

November 20, 2007 Friends of North Point

1. Introductions
2. Review of last meeting
3. Overview of North Point and Syndicate Properties
4. Establish Plan to Move Forward:
 - create alternatives (number of alternatives to be decided later) – alternatives created from pair wise voting on topics/issues
 - research costs and maintenance issues for each alternative
 - revise alternatives if necessary
 - prioritize alternatives
 - send out press releases to present prioritized alternatives to the public and ask for feedback (will need to designate someone to collect feedback from public)
 - finalize prioritized alternatives and costs and present to County Board

5. Begin creating alternatives:

A list of “ideas” for developing and operating the North Point Property was compiled from all input from previous meetings. Further a list of “considerations” was compiled from public input from previous meetings.

The group reviewed the lists of “considerations” and “ideas” and had the opportunity to add additional items to each list.

The Final list of “considerations” was as follows:

1. Cost
2. Maintenance/Replacement (cost and labor)
3. Critical Dune – fragile ecosystem
4. Future of Van Buren County – how much open space/wild/undeveloped spaces will be left?
5. Context – other parks (includes state, township and city parks) in the area and what they offered
6. Safety/Security/Vandalism
7. Handicap Accessibility
8. Current Conditions of property – none to little invasive species – high quality site
9. The County Board’s expectations of the final alternative (although we don’t have a good idea of what this might be)

This list of considerations was used as a guide to make decisions on the topic/issues listed below. These considerations must be balanced and addressed throughout the alternative creating process.

The next lists are broken out by topics/issues and then scenarios are listed under each topic/issue. The group used a pair wise comparison voting method to prioritize the scenarios for each topic/issue. The voting results and prioritization for each topic/issues are below. There is also a short summary of some of the discussion that took place during the voting.

A. Access/Parking

#1. Expand parking area off of Ruggles Road on County property (20)

#2 - No change (park and access along Ruggles Road) (14)

#3. Improve road from Syndicate Park to North Point and create parking in already cleared areas in the dunes. (3)

Items removed from list, due to lack of support:

1. Improve road from Syndicate Park to North Point and expand cleared areas in the dune for additional parking. – This scenario was removed because no one supported it.

2. Create parking area on County owned land in Syndicate Park and access park by walking up unimproved road. – This scenario was removed after discussion because it was noted that that none of the County owned properties in Syndicate Park were suitable for parking because of the slopes.

Discussion on topic included expanding the parking off of Ruggles Road (clearing shrubs and making the present area deeper or using the right of way along the road way). A member of the Boy Scouts said they used the existing cleared areas in North Point for camping. The road from Syndicate Park to North Point is currently only one-way and would need to be improved and widened in some sections to allow for two-way traffic. There were concerns about cutting trees to widen the road. The dunes are sand and the stability of the road and parking areas were questioned. All work in the dune area would need to be engineered to meet MDEQ critical dune requirements and permits from MDEQ would need to be obtained. Developing the property with a road, trails and other amenities could influence a future county board to not sell the property because it is an established and developed park.

B. Trails/Access to Dunes/Beach

#1. No Change – (rustic/gravel with some reinforcement on eroding areas) (23)

#2. Install wood/plastic observation/overlook deck on top of dune (3)

#3. Install stairs from top of dune to the beach to limit erosion (0) – this choice was kept on the list even though it received no votes, because the group agreed that if erosion became a problem in the future, stairs should be considered at that point. Otherwise, stairs to the beach were not wanted by anyone in the group.

Items removed from list due to lack of support:

1. add woodchips or bark to existing trails - no support because of high maintenance, everyone agreed that gravel is a better option.

2. Pave new trails on North Point property - no support for this idea

3. Cut and build up dune areas for a 10% grade and pave trail for wheelchair accessibility – no support because of the impacts to the dunes

5. Build a chair lift from parking area to dune - no support for this idea

Discussion on the topic included the fact that the existing trails in North Point actually cross over into the State Park land to the south. Vandalism was also mentioned. The other concern was safety – easier access may mean that police can enter property easier to patrol the property.

C. Bathrooms

#1 No change (no facilities exist on property) (8)

#2 Install a pit/vault toilet (5)

Items removed from list:

1. Install flush toilets with a septic system – no support for this idea

Discussion included vandalism and the cost of pumping and cleaning the toilets regularly. If a bathroom were to be installed it should be by the parking area for handicap accessibility and for pumper truck access. It was also noted that the public sewer and water system was not close to North Point at this time and there are no plans for South Haven Township to expand the system to this area.

D. Other Amenities

#1 No change (the County supplies a dumpster along Ruggles Road from April – November) (20)

#2 Add picnic tables , garbage cans and grills (13)

#3 Add a pavilion with picnic tables, garbage cans and grills (5)

Discussion again included vandalism. Location of the picnic areas should be by the parking area to limit impact to the dune area.

E. Hunting

#1 Not allowed (12)

#2 Allowed (1) – *note: the person voting for this only wanted it if it was possible to hunt at the State Park

Discussion included concerns about proximity to houses in Syndicate Park and safety issues. There was also concern that even if hunting was allowed in the State Park, the park rangers may not be allowed to patrol and/or have enforcement jurisdiction on North Point unless it became part of the State Park.

F. Nature Center Building

#1 No change (no nature center building) (13)

#2 Build a nature center building (0)

Discussion was that this was too much of a pie in the sky dream. Maybe possible 50-100 years down the road, but not in the planning period we are dealing with.

G. Signage on the Property

#1 A sign at the entrance/parking area that would explain the importance of dune ecosystems and the need to respect the dune environment and to not ascend the dune. (74)

#2 Trail wayfinding signs (49)

#3 Small tree/plant identification signs along trails (39)

#3 A sign at the top of the dune that would explain the importance of dune ecosystems and the need to respect the dune environment and to not ascend the dune. (39)

#4 No change (sign at the entrance “North Point Conservation Area”) (33)

#5 Interpretive signs throughout the property on birds, trees, dunes, etc (15)

#6 Print and make available a trail guide with interpretive and identification information (6)

Discussion: It was important to the group to communicate to the user that the dunes are fragile and use must be limited to protect this important ecosystem. Trail wayfinding signs could be slender posts with a blue dot for heading to the top of the dune and with a white dot on the other side indicating you were headed back to the parking area. For the plant/tree id signs – keeping them very small and unobtrusive seemed to be the consensus. There was interest in sign making being a project for scouts or schools.

H. Funding North Point

#1 Go for a one-time ¼ county wide millage for recreation and open space (19)

#2 No change (no fees) (15)

#3 Institute a funding/fundraising mechanism (donation box, charge for group use, capital campaign, fundraising efforts, envelope with donation form, add on to trail passes) (5)

Discussion: There was a lot of interest in a county wide millage to support parks, trails and open space in the county. There would be interest in having parks throughout the county if a millage were to be considered. There may be a need to ask the following questions at future meetings:

1. Go for a one-time ¼ county-wide millage for recreation.
2. Go for a one time ¼ county-wide millage for open space.
3. Go for a one time ¼ county-wide millage for recreation and open space.

Items to be discussed at the next meeting:

I. Organizational/Group Use (Boy/Girl Scouts, 4-H, churches, school field trips, etc)

1. No change (no reservations needed for group use)
2. Need reservations
3. Need reservation and a fee is charged

Other ideas?

J. Maintenance Options

1. No change (Boy Scout projects, county provides dumpster April – Nov)
2. Adopt a Park – volunteer run
3. County staff/road commission/prison worker program
4. County contracts with business to do work

Other ideas?

K. Marketing Options

1. No change (sign at entrance, on County website (www.vbco.org/northpoint.asp), word of mouth)
2. Limited/to no cost (get information on more websites (tourism, City, Township, etc), put on County road map and region bike map, press releases, etc.)
3. Minimal cost (design, print and distribute brochure)
4. Extensive cost (billboard, ads in newspapers, other media advertising)

Other ideas?

L. Programming Options

1. No change (none offered)

2. Schools develop a curriculum associated with using North Point (history –facts concerning South Haven and Van Buren County; Geology – glacier activity, dune formation; Ecology – development of forests from beech/maple to oak/pine(succession); bird watching; measuring dune movement; Respect for nature – being quiet; Writing – narratives, poems, etc)

Other ideas?