

## Belle Isle Update

The State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources has been forthcoming with their plans for improvements to the Athletic Complex on Belle Isle. The DNR has shared their plans and timeline for those improvements with the MHA in a number of meetings we have been invited to attend.

As of this writing, we are pleased to report the following progress of those plans....

The overall plans include repairs and improvements to much more than the Handball Courts, but we will address some specific line-item repairs to the Courts in this report. Those line-items were specified by the engineers/architects hired by the DNR and are currently under bid by private contractors. The proposed improvements are likely to change (the opinion of this writer) as there will be a predictable difference in the proposed cost and the actual proposals submitted by the various contractors.

It is public knowledge that funding for this project is a result of a 650K grant. While it appears to be a princely sum, it actually falls significantly short of the cost to improve the site. The overall site improvements include street repairs, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, tennis courts, etc.

Fortunately, the DNR has allocated approximately 120K for the Handball facility improvements. The focus will be on the repair of the roof and walls...sealing and/or replacement of coping, all masonry repairs (tuck pointing), roof repair, ceiling panel replacement where needed, clean and prep for paint, replacement of light fixture/s, fence repair and replacement of water fountain. Their plans also include aggregate walkways to the courts (and walkway to the basketball courts) and removal of the brick pavers located under the canopy nearest the water fountain. That area will be paved. At this time, replacement of the playing surface concrete in the courts has been shelved due to cost. It is our opinion, which we have expressed to the DNR, that there is some soil erosion beneath one of the rear courts which should be addressed as the concrete in that court has cracked with a resultant uneven playing surface.

The DNR has indicated that construction will tentatively begin 2<sup>nd</sup> week of June. Note that there is no schedule of first up....Therefore, playing season may or may not extend beyond that time for this year. Time of completion for all improvements is anticipated to be 90 days from start.

As a housekeeping matter, we will be holding both of our 3 wall tournaments at St. Clair Shores. Doubles is scheduled for July 22,23 and Singles is slated for Aug 11-13, 2017. Mark your calendars....

At this time, the MHA is signing a gift agreement with the State of Michigan, and will be sending a check that guarantees that our gift of \$ 10,000.00 will be used strictly for the Handball Court improvements as part of our continuing commitment to the life of Handball on Belle Isle.

As a personal aside, it is important to note that much of the athletic complex has been contracted to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party for the rental of the playing fields and other sports related activities. We were vocal, early on, in our opposition to any commercialization of the handball courts. It is our opinion that the courts should remain open for free play and that we, as a membership driven association, have absolutely no

interest in charging for the use of the courts. We believe that is the right thing to do and the State of Michigan respects our position. We are subject to a fee for the exclusive use of the courts during our tournaments only. And that fee has been suspended, for now, due to our significant donation.

While the MHA has no equity in the decisions made by the DNR, we have truly enjoyed a collaborative dialogue with the DNR. We have no ultimate say in the scope of work nor the timeline for start and finish. With that in mind, the DNR has informed us that the grant is due to expire at years' end. With a spend it or lose it scenario, we are optimistic that court improvements will begin.....

In a review of the list of contributors, we are so grateful to all of you who have given so generously. This was not a token \$ 20 bill here and there....you have all been so generous with your hard earned money...and that makes this job a pleasure.....

Dale Chimenti