memorial stones. They worked with the Park director on their project selections.

### **N. Wenke/S. Wenke Parks**

The gravel parking lots were graded in March. The graffiti on the signs continue to be a problem as the initial product used did not work. The lighthouse was painted, and the gazebo washed this fall.

### **McLinden Nature Trails**

Gravel parking lot was graded in March.

The Road Commission of Kalamazoo County (RCKC) dropped off woodchips unexpectedly at McLinden Nature Trails. These woodchips were from trees cut down by the RCKC, which were only approved to be used along trails and walking paths, not playgrounds. The Parks Department has strived to work effectively with the RCKC and gain better communication about when to expect drop offs in the future. These woodchips were spread along the McLinden Trails

Security lights were repaired this month. Trees were cut back around the fixture to provide more lighting. Litter was removed from the parking lot edge and will be picked up along the trails this month as well.

### **Celery Street Park**

Basketball court was sprayed for weeds. One of the replacement metal basketball nets was stolen again. Additional nets were ordered.

The cracked slide on the Celery Street Park playground is to be removed. The playground equipment is too old and replacement parts are no longer available. Without the slide, the playground is obsolete. Discussion regarding this was taken to the board. Additional sand is needed for the playground.

### **Fleetwood Park**

A dead tree was removed near the pavilion. Swing seats were replaced this fall. Missing segments of the split rail fence were replaced.

The Facility Supervisor (Joe) painted the Fleetwood playground equipment. While working, he noticed that a floor board from one of the walkways was cracking in the middle and needed replacing. Replacement swing seats for the cracked swing set seats were ordered.

### **River Villa Preserve / Jan Schau Wildflower Walk**

These park lands were visited by the board members in the summer.

### **Neal St Ball Diamonds / Football field**

These continue to be unused.

## **Programs**

### **Youth Baseball League**

Registration opened January third for the 2017 youth baseball season. 12 teams signed up the first day of registration. This program is limited to 16 teams due to the number of fields.

### **Pavilion Rentals**

Pavilion rentals opened in the spring. An ad was placed in the Comstock Communicator Newsletter advertising that pavilion rentals offer a great option for family reunions, baby showers, graduation parties and meeting locations.

### **Galesburg Kids Walking Club**

The Parks department partnered with the Galesburg Augusta Primary School & KRVT and provided a six-week program in the spring and fall Thursdays after school (3:15-4:30pm). Participants tracked their steps with pedometers, were provided nature hunt activities, and participated in a supervised one-mile walk each day. At the end of the program the kids were given certificates with their total steps taken for the six-week period

### **Senior Walking Club**

The Parks department partnered with the Comstock Community Center and provided a six-week program, one day a week. Participants tracked their steps with pedometers, were provided water bottles, or t-shirts through sponsors or donations.

### **Community Garden**

The garden to the east of the Community Center offers 12 ft. X 4 ft. raised bed plots (12 total) at a cost of \$10 a plot (money goes back to the community center to cover the cost of water). Plants were provided by local greenhouse donations and the Parks department partnered with local Master Gardeners to provide information for new gardeners.

### **Free Day**

The Free Day was June 21<sup>st</sup> at Robert Morris Park. The Parks department partnered with Kalamazoo County, Portage City, and Kalamazoo City for a joint day. Discover Kalamazoo donated 100 small bags to each park. The bags contained park information, a punch card for a grand prize, and at Robert Morris Park, a kid's scavenger hunt was held and each participant was provided free ice cream or a Popsicle. Activities included scavenger hunt, bird feeder construction, and leaf printing. The activities continued all day. Scavenger hunt participants entered a drawing for a free annual park pass and the Robert Morris Park Disc Golf disc. The Free day went well. The Park director spoke to many park guests who had never been to Robert Morris Park before and enjoyed the park. Total tally was around 120 cars for the day, which was more than usual for a Wednesday.

### **Fall Kickball**

Flyers were put up at Wenke to advertise for Fall Kickball. Posts were made weekly on the Facebook page with a link to sign up. This new program did not get off the ground in 2017.

### **Fall Softball League**

Fall softball league began on Monday August 21<sup>st</sup>. The number of teams was consistent with previous years.

### **Celery Street Park Day**

This was held Saturday October 21<sup>st</sup> 12-4pm. 500 post cards were mailed out to the Celery St. and Merrill Park neighborhoods. A 15x15 tent was rented for crafts and any risk of rain along with a porta jon. There was kickball, small games, snacks, and crafts. Due to limited parking we asked that visitors walk or bike to the event.

### **Parks and Recreation Board/Administration**

The Parks and Recreation Board met monthly in 2017 on the second Monday of the month at 7pm. Most of the meetings were held at the Township Hall. However, the May, June, July and, August meetings were held at four different parks for two specific purposes. The first was for park visitations and observations of parks nearby as well as the park where the meeting was held. These visitations were for evaluation and monitoring purposes. Future developments were discussed, and concerns were noted. The second was to be located where much of the seasonal activity takes place and invite the staff, participants and any others to provide input on the facility and programs. For instance, at the Wenke Softball Complex, the Umpire in Chief for our softball summer recreational leagues shared his views of the facility, management, and programs.

The Board continues to be extremely satisfied with the performance of the Parks and Recreation Director, Vanessa Street, who has proven herself invaluable. She has an excellent working relationship with the board, the township administration, and the maintenance department. She has also built a wonderful cooperative relationship with the Comstock Community Center; the Library; the Baseball Players Association; the baseball and softball umpires; and, the many other park and recreation professionals around the region. Vanessa is very good at initiating ideas, solving problems, handling challenges as they develop, and communicating with the public she serves in all types of circumstances. The board welcomed Rachel Hopkins who was hired as a part-time program coordinator for 2017. Rachel moved smoothly from her past seasons as summer staff to year-round management. She presided over the seasonal staff and programs as well as skillfully filling in for the Park director while she was on family leave.

Board members continue to be pleased with the way the township maintenance department has cared for the parks, and gratefully recognize their efforts to carry out regularly scheduled and routine park maintenance functions as well as effectively handling emergency needs, special requests, and special functions.

The board chair, or designee, and/or the Parks Director routinely attend the Township Board meetings to keep abreast of all Township issues and periodically inform the trustees of Parks and Recreation Department updates. Commissioners agree that working closely with the township trustees and administration along with other factions of the township such as the fire department, library and community center improves communications and benefits our community.

The Parks and Recreation Board members continue to recognize the significance of its fiduciary responsibilities and commend the Parks Director and the Program Coordinator in their judicious efforts to this end.

Respectfully submitted by Linda Law and Vanessa Street  
Commission Chair and Department Director Respectively