PETOSKEY — Early conceptual plans for Petoskey’s Bayfront Park West and Solanus Mission Beach stirred some backlash from neighbors this week, meaning the city will likely go back to the drawing board and scale back on the project proposals.

**Bayfront Park West** is near but disconnected from the main portion of Bayfront Park, and tends to see lighter use than the marina area. This likely results from the area remaining essentially undeveloped, apart from a handful of picnic tables.

A draft presented to the public early this week at a Petoskey Parks and Recreation Commission meeting would mark a slight departure from that status quo — potentially bringing
sand volleyball courts, a play structure, picnic shelters, a hammock circle and a boardwalk to the area. Some residents argued such a move would lead to a greater likelihood of nuisance issues and upset the natural environment.

“This is why we have citizen feedback,” Kendall Klingelsmith said in a phone interview with the News-Review on Tuesday afternoon. “We started out with a concept to provide access to the beach area on the west side, and then we took some ideas that have been some batted about in past discussions and essentially put a plan together for public discussion — and we clearly had that discussion last night (Monday). And that’s OK, we want to hear the opinions of people who are affected by these projects.”

Bayfront Park West is separated from the main section of Bayfront Park by Water Street Condominiums and a private, pebbly beach owned by the condominium association. However, the public can travel between the two parks via the Little Traverse Wheelway trail, which cuts through the condominium grounds.

Klingelsmith said 22 people attended the meeting Monday, and about 10 spoke out on the subject of the Bayfront Park West project, specifically.

He said the general feedback was that people preferred to see the park remain an open space, and that his staff would try to revise the plans accordingly, presenting them again at the commission meeting next month.

“Form a wildlife standpoint, we’ve seen this group of ducks being raised on the shoreline every year where wild cattails grow... There’s a lot of wildlife in the form of small mammals that habitat there,” resident Jim Harper said in a phone interview with the News-Review.

He and his wife, Lynn, who have a condo in the area, said they were not able to attend the meeting because of the short notice, but sent a representative in their stead.

“The short notice was a commonly voiced concern among residents, who said they did not receive word of the meeting until a couple of days ahead of time. Residents at the condominiums and along streets adjacent to the park received a notice in the mail.

“Everything happened so fast,” Lynn Harper said. Klingelsmith acknowledged, both at the meeting and on the phone with the News-Review, that the notice should have been sent out earlier.

Jim and Lynn Harper both said they were encouraged by the announcement that the city will rework the plans, and of Klingelsmith accepting responsibility for the late notice, but they still had concerns that the area would become too developed and “public.”

Klingelsmith noted that some residents feared the development would encourage further trespassing onto the condominium grounds — something that is already a problem in the area, with some park-goers using the private beachfront as an extension of the park.

The impetus for the proposed project came about because of efforts to clean up Solanus Mission Beach, a park area farther west which serves as the site of the historic St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission Church building. That area had fallen into some neglect and overgrowth, Klingelsmith said.

The city, nearby residents and Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council made some efforts to remedy that situation last year, sparking conversations about adding some decking in the area to allow better access to the waterfront, especially for those with disabilities.

From there, the staff had additional conversations about developing the property as a whole, but Klingelsmith stressed that the designs presented Monday night were not definitive. Instead, they were simply an example of some of the options for the area.

He added that the staff wanted to put the design plan together early enough that they could receive citizen feedback and, if things worked out, that they wouldn’t miss out on potential grant deadlines in April.

But that doesn’t mean they’re anywhere close to moving forward with the plans, especially now that opposition has been raised. He said there are still at least two or three other parks and recreation projects that are higher on the department’s priority list before they touch Bayfront Park West.

Revised plans will likely cut out all parts of the project except for the boardwalk in the vicinity of Solanus Mission Beach, Klingelsmith said. He added that the department will continue to work with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council to ensure that the environmental impact is minimal.

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