

City leaders raring to go after Sea Grant final presentation

By Tim Barnum

news@arenaindependent.com
989-387-9140

Au Gres — Michigan Sea Grant presented the final results of its months-long study in the city of Au Gres during the Dec. 1 city council meeting, and now city officials are ready to begin making headway on the study's recommendations.

Mark Breederland represented Michigan Sea Grant and made the final presentation to the city last week at the meeting, which was held in the Au Gres-Sims Elementary library to accommodate increased attendance. Breederland gave an overview of how Sea Grant arrived at its final presentation, touching on its initial vision meeting in August and three-day charrette in September.

Using information from the charrette, which saw community members present ideas on how to develop the city's waterfront properties and vote on which ideas they found most feasible and appropriate, Breederland gave recommendations for improvements to the city's properties. Included in the properties were the harbor of refuge — currently still in the process of being turned over to the city from the state — as well as the city park and campground and the breakwater area at the mouth of the Au Gres River.

Breederland talked about how a popular alternative from the charrette included making the harbor a family-oriented public space that would include a band shell, kayak launches, a beach or sandy area and fishing pier. The overall development recommendation also included adding rental mini cabins to the city campground and a playground, pocket beach and fishing platforms to the Department of Natural Resources property at the mouth of the river.

Diagrams and conceptual photographs and drawings showed how all of the three properties

could be connected.

"That's everything from biking to the kayaking to the pedestrian walkways," Breederland said. "There's a lot that's already been done. The existing connections as well as the proposed connections are envisioned here."

Possible ways to fund the projects going forward were presented to the city, as well.

"You have to find a way to get some of the low-hanging fruit and phase in stuff at your own pace," Breederland said. "That's a challenge, but another way is to recycle the dollars and make sure you maintain them."

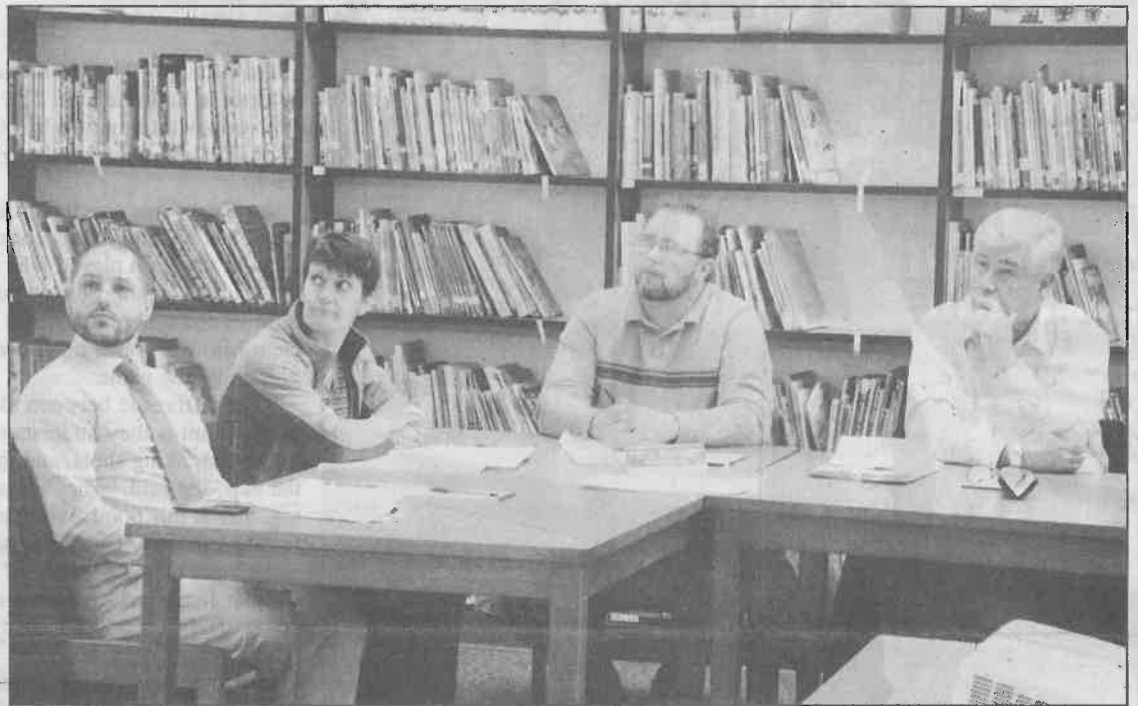
"The team did not want to come in and design grandiose things that nobody can maintain," he said.

One of the key changes proposed that did not deal with the waterfront property was getting US-23 changed from a four- or five-lane roadway through the city to a boulevard. Mayor Bill Borushko said he is looking at the possible highway changes as a separate project from the overall waterfront developments. Any changes there would require a lot of communication with legislators and perhaps even the governor's office, Borushko said. In the meantime, he said he would like to begin forming committees to complete work that can be done by the city.

"We should begin forming committees and going forward with as much as we can do immediately," he said. "I assume everybody's on board with it. I know council is."

City Manager John Stanley said before any actual changes can occur to the city's waterfront, the actually changing of the deed for the harbor property must be completed — something that has been in the works for more than a year.

"It was in discussions prior to my hiring, but I do think we're in the home stretch with this now," he said. "As far as a hard date, I



City Manager John Stanley, City Clerk LaVonne Pritchard and city council members Keith Edmonds and Tim Edwards listen as Mark Breederland delivers the final Sea Grant presentation Dec. 1.

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don't know that. I'm certainly hoping by the spring we're able to do that."

While Breederland touched on the highway and city park and campground Dec. 1, Borushko said he felt the committees should first focus on the harbor and what can be done there when it eventually reverts back to the city.

"I think the emphasis has to be on the other side of the highway," he said. "Let's get that rolling."

"I think by next year, people should see some definite signs of

activity, things going on in that area," Borushko said. "They talked about a fishing pier. They talked about a few things. We could do some of that now using some of the existing docks."

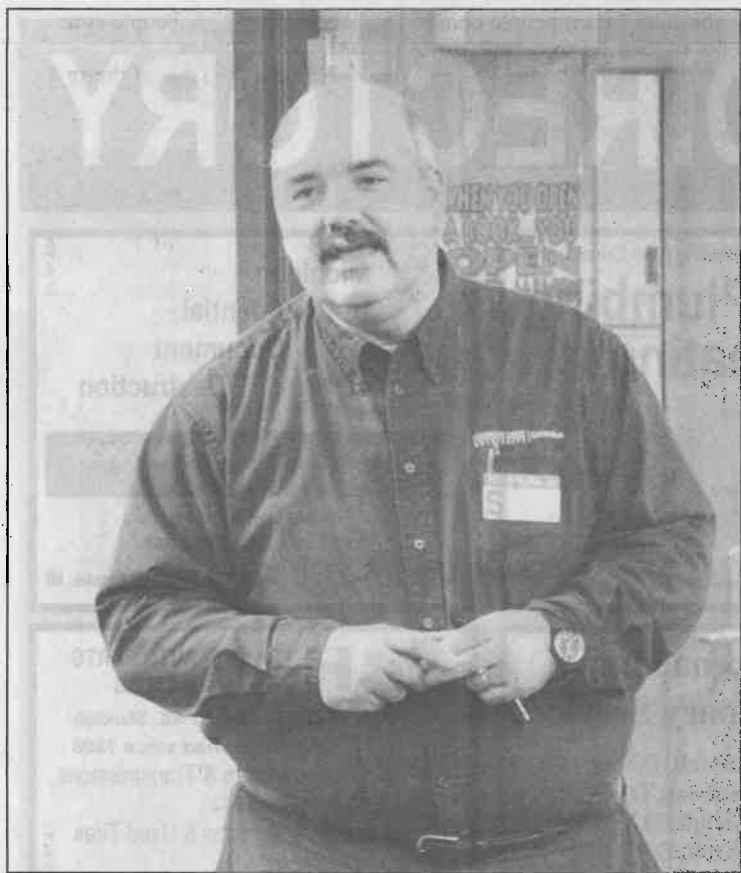
"That's one of the committees I could see functioning now," he said. "They could work on what could we do now with the money we have or to get more money so that we could work on that now."

Stanley said he was pleased with the way the study went and the reaction from the community.

"I think it was a beneficial and eye-opening experience not just for myself, but the greater Au Gres area," he said. "It shows we have an abundance of resources right here within our reach. I think the group helped bring that out, but even more I think the community helped bring that out."

Borushko said he hopes surrounding communities will be involved in the process going forward, and that the city plans to share its Sea Grant report with adjoining townships and would welcome their participation. He said he also hopes many new people get involved with the developments that come about from the study.

"We need to have the whole town, the whole area involved, because we're going to be wearing people out if we don't get that," he said.



Mark Breederland tells the crowd what Sea Grant feels the community wants most at the harbor property in Au Gres.

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Community members packed the Au Gres-Sims Elementary media center for the Sea Grant final presentation.

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