

Tuscola County Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

Tuesday April 21, 2026, 8:00 AM

Tuscola County Purdy Building Conference Room

125 West Lincoln Street, Caro, MI 48723

Call to Order:

At 8:06 A.M., Michael Clinesmith, Chairperson, called the meeting to order.

Pledge of Allegiance:

Michael Clinesmith led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Mark Putnam, Secretary, called the Roll.

Appointed Members Present: Michael Clinesmith, Chairperson; Nancy Barrios, Vice-chairperson & Tuscola County Board of Commissioners Member; Mark Putnam, Secretary; William Thomas; Isabella Hill; & Joseph Ewald.

Appointed Members Absent: Vacant.

Ex-Officio Present: Alishcia Little, Drain Commission Liaison; Mitchell Holmes, Road Commissioner

Ex-Officio Absent: Jane Rymarczyk, Planning Commissioner, Excused.

Public Present: Richard Peters.

Ex-officio Member Elevated to Voting Status:

Mitchell Holmes, ~~Drain~~ Road Commissioner.

A quorum was present with seven voting members.

Approval of Agenda:

- Action: Nancy Barrios, seconded by Joe Ewald, motioned to approve the agenda with the date amended from March 17, 2026, to April 21, 2026.
- Result: Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment:

Richard Peters addressed the assembly regarding the "Walking Trail Agreement" item on the agenda. Mr. Peters provided a historical presentation on the former railroad line, detailing its route as follows:

- **Origin:** Commencing at the current Bell-Wasik Dealership site.
- **Direction:** Paralleling East Dayton Road and crossing the Cass River (south of Sucker Creek).
- **Route:** Continuing north before Foster's Dam on Bevens Road, following Bevens Road east toward Wilmot.
- **Termination:** Extending east to the Tuscola and Sanilac County border near Snover, Michigan.

Approval of Minutes:

- Action: Joe Ewald, seconded by Nancy Barrios, motioned to approve the March 17, 2026, Minutes as presented.
- Result: Motion passed unanimously.

Park Host Applications:

The Vanderbilt County Park Host Applicant Interviews Committee includes Michael Clinesmith, Joseph Ewald, Mark Putnam, and Interim Administrator Mike Miller. It was determined that Shelly Lutz, Human Resources Director, will join the committee to participate in the interview process.

Timeline and Procedures:

- Question Submission: Commission members are to develop interview questions and email them to Mike Miller by Monday, April 27, 2026.
- Interviews: Two Park Host Applicant Interviews are scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 10:00 AM and 11:00 AM.
- Final Recommendation: The committee will submit its final recommendations to the Full Board prior to their meeting on May 14, 2026.

Hiring Requirements & Expectations:

- Pre-Employment Screening: Successful applicants must complete a background check, physical examination, and drug screening prior to hire.
- Holiday Availability: The Park Host is required to be on-site at Vanderbilt County Park & Campground for Memorial Day weekend (Friday, May 22 – Monday, May 25, 2026).

Walking Trail Agreement:

Historical Context & The "Handy Line"

Richard Peters presented the Commission with a strategic opportunity to reclaim a project initiated seventeen years ago during his tenure as Chairperson of the Commission. The project utilizes the former Detroit, Bay City, and Western Railroad route (historically known as a "Handy Line"). Built between 1910 and 1916 to connect Bay City, Caro, and Port Huron, the line was a vital artery for coal and agricultural transport.

Current Licensing & Revitalization

The route is currently owned by International Transmission Company (ITC). In 2009, ITC recorded a "Revocable Non-motorized Bike Path License," granting Tuscola County the right to construct, operate, and maintain a bike path for a nominal fee of \$1.00.

The Commission determined that it is time to renew contact with ITC and resume this project. While the proposal faced community opposition seventeen years ago, the Commission noted that today's public climate highly prioritizes hiking and biking infrastructure, making the project a highly viable undertaking.

Development Strategy & Phasing

The Commission proposed a "small step" approach, focusing on incremental development:

- Phase I (Start at the Caro Embankment): Mark Putnam suggested that initially we should focus our attention on the Old Railroad Track & Embankment that starts at the east edge of the City of Caro.
 - The property at 200 Ellington Street (Wasik property) is an ideal trailhead for the Bike & Hike Pathway. Located between Spring Creek and the Old Historic Railroad Embankment, this site once housed George Warren's 1902 Brick & Tile Works—the clay source for early Caro's masonry. The land offers ample space for a park and staging area, bordered to the north by Indianfields Cemetery. From here, the Bike & Hike Pathway would follow the old rail line route southeast across Spring Creek toward a future Cass River crossing and onward to Wilmot.
 - A proposed side-path could extend down Weeden and Gun Club Roads to reach Exchange Club Forest and Chippewa Landing. From there, existing routes connect to downtown Caro. Cyclists can travel toward Montague Avenue and the Strand Theater, or head toward East Grant Street and Atwood Park. This interconnected loop allows travelers to navigate the "Old Town Neighborhood" and return directly to the Ellington Street starting point.
- Phase II (Incremental Development): The Commission wants to adopt a phased implementation strategy, focusing on the development of individual trail segments or sections rather than an "all-or-nothing" approach. This allows for the steady, manageable progress of resources and volunteer support that will become available.

- **Community Involvement:** The Commission aims to leverage increased public interest in outdoor recreation and recruit volunteers for pathway clearing, like the volunteer groups that offered support in the not, too, distant past.
- **Pathway Expansion Goals:** Discussion was held regarding the long-term extension of the trail system into Wells and Kingston Townships. The goal is to connect the City of Caro to Wilmot via a day-trip-length pathway. By leveraging the natural appeal of the White Creek area and the existing charm of Wilmot, the Commission aims to promote local tourism and residential growth, transforming the historic "cottage and hotel" area into a premier regional destination.

Next Steps

Our immediate priority is to re-establish our relationship between Tuscola County through the Commission with International Transmission Company and renew our contacts before the revokable license has passed its season and finalize the plans to the foundation of this wonderful project.

Review of Financial Reports & Budget Adjustments:

The Parks' Webpage & Reservation System

Digital Transition and Application Development

The Commission discussed the ongoing modernization of the Vanderbilt County Park & Campground registration process. The Tuscola County Information Technology Department, in coordination with Oakland County and its Parks & Recreation Commission, is developing a dedicated application for camper and visitor registration.

- **Access:** Users will be able to access the system via a QR code or a direct link on the Tuscola County Parks & Recreation webpage.
- **Payment:** The application will facilitate smartphone-based purchases and payments, linking directly to the Tuscola County financial system.
- **Navigation:** A link to the reservation portal will be hosted on the Parks & Recreation Commission page and is expected to be featured in a separate directory under the main Tuscola County website.

Memorial Day Weekend Operations

For the upcoming Memorial Day Weekend, financial records will likely be managed manually using paper logs, consistent with previous years. Following the holiday, all financial transactions and registrations will transition to the new digital platform [when completed.]

Financial Review The Commission reviewed the Financial Report dated April 17, 2026. During the review, Chairperson Michael Clinesmith noted that current parking fee revenues for Vanderbilt Park appear lower than projected.

- Action: Mark Putnam, seconded by Nancy Barrios, motioned to receive and file the April 17, 2026, Revenue and Expenditure Report for Tuscola County – County Parks & Recreation.
- Result: Motion passed unanimously.

Michigan Trails & Greenways Association:

The Commission moved to join the Michigan Trails & Greenways Association. Michael Clinesmith will secure the membership application and forward it to Mike Miller to facilitate payment. It was noted that professional memberships are already accounted for in the approved 2026 budget.

Property Development: The Parcels

City of Caro & Chippewa Landing Update

Nancy Barrios reported on her recent discussion with City of Caro Manager Scott R. Czasak. The City's Parks & Recreation Committee has budgeted between \$360,000 and \$370,000 for the development of a launch at Chippewa Landing Park. Located in southeast Caro opposite the Tuscola County Recycling Center. Historically, the recycling site was once known as Richardson's Grove Park.

Cass River Flooding Observations

Chairperson Michael Clinesmith presented photographs taken just prior to the meeting documenting recent flooding of the Cass River at The Parcels. Observations noted:

- The river is currently moving swiftly at the lowest level with the two lowest levels, below the "Upper High Bank," submerged.
- The uppermost third level remains well above the current flood stage, confirming its suitability for our initial development.

Phased Development Strategy

The Commission reviewed the Spicer Group's conceptual plan for The Parcels, which carries a conservative total estimate of \$571,900 for full site "re-creation." To manage costs, Mark Putnam and Mike Miller proposed a two-stage development approach:

- Stage I (Upper Level): The Commission favors beginning development on the top level. This would include constructing a parking lot while retaining existing features such as the overhead utility line, the large specimen tree, and the concrete pump house pad. Additional amenities in this stage include native plantings, interpretive signage, a trash receptacle, and an ADA-accessible picnic table and grill.
- Access Considerations: Mike Miller noted that while the Spicer Plan includes a circuitous, ADA-compliant route to the river, many users may still prefer a direct path to the water. Both options will be considered to ensure accessibility and convenience.

Campground Feasibility

The Commission discussed the potential for a campground at The Parcels as a revenue-generating feature.

- Specifications: Joseph Ewald noted that standard campsites require a minimum of 1,200 square feet (e.g., 30' x 40').
- Economic Impact: Mark Putnam highlighted that camping fees would offset operational costs and reduce reliance on tax revenue. Suggested rates included \$30/night for rustic sites and \$90/night for rustic cabins.

Next Steps The Commission will invite a representative from the Spicer Group to the next meeting to further discuss these phases.

Discussion regarding a formal name for "The Parcels" has been tabled.

Vanderbilt County Park & Campground:

Historical Kiosk & Cornhole Game Installations

The Commission reviewed the most recent bids for improvements at Vanderbilt County Park. WJH Concrete of Mayville submitted the following quotes:

- Historical Kiosk: \$490.00 for a 7' x 7' concrete pad.
- Cornhole Game: \$1,840.00 for the installation of two pads.

Financial Administration & Reimbursement

To facilitate proper grant processing, these projects will be billed via two separate invoices and paid with individual disbursement checks. This structure allows America250MI to provide a clean reimbursement for the Historical Kiosk pad and associated incidentals (such as anchor bolts). The Commission noted that all kiosk-related expenses are eligible for reimbursement through the America250MI program.

- Action: Joe Ewald, seconded by Mark Putnam, motioned to approve payment to WJH Concrete of Mayville for two separate bids: one for the Kiosk pad, \$490, and one for the two Cornhole Pads, \$1,840. Mike Miller will contact WJH Concrete of Mayville to complete the transaction.
- Result: Motion passed unanimously.

The 2023 – 2027 Master Plan Submission:

Chairperson Michael Clinesmith will officially submit the amended 2023–2027 Tuscola County Parks & Recreation Commission Master Plan. The updated document includes the required ADA compliance revisions to ensure the county remains eligible for future grant opportunities and state recognition.

Future Meeting Items:

County-Wide Parks & Recreation Summit

Nancy Barrios proposed hosting a "Tuscola County-Wide Parks & Recreation Meeting" to foster collaboration among all municipal parks and recreation departments within the county. The Commission discussed establishing this as an annual event to synchronize efforts and share resources across local jurisdictions.

Bylaws Review

Michael Clinesmith is currently reviewing the proposed "Tuscola County Parks & Recreation Commission Bylaws." He will collaborate with Mark Putnam to refine the document for future Commission and Board consideration.

Renaming of "The Parcels"

The Board of Commissioners has granted permission to proceed with selecting a formal name for the property currently known as "The Parcels." Nominations and selection criteria will be discussed later.

Park Host Interviews

Interviews for the two Park Host applicants are scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 10:00 AM and 11:00 AM.

- Contingency: An alternate interview date has been set for Thursday, May 7, 2026, at the same times, should rescheduling be necessary.

Adjournment

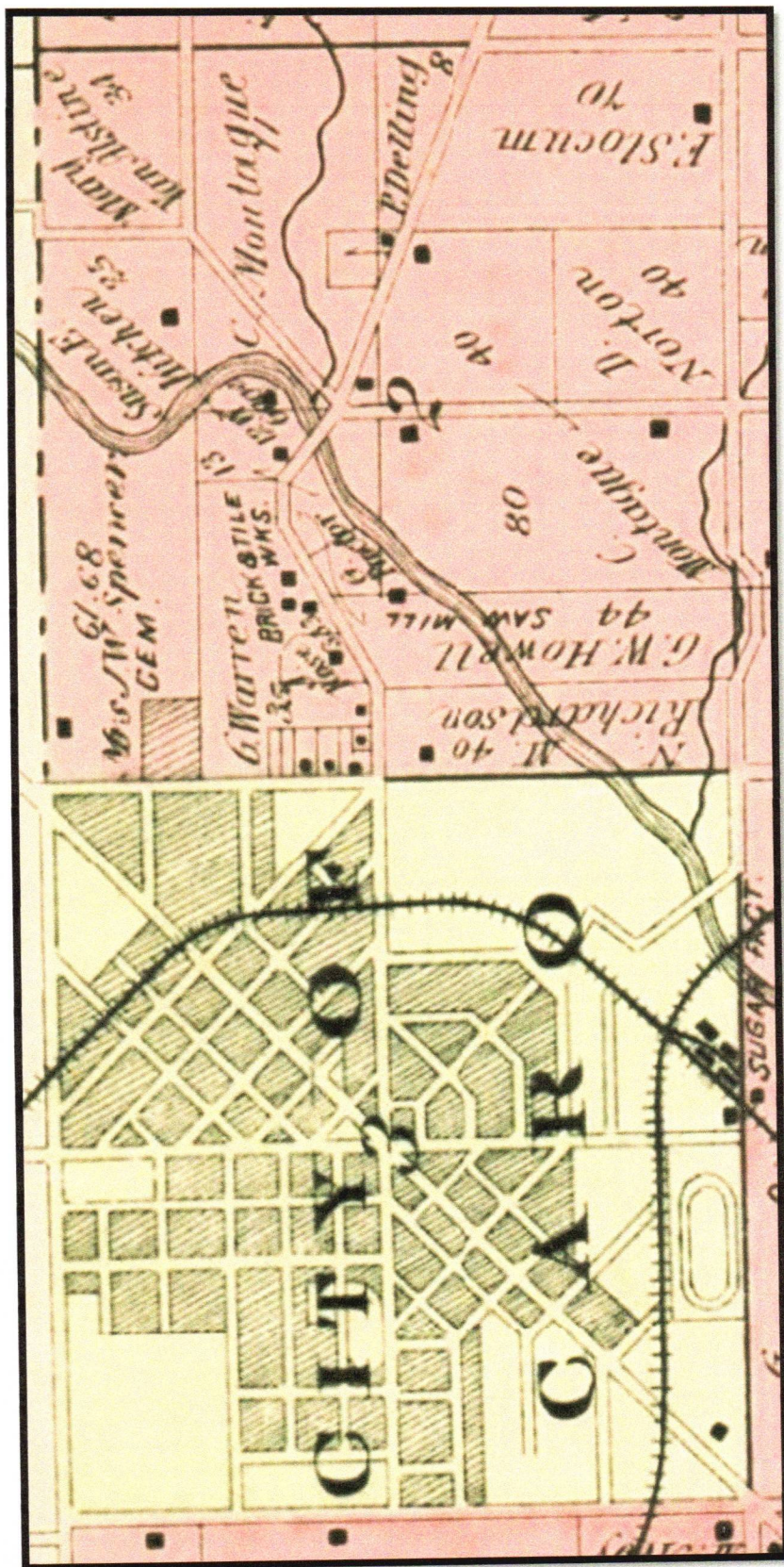
- Action: Joseph Ewald, seconded by Nancy Barrios, motioned to adjourn the meeting.
- Result: The motion passed unanimously.

The Tuscola County Parks & Recreation Commission regular meeting concluded at exactly 10:00 A.M.

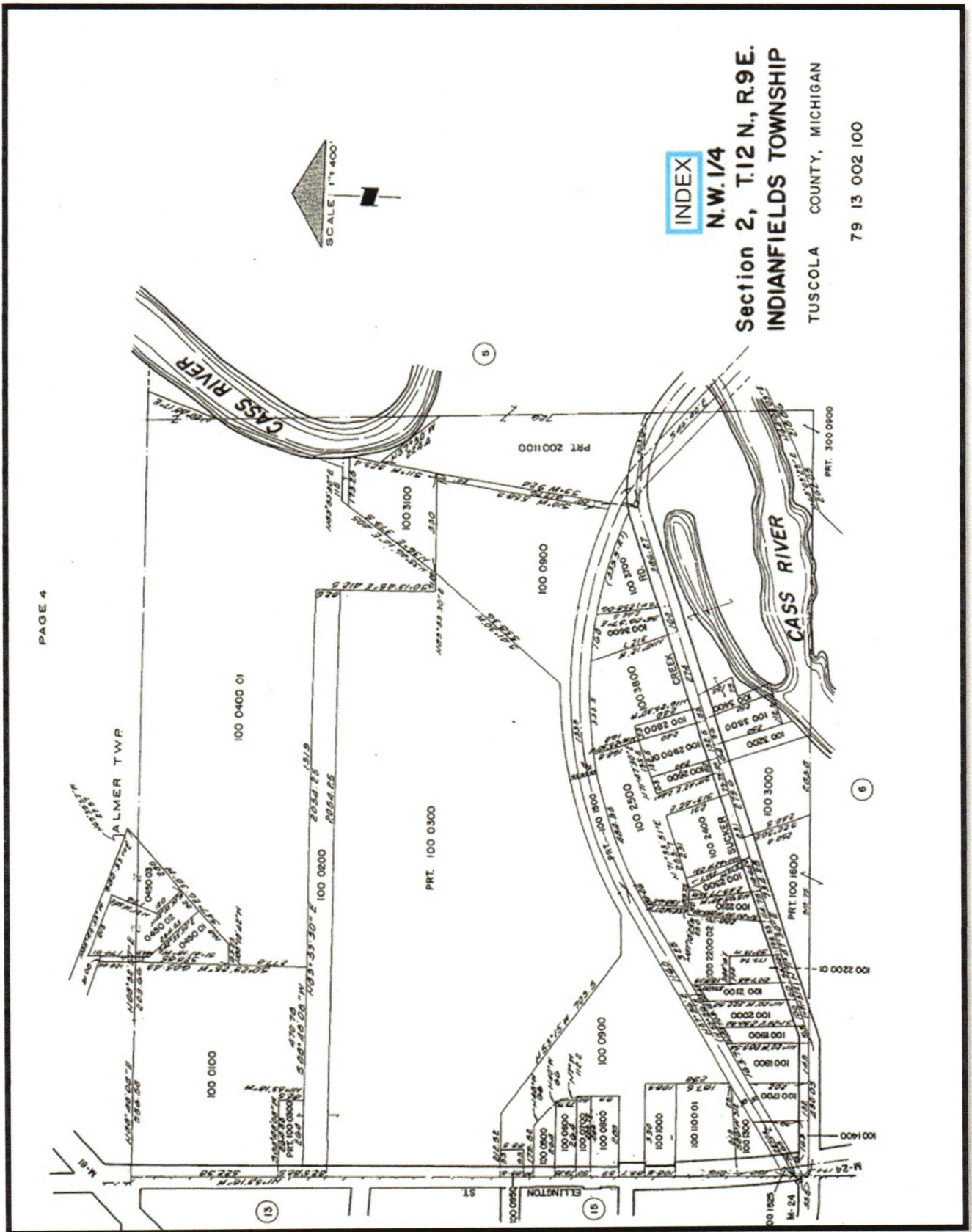
The next meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2026, at 8:00 A.M. at the Tuscola County Purdy Building Conference Room, located at 125 West Lincoln Street, Caro, MI 48723.

Respectfully submitted

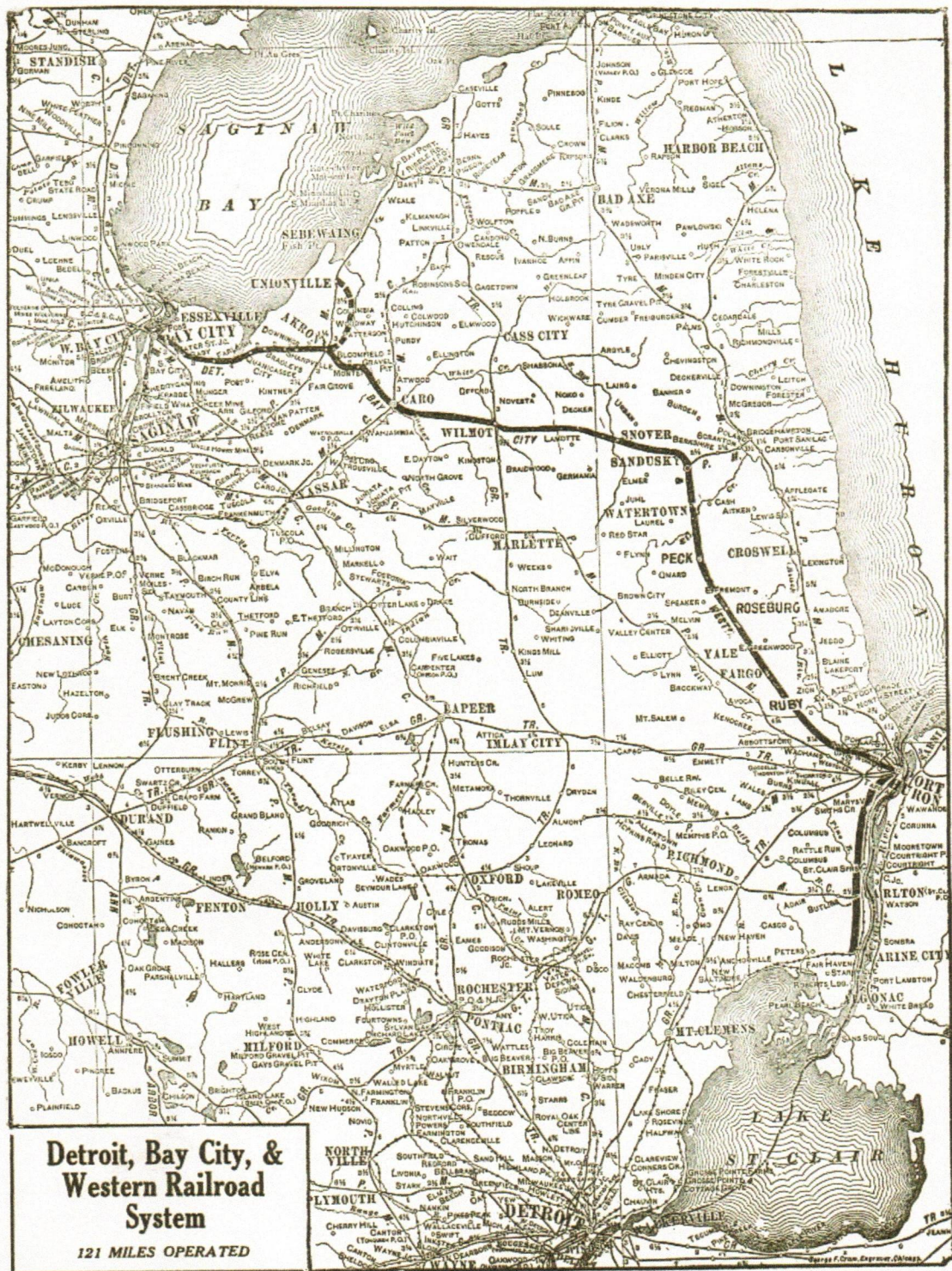
Mark Putnam, Secretary



Sections 2 & 3 Indianfields with George Warren's Brick & Tile Works above center -1902 Plat



The Ryan & Olivia Wasik Property – 100 0900



CANOE/KAYAK LAUNCH TUSCOLA COUNTY, MICHIGAN



PROPOSED:

- 1 GRAVEL PARKING LOT W/ PAVED ADA PARKING SPACES
- 2 8-FT WIDE ASPHALT ACCESSIBLE PATH
- 3 FLOATING CANOE/KAYAK LAUNCHDOCK WITH GANDWAY PROFILE
- 4 INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE, LOW
- 5 INTERPRETIVE SIGN, 3-SIDED
- 6 KIDIC TABLE, ADA ACCESSIBLE
- 7 GRILL, ADA ACCESSIBLE
- 8 TRASH RECEPTACLE
- 9 NATIVE PLANTINGS

EXISTING:

- 1 EXISTING OVERHEAD UTILITY
- 2 EXISTING TREE TO REMAIN
- 3 EXISTING CONCRETE PAD FROM OLD PUMP HOUSE



PROJECT # 1307500025
DATE: APRIL 2008

