

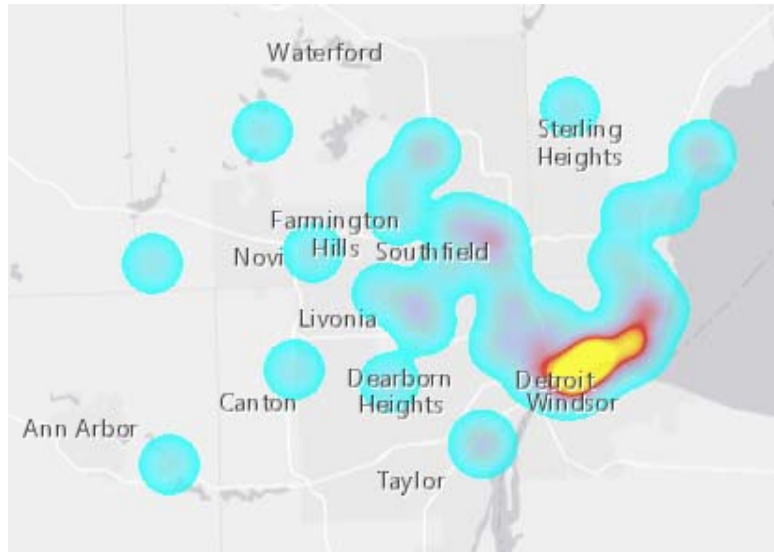
# Belle Isle Park Strategic Direction and Management Plan



## Summary of Public Input

The public was invited to share their thoughts on the future of Belle Isle in two sessions on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm and from 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm. The meeting format was nearly identical to the stakeholder meetings, with the exception of the participant introductions.

Over the two sessions, 99 attendees were recorded. Each attendee was given a blank index card and asked to record their name, zip code, how long they have been visiting or involved with the island, and the answer to the prompt “What matters most to me about Belle Isle Park is...” The participants shared the answer to this prompt within their tables as an introduction to their groups. The answers of those who returned their introduction cards to the planning team are listed at the end of this document.



A map showing attendees’ provided zip codes. Brighter colors denote more attendees from that area.

Similarly to the stakeholder meeting, a status update on the park and a summary of recent improvement projects was presented by the DNR and the Belle Isle Conservancy, followed by a series of input exercises. The results of the exercises are detailed below. This summary represents the combination of results from both the afternoon and evening public input sessions.

### ***Exercise 1: Say one word or phrase that describes Belle Isle right now.***

When the public thinks about Belle Isle today, the island’s natural beauty, rich history, safe and family-friendly atmosphere, and recent improvements come to mind. The words and phrases that were mentioned at three or more tables are listed below.

Items	Times Mentioned
Natural setting / Nature	9
Clean	6
Safer	6
Beautiful	5
Evolving / Improving / Greatly Improved	5
Work in progress	5
Tranquil/Peaceful	4
Unique	4
Families / Family friendly	3
Historic	3
Provide wonderful views / scenic views	3

**Exercise 2: Say one word or phrase you would like to describe Belle Isle in the future.**

The public who attended the input sessions would like to be able to describe Belle Isle as a place that is first and foremost inclusive and accessible by all. They would like the island to be bike-friendly and pedestrian friendly, to have more food options and restaurants, and to host more winter events and activities. There were several groups that would like to see the Grand Prix discontinued and have motorsports prohibited on the island. Finally, the public would like the island to be a world-class facility. Below are items that were mentioned by three or more groups.

Items	Times Mentioned
Access by all / Accessible / Inclusive	8
Bike friendly / Cycling Trails	5
No Grand Prix	5
Pedestrian-friendly	5
Motorsports prohibited	4
Beautiful	3
Food/restaurants	3
Winter events	3
World class	3

**Exercise 3: What do you like most and least about Belle Isle?**

The public was asked to discuss what they liked the most and least about Belle Isle. The items that were most frequently mentioned included the unique attractions on Belle Isle such as the conservatory, aquarium, and Scott Fountain; the natural beauty and scenic views; recreational amenities such as the beach, walking paths, bicycling paths, and non-motorized watercraft rentals; as well as the location of the park close to the urban center. The item that was liked the least by the public was the Grand Prix, which was mentioned at 13 tables over the two sessions. The public also dislikes the number of food options available, the hours of operation and closed facilities, and the auto-centric nature of the island’s circulation system.

Like Most	Times Mentioned	Like Least	Times Mentioned
Conservatory	10	Grand Prix	13
Nature	9	No food sites available	5
Aquarium	7	Hours of operation	4
Beach	6	Closed golf course	3
Walking paths / trails	6	Too auto-centric	3
Views	5		
Beauty of the island	3		
Bike ride	3		
Close by=accessible	3		
Kayak/canoe	3		
Scott Fountain	3		

**Exercise 4: What differences have you noticed about Belle Isle in the last three years?**

Over the last three years, the public has noticed several improvements in the park. Frequently mentioned items were the improved restrooms and overall higher level of maintenance, an increased number of visitors, a safer atmosphere, and attractions re-opening. Some have noticed that the police presence has increased, which to some is a positive aspect, while others see this as negative. Items mentioned at three or more tables are listed below.

Items	Times Mentioned
Bathrooms improved / clean	7
More people / crowded / more activity	7
Much cleaner	7
Safer	7
Have removed dead and downed + tree maintenance improved	4
Improvements/restoration of facilities & buildings (bathrooms/shelters)	4
More families	4
Aquarium open and improved / better hours	3
Melting pot / more diversity	3
More police presence	3
New bridge lighting	3
No loud music!	3
Park safety/cleaner	3
Scott Fountain is running	3

**Exercise 5: What improvements or changes would you like to see that would increase your enjoyment of Belle Isle? (with voting)**

Each group discussed what they would like to change on the island, and the results were wide-ranging. Over 130 items were mentioned by the groups that attended both sessions. The most frequently mentioned ideas included discontinuing the Grand Prix, creating a public boat launch to access the Detroit River, re-opening the golf course to the public, and renovating the Detroit Boat Club. Items mentioned at two or more tables are listed below.

Items	Times Mentioned	Votes
No Grand Prix	7	28
Boat launch / access	4	6
Open golf course for public use / Restore golf course	4	6
Assist Detroit Boat Club with improvements/renovations	3	9
Winter sports / activities (ice skating, cross country skiing, sledding)	3	6
Activities for kids / teens	3	4
Restore / Open Belle Isle Zoo	3	4
Food trucks (diverse) (small business) / on a permanent basis	2	8
Less time for setup/take down of Grand Prix	2	8
Remove or reduce effects of Grand Prix	2	7
Horseback riding / stables	2	4
Repair fishing pier at coast guard, make accessible	2	4
Clean/restore canals	2	3
More education opportunities / school programs	2	3
Expanded programming / more activities	2	2
Lifeguard at the beach	2	2
Restored band shell, music on the island	2	2
Public access to covered bridge / repair	2	1

### ***Final Exercise: Collective Priorities***

As one person from each group presented the highest-voted items from their vision of Belle Isle, the planning team transferred those ideas into a separate exercise, combining similar items. As the attendees left the input session, they voted on their top three items from the collective priorities list. This afforded them the opportunity to vote on an item that was not mentioned at their table. Below are all of the collective priorities from both sessions, combined into one list. The three items that received the most votes all involve the Grand Prix, either discontinuing it or minimizing the impact of the event. Other top priorities included improving the canals, creating walking trails in the woods, and adding winter activities and events. This input will be considered by the planning team when creating a ten year action plan.

<b>Collective Priorities</b>	<b>Combined Votes</b>
Remove/reduce effects of the Grand Prix	24
No Grand Prix (and eliminate association parking, etc)	20
Minimize Grand Prix impact (less time for set up and take down)	19
Clear connections between the streams and lakes (clean canals)	14
Walking trails in the woods	13
Winter sport activities (ice skating, cross country skiing, sledding)	11
Canoe/kayak rental, sail boards etc	10
Food trucks permanently and other affordable food options	10
Greater food options (general store, restaurant, bottled water, BBQ)	10
More free family programming (movies in the park, food truck rally)	8
Non-motorized trail (whole island)	8
Reduce police presence	8
Increase public relations	7
Kid activities	7
Repaved roads and bike lanes	7
Repurpose zoo and golf course	7
Better maintained gardens and canals	6
Large & small events (musical, etc.)	6
Preservation of natural resources	6
Add golf course	5
Create unique waterfront access	5
Extended aquarium hours	5
Restrooms open all the time	5
Boat club improvements	4
Emergency/safety station	3
Horseback riding and stables	3
More activities for kids and teens	3
Provide a free day	3
Restore the zoo	3
Improved communication regarding passes, permits, rules, etc	2
Intelligent enforcement	2
Kayak lockers	2
Repeal motorsports	2
Restaurants	2
Skate park	2
Cooling and warming centers	1
Boat launch between River Rouge and Detroit Boat Club	0
Public Wi-Fi	0
Sports leagues	0

## Appendix: Introduction Card Answers

What matters most to me about Belle Isle Park is...
Love the diversity of the park, would love to start RC Boat Club and RC Car Club
Enjoying the peace and quiet on the island
Refuge, nature, water, peace & quiet
Preserving its beauty and access to the public.
Continuing improvements by DNR, enhancing the park's beauty and its benefits to our citizens
The beautiful scenery and open spaces
It's here for all of us!
Presently we park and watch the ships go by, learned to sail at the DYC, attend power squad at DYC
The history and future of this amazing gem in the middle of the Great Lake basin. The world's largest fresh water reservoir.
Public access and place for kids
Easy access to safe bike training and running that has bathrooms and water stops.
Having a natural sanctuary to relax, read, and enjoy a peaceful experience
Work at the aquarium for education. Family has been here off Elliot since 1927. Uncle (~93) has been ice skating here since 1930.
Keeping it for the residents of Detroit and visitors
Keeping it open for the residents of Detroit and others
Family, visits weekly, graduation party, weddings, engagement, tap and ballet recital on the fountain
Access, hiking, land sailing, kayaking
Access to everyone regardless of background. Conservatory.
Safe, clean, family-oriented all attractions
No Grand Prix. Set up and take down is way too long and is a nuisance for the public users. Would like to see ice skating in the winter.
The conservatory
Conservatory and aquarium
Not over commercializing it. Keep it more natural. Clean, road repairs.
Natural setting in the urban area in the Great Lakes basin.
It's natural beauty, all seasons for all people
Green space/park in the city. Reopen the golf course (not disc golf!)
A blend of country in a city setting
Knowing from personal experience how much family activity can exist and entertain. Preserving and restoring its heritage. And remove the kayak launch in the lagoon area near the DYC.
The Conservatory and garden, daffodil program, fountain
Clean, safe, attractions
Availability
Developing and maintaining Belle Isle as a world class recreation destination for families from throughout Michigan and the world.
A lot safer and cleaner
Great local venue to run/bike while experiencing the river but avoid downtown.
It is a place for families and recreation activities. It is in the middle of the two countries.
Termination of Grand Prix/non-renewal of contract with Penske group, and demolition/removal of over 10 acres of concrete paddock, slabs, lots, and reinvestment of grass, trees, parkland so that the area may once again be enjoyed by the public. The paving over of 10 acres has created massive blight on what used to be the prettiest part of the island.
Beautiful flower garden
Nature for Detroiter, kids & adults
I walk on Belle Isle weekly and often bring my family to different activities. My grandmother was the Director of the Belle Isle Zoo. I love nature and grew up in Puerto Rico so coming somewhere with water is important for me.
Preserving the flatwoods
A peaceful place to enjoy nature

Public access and minimizing the impact and closures of the Grand Prix
I'd like to see an inclusive island that provides restoration to the community through unique attractions/events (restoring the canal, canoe rides, paddle boats, skate park, disability inclusive playgrounds, and preservation of natural resources).
water sports, historical moments
Great getaway, great views, golf
Belle Isle is a treasured community asset and congregation place. It should be available to the people of Detroit first and foremost, and the voices of black Detroiters should be prioritized at every step in this process. Since the DNR took over police patrols and check points have made my black neighbors feel unwelcome and criminalized. I myself have been stopped three times since the take over for such minor things as bicycle reflectors. I want to feel safe from police when using this public resource; I want my friends and neighbors to feel the same safety.
The cultural assets such as the aquarium, conservatory, fountain and sports facilities
The natural landscape which is rare and irreplaceable
Recreational access and investing in our current infrastructure, athletic complex, and golf course
Natural beauty
Natural landscape, sound of water, the peacefulness and swimming, picnics, recreation, skating, biking
Great lakes museum, conservatory, nature center, aquarium, biking
Grand Prix and the natural beauty!
An enjoyable piece of nature, so close to home-free.
My family has been hosting picnics for over 50 years here
Keeping Belle Isle safe and maintaining buildings and grounds
Keeping it in good shape, safe, people friendly and clean.
Activities and events, aquarium and conservatory
The peaceful nature setting with lots of activities to do
Please consider having a free day once a week. It would be psychologically symbolic and sociologically positive for Detroiters to help them understand that this is a state park but that you recognize its special history and the immense amount of financial and social support has had from its citizens/residents over many years. I also note that none of us talked about swimming and the beaches, probably because it was a very senior group!
The beauty and peace in the middle of the city.
Belle Isle to me is a respite and oasis in the city-something other cities don't have. We can be proud of it and help to keep its beauty intact.
That it "stays open to everyone." "Accommodating"
Teach entrepreneurial skills to children in sports, entertainment, science and technology. Establish a campus on the park. Stabilize community support and wellness, campus generates revenue, purpose and longevity. Secure educational, physical, and mental hope for Detroit children. Our school has been planning to start "summer training" on the park for a year.
Current member of Friends of the Detroit River, we partnered with Fish Habit and access improvements. Belle Isle is unique: natural setting, variety of activities, memories/history, February "shiver on the river" winter event
The canals and exploring the wildlife
Place to get away
What means the most to me is the longer-term black residents in the nearby neighborhoods have the same opportunity to benefit from improvements to the island. In my neighborhoods association, we hear many people feel unsafe coming here because of the police checkpoints and excessive policing since the state took over. I feel unsafe being constantly pulled over for no reason. I also strongly feel the island should stay accessible to low-income Detroiters, not just suburban white people. Finally, the Grand Prix creates noise pollution that affects all the surrounding neighborhoods, has a negative environmental impact on the island and makes it a less pleasant space to visit.
Restoring its natural beauty and eliminating racing of cars
Park near downtown-the river, canoeing, driving through the woods, the beach, golf, riding my bike around the island, wolverine200, roller skating/blading the Grand Prix track, tennis, watching the fireworks, visiting the aquarium and conservatory, submarine races, Dossin museum, Scott fountain, picnics after weekly golf,

banquet at boat club.
Escape and open space, water, access, nature
Keeping it clean up and all facilities open to the public. Also keeping the senior power days going every year for the seniors
Nature- I love how peaceful it is!
New kayak ramp blocking flow-closing opening reducing flow to the beach, communication-Belle Isle app, One stop shop for events/info
Inclusivity and community engagement, recreational activities