

# Belle Isle Park

## Strategic Direction and Management Plan



### Summary of Stakeholder Input

In order to gather targeted input from governmental, non-profit, and business/tourism entities, the planning team invited a group of stakeholders to an input workshop. The workshop was held in two sessions on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm and from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm. A total of 43 stakeholders participated in the two sessions. The participants were first given a status update on the park and a summary of recent improvement projects, followed by breaking into groups for a series of input exercises. As the stakeholders introduced themselves, they were invited to share an answer to the prompt “What matters most to me about Belle Isle Park is...” Those that recorded their answers and returned them to the planning team are included below.

What matters most to me about Belle Isle Park is....
The memories I've created with my mom and family. Belle Isle remaining accessible to the public. Improved and better promotion of the island. Amenities (beach, aquarium, canals). Protecting environmental quality/natural ecosystem @ park. Park remaining natural space (non residential). Stormwater management via nature-based infrastructure. Greenway/non-motorized path connections at and to the park
Island is both safe and clean for all to use.
That it is a place of unity where people from all backgrounds can join and find respite in the island's natural and architectural beauty.
The Conservatory memories
I hope it stays a family park!
That native Detroiters feel welcomed and comfortable at the park
Creating safe places to play for all members of our community, hub for active community
Public access to-and participation in-this beautiful island's many amenities
Got fishing
Improved facilities (dedicated) for people who bike and walk. Welcoming and inclusive to all.
The positive momentum on Belle Isle seen over the last few years continues into the future
Getting kids on the island, welcoming to all residents
Inviting and accessible to all
It's a special place to create multi-generational family memories...picnics, visiting the conservatory, business...great collaborative partner
Accessibility, recreation options, green spaces, family environment
People interacting with nature
Accessibility and methods of transportation onto and around the island
Public access and enjoyment, public enjoyment of diverse outdoor spaces and experiences, historic integrity
Belle Isle has been called a gem of Detroit, I believe we need to polish that gem for all to enjoy. Better facilities, infrastructure, and opportunities for all to enjoy, now is the time to start to improve the island and make it not only a park for Michigan residents, but a tourist destination as well.
Preserving the historic buildings
Historic buildings
Accessibility to public buildings, preserving cultural landscape
Equality-that everyone has access who benefits
That it remains safe for families. Continue investment in infrastructure; upgrade hard line communications on the island.
That it remains clean and accessible to all. Activities and attractions remain open. Remain a place for youth, families, and adults to experience aspects of nature. Remain a resource for the community
Becomes a great place to walk and bike, that is welcoming to all Detroiters (of all abilities) year round
Green space in the city, place to go

The results of the exercises are detailed below. This summary represents the combination of results from both the morning and afternoon stakeholder input sessions.

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

When thinking about the current state of Belle Isle, the stakeholders had many positive associations. The groups keyed in on several significant features of the island: its historic architecture and role in Detroit’s story, its beautiful natural areas so rarely seen in the heart of urban development, and the sense that the island is improving with new investment into its infrastructure and key buildings. The words and phrases mentioned by three or more tables were:

Items	Times Mentioned
Work in progress / Better / Improving / Upward / Evolving	5
Historic	3
Natural areas / Nature / Garden	3
Nostalgic / Sentimental / Memories	3
Opportunity	3
Resurgence / Rebirth	3

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

In the second exercise, stakeholders discussed Belle Isle’s potential. Several of the most frequently mentioned items shared a similar theme: access and availability of the park for all people. It was important to the stakeholders that the island is a place that is welcoming to all, that is inclusive, and that is accessible. They also felt that the island should feel very connected to the heart of Detroit and that it should be easy for pedestrians and bicycles to travel through it safely. Additionally, several groups envisioned Belle Isle’s future to be that of a well-known destination. Below are the items that were mentioned at three or more tables.

Items	Times Mentioned
Improved access / Accessible	6
Destination	4
Connection / Seamless connection to mainland	3
Inclusive / Equal	3
Multi-modal (Bike/pedestrian friendly/trolley/kayaks)	3
Robust environment/ecological environments	3
Welcoming to all	3

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

The third exercise combined two sentiments: what the stakeholders liked most and what they liked least about Belle Isle. Occasionally, the same item would be placed in both columns, as is the case with the Grand Prix. Aspects of the island that were the most liked related to the availability of public open space and nature close to the city as well as the many unique attractions and events accessible to users. What stakeholders liked the least related to the work yet to be done to improve the island, missing elements such as food options, the Grand Prix and its associated effects, and the perception that not everyone is welcome on the island. Since many unique items were mentioned, those that were mentioned at two or more tables are listed below.

Like Most	Times Mentioned	Like Least	Times Mentioned
Size/scale/open green space	3	Grand Prix / Impact on roads / timeline	5
Views/water	3	Closed zoo	4
A place for everyone	2	Signage / Lack of wayfinding	4
Aquarium	2	Closes too early	3
Cleaner / Cleanliness	2	Food desert	3
Conservatory	2	Boat Club distressed	2
Events	2	Deferred maintenance	2
Forestry	2	Perceptions of exclusivity / Is everyone welcome? Do they feel welcome?	2
Grand Prix	2		
History/architecture	2		
Lots of activities	2		
Safety	2		
Trails / Nature trails	2		
Unique attractions/activities	2		

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

The planning team wished to know what differences the stakeholders have noticed since the beginning of the DNR's administration of the island. The most frequently mentioned items show that the groups have taken notice of the improvements, such as greater attention to maintenance, the repair and opening of previously closed restrooms, the availability of amenities such as non-motorized watercraft rental, and the availability of public transit. Interestingly, some groups thought the island has become more crowded in the last few years, and others notice fewer people and less activity. Below are items that were mentioned by two or more groups in this exercise.

Items	Times Mentioned
Cleaner, improved maintenance	6
Feels safer (perception)	4
Restrooms / Bathrooms are working / cleaner	4
Greater police presence	3
Kayak/canoe rentals	3
Accessibility by bus	2
Adequately stocked comfort station	2
Dead tree removal	2
Fewer people / less activity	2
Greater stakeholder engagement	2
More crowded / people are coming back	2
More public programming	2
Rec passport/entrance / fee for access	2

**Exercise 5: What improvements or changes would you like to see that would increase public use, enjoyment, and benefit from Belle Isle? (with voting)**

The last exercise was intended to decipher what the stakeholders envisioned for the future of the island. The stakeholder's ideas reflect a desire to improve and restore what exists on the island, to create a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclers, and to improve communications on the island through event advertisement and improved signage. Ideas mentioned at the most tables included increasing food options on the island, creating a water taxi, and restoring the Detroit Boat Club. This exercise generated many unique responses from the groups; only five ideas were

mentioned at two or more tables. After generating ideas, each person voted on the top three ideas from their group. Items receiving four or more votes are shown below.

Items	Times Mentioned	Votes
More concession, food and beverage opportunities / highlight local	4	8
Water taxi between island / Detroit	3	5
Boat club restoration and use	3	4
Internal/external communication (signage/daily events)	2	4
Dedicated bike and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the park	2	2
Reopening the aquarium full time	1	5
Address facility infrastructure	1	4
Identifiable welcome center	1	4
Safe on-road biking	1	4

### ***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 ideas. As the stakeholders left the input session, they voted on the top three items from the collective priorities list, which included items not mentioned at their tables. Below are all of the collective priorities from both sessions combined into one list. The top collective priority was to add more concessions and food options on the island, and one group thought that those options could highlight local businesses. Protecting the natural resources on the island was the second highest-voted priority, followed by improving the signage system throughout the park. These items, along with the other input from the stakeholders, will be considered when as the planning team creates an action plan for the park.

Collective Priorities	Times Mentioned	Combined Votes
More concessions / food options (highlight local)	2	19
Protect natural resources (recycling, green initiative, wildlife)	1	12
Signage improvements (internal communications)	1	11
Facility infrastructure (buildings, restrooms)	1	9
Identifiable welcome center	1	9
Park amenities (benches, picnic tables)	1	8
Non-motorized infrastructure (safe for pedestrians/cyclists)	1	7
Public relations campaign	1	7
Employment opportunities for local residents	1	6
Technological advances (phone app for park directory, history)	1	5
Water taxi for Detroit	1	5
Re-open the aquarium full time	1	4.5
Stock model boat basin for children's fishing	1	3
Activate closed areas: zoo + golf course	1	2.5
Increase youth programming	1	2
External communications (daily event schedule)	1	0

## Participant List

First name	Last name	Representing	Title
Khalil	Ligon	Alliance for the Great Lakes	SE Michigan Outreach Coordinator
Brenda	Price	Alliance for the Great Lakes	Volunteer and Education Director
Katy	Wyerman	Belle Isle Conservancy	
Amy	Greene	Belle Isle Nature Center	
Dawn	Bilobran	Belle Isle Conservancy	Board Member
Janice	Ellison	Belle Isle Conservancy	Belle Isle Conservancy Board Member
Danielle	Jackson	Belle Isle Conservancy	Event Manager
Genevieve	Nowak	Belle Isle Conservancy / DNR	Director Volunteer Services
Kamilah	Henderson	Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan	
Scharron	Rambus	City of Detroit (DDOT)	
Janese	Chapman	City of Detroit Historic Designation	
Justin	Jacobs	Come Play Detroit	Owner
Mike	McGuiness	Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence	Community Outreach Coordinator
Walter	Brown		
Lisa	Nuszkowski	Detroit Bike Share	Executive Director
Michael	Montri	Detroit Grand Prix	General Manager
Todd	Scott	Detroit Greenways Coalition	
Dawayne	Jones	Detroit Police Athletic League	Athletic Program
Keith	Flournoy	Detroit Parks and Recreation	
David	Miller	Detroit Parks and Recreation	Director of Dept of Parks and Rec
Michele	Marine	Detroit River Conservancy	Director of Programs
Alease	Johnson	Dossin Great Lakes Museum	
Mark	Wallace	Detroit Riverfront Conservancy	President/CEO of Detroit Riverfront
Ben	Beaman	Ducks Unlimited	
Kyle	Burleson	Detroit / Wayne County Port Authority	Deputy Director
John	Loftus	Detroit / Wayne County Port Authority	
Christina	Doby	Erb Family Foundation	Program Officer
Richard	Benson	Lake St. Clair Walleye Association	President
Bill	Shreck	Michigan Department of Transportation	
Ryan	Cunningham	Michigan Historic Preservation Network	Volunteer
Nancy	Finewood	Michigan Historic Preservation Network	
Jennifer	Reinhardt	Michigan Historic Preservation Network	Detroit Preservationist Specialist
Nicolette	Carlone	Public Lighting Authority	
Tiffany	VanDetley	Riverside Kayak Connection	
Jeff	Griffith	The Youth Connection	
Lisa	Perez	US Forest Service	
James	Hines	US Coast Guard STA Belle Isle	
Justin	Stanley	US Coast Guard STA Belle Isle	
Alvina	Gipson	Western Michigan University, Metro Detroit	
Diana	Jacobson	YMCA	
Lynette	Simmons	YMCA of Metropolitan Detroit	VP of Mission Resources
Wyatt	Griffith		

## Attendees not Participating

Karis	Floyd	DNR	
Jacob	Brown	DNR	
Debbie	Jensen	DNR	
Amanda	Hertl	DNR	
Andrea	LaFontaine	DNR Exec	
David	Malloch	DNR Law Enforcement	
Scott	Pratt	DNR P&R	
Damon	Owens	DNR-LED	
Michele	Hodges	Belle Isle Conservancy	
Brittany	Sanders	Belle Isle Conservancy	

