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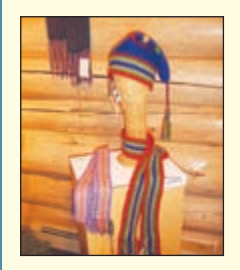
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Park board agrees on Master Plan

Jane Howard

After months of opinion-gathering and discussion, the Grand Marais Park Board has decided on the basic components of the Recreation Area Master Plan it has been working on for months.

At its regular meeting in the park rec hall Tuesday, July 7, 2009, each member of the park board weighed in on the ideas that have been generated throughout the community and by consultant Bob Bruce. In the end, they disagreed very little with one another's opinions and formulated a list of elements for Bruce to incorporate into a final design map.

Todd Miller, who could not attend the meeting, sent an e-mail to his fellow park board members earlier that day. He expressed a sentiment echoed at the meeting regarding the plan Bob Bruce proposed to them at their June 23 work session. "All opinions are valid, but I believe Bob prefers to listen more to the opinions of those that prefer an expanded wetland, the removal of the campsites [in the northeast corner], and the moving of the boat launch in to the current/future marina area." According to Miller, Bruce's promotion of one plan over another "puts us on the defensive...."

Miller supported a plan presented at a May 19 public meeting that keeps campsites in the northeast corner and leaves space in the southeast corner for an events pavilion. Miller said this plan "is the natural fit that provides the least disruption to our current town culture of camping, creates space for consideration of an events pavilion, maintains the existing ramp - thus preserving space in the marina for more needed slips, and shows the way for the future marina. It does not require a digging up of the whole park to accomplish its purpose.

"We can't afford to throw away this wonderful asset we have in the community."

"I would support this plan with the condition that as our long-term seasons give up their spots on their own, we turn the sites over to nightly use because that is double the revenue. ...The creation of a marina and an events site adds revenue without taking revenue away from other sources."

One of two options presented to the public May 19 turned the northeast and southeast corners of the park into "green space." Miller said while that plan was "elegant and well-thought out," it would cause "just too many human casualties, and we need to preserve all our existing income, not trade it

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Dan Score of Woodbury, MN said he was about 50 yards away from the area where the Tofte 4th of July fireworks were being set off. He started taking photos when he saw volunteers running, capturing this frightening 4th of July memory.

Explosion nearly halts Tofte fireworks show

Rhonda Silence

At 10:06 p.m. on Saturday, July 4, 2009, about halfway through the town of Tofte's fireworks presentation near Bluefin Bay Resort, a tube holding a round of fireworks ruptured, sending a five-inch round into the stockpile of pyrotechnics yet to be lighted. The resulting explosion sent the volunteers scattering and startled the crowds lining the lakeshore. Cook County Law Enforcement dispatch received multiple calls reporting the explosion. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt and by 10:09 p.m., the Tofte Fire Department radioed the emergency dispatcher, stating, "Everything is under control." The fireworks continued with the finale a few minutes later.

Nearly as fast as the fireworks display, video of the incident was posted to the internet website YouTube. However, the video did not show that the fireworks show resumed,

leaving viewers to believe the worst.

Tofte Fire Chief Rich Nelson, who was overseeing the pyrotechnic display said there were 11 volunteers operating the fireworks show, many of them West End firefighters. Some of the volunteers have up to 30 years of experience. "We've trained for this," said Nelson. "We do a drill before we start and everyone picks an escape route. It worked. No one tried to be a hero."

One Tofte firefighter was injured, not from the explosion, but in the dash to get away from it. She suffered a cut requiring stitches to her knee. At press time she was nearly recovered.

Nelson said the fire department and volunteers had covers over the fireworks to avoid such an explosion, but added that they would look at other ways of handling the pyrotechnics in the future.

Grand Marais home damaged by fire

Rhonda Silence

The damage at the Jeremy Somnis home on 934 Cut Off Road in Grand Marais would have been much worse if not for an overexcited Golden Retriever named Samson who alerted neighborhood teens to the fire. When the fire was noticed at around 3:00 p.m., on Thursday, July 2, the Maple Hill Community Fire Department responded and was able to extinguish the blaze, containing the damage to the basement and one end of the house.

The fire had nearly burned itself out, having most likely smoldered for most of the day. Somnis and his sons, Riley and Connor, were not at home at the time of the fire. Neighbor Anders Zimmer, 13, said he noticed an odor of smoke while doing lawn work at 10:00 a.m. "I figured someone was burning brush or something," said Zimmer.

Two other neighborhood teens, Johnny Jacobsen, 13, and Parker Slanga, 14, were the ones who realized there was a fire. They were outside when Somnis's dog, Samson, came running up to them—with a broken lead. They decided to return him to his yard and noticed that the smoke was stronger as they approached the house. They also heard smoke alarms going off. Jacobsen looked in the window and saw that the house was filled with smoke. He opened the door to an outpouring of smoke and heard the sound of water running. Slanga ran to the Jacobsen home to call 911 and the Maple Hill Fire Department, Grand Marais First Responders, and Cook County Ambulance was paged at 3:08.

The fire department



responded and the fire was quickly extinguished and the smoke ventilated. The fire

department was cleared from the scene at 5:02 p.m.

It appears that the fire started

in the family room in the basement, possibly caused by a space heater. The blaze melted a water



Staff photos/Rhonda Silence

Left: Jeremy Somnis, with First Responder David Beckwith and Sheriff Deputy Julie Collman inspects damage caused to his home by the Thursday, July 2 fire. **Above:** Fire damage would have been much worse if it was not for the family dog, Samson, who broke off his lead and alerted the neighborhood.

Ramsey man drowns at Temperance River

Rhonda Silence

Independence Day weekend was once again touched by tragedy with a drowning on Temperance River in Tofte. On July 4, 2009 at 6:51 p.m. the Cook County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call reporting a possible drowning at Temperance River in Tofte, Minnesota. Ari Benjamin Sommerfeld, a 45-year-old male from Ramsey, MN had been witnessed swimming in the river, and got carried away by the current.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office, Tofte First Responders, Cook County Sheriff's Resource Unit, Department of Natural Resources, United States Coast Guard, Lake County rescue divers, St Louis County Search and Rescue, and Cook County

Ambulance all responded.

On July 5, at approximately 12:11 p.m. Sommerfeld's body was recovered from Lake Superior after being extricated from the bottom of a deep pool along the river.

There is no suspicion of any criminal conduct involved.

Sommerfeld's wife, Martha Sommerfeld talked to Fox21 television in Duluth, describing her husband as "adventurous but careful, and a kind and caring man." She added that he had gone swimming in the same area many times before, but said this time the current was apparently too strong. She urged others to use caution near the Temperance River.

There have been multiple deaths in the powerful rapids. In 2008, two young women, 17 and 22, from Maple Grove, MN perished after being swept away by the current in a popular wading spot. In 2001, a 22-year-old hiker from Finland, MN died after falling in the river. In 2000, a 50-year-old Wisconsin man drowned while saving his eight-year-old son. Another father, 48, from Remer, MN drowned while rescuing his 12-year-old daughter. In 1996, a 14-year-old boy from Crystal, MN drowned after diving at one of Temperance's waterfalls.

Temperance State Park officials said an estimated 160,000 - 200,000 people visit the state park each year and most of them adhere to the cautionary signs along the river.