

Walker Area Partners hear details of Walker Bay Days, other plans, proposals

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More details on Walker Bay Days activities were revealed at the April 26 Walker Area Partners meeting.

Walker Bay Days, a new festival that celebrates everything Leech Lake and the Walker area has to offer, will be held Aug. 11-13, with the base of operations at city park.

Details have been finalized for two Walker Bay Days Poker Runs One "run" will be overland in the Walker area and the other will be by sea on Leech Lake.

Ten sponsors will participate in each run. Each location will hand out a ticket unique to that location. Participants will make a five-card poker hand from tickets collected in each run. The person with the best hand will claim a top prize of \$100 in Leech Lake Chamber Dollars. More details will be announced closer to date.

A Dogfish Fishing Tournament permit application has been submitted to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Mitch Loomis reported. The tourney will run from noon Aug. 11 until 6 p.m. Aug. 12. Only dogfish (also known as bowfin), a feisty, primitive species that is becoming popular with sport anglers, will be accepted. (For more details, visit www.bowfinanglers.com.)

Tourney anglers must register and purchase a Walker Bay Days wristband. There will be individual age categories and team competitions. Prizes will be given for the single largest fish and largest combined total weight. If a new state record is caught, an additional prize will be awarded.

A banner promoting Walker Bay Days will soon go up at the former Gas and Splash site, Jeff Holly reported. Steve Bilben is looking into finding an open air trolley to transport visitors around town. Walker Bay Days Olympics and youth games also are being planned by members of the Youth Rotary.

Walker Beautification

Turning to WAP's long- and short-range goals, Char Moore presented a proposal for a Walker Beautification Project on behalf of Barb Sherman and Jennifer Schneider of Northern Lakes Floral and Garden, who could not attend.

Thirty hanging planter-baskets and brackets would be installed on light standards in the downtown area. The baskets would be filled with flowering plants and greenery that would add beauty to the area from late spring through fall.

First year costs to purchase brackets and baskets, plus plants and weekly maintenance (watering) are \$4,775.15. Costs for subsequent years would be less, mainly for maintenance and new annual plants. The goal is to have baskets in place for this summer.

Chair John Fjelstul stressed that WAP is not being asked to contribute, but to encourage other nonprofits, businesses, families and individuals to support the project.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) has given its approval, and the city of Walker said it would follow suit.

For more information on the beautification project, contact Schneider at 547-3990.

Forest Service plans new facility

Mitch Bouchonville of the Chippewa National Forest's (CNF) Walker Ranger District, announced that, in the next few years, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) will construct a new facility, large enough to share with other partners.

After 12 years, the USFS has finalized a property exchange for the long-closed National Guard Armory site next to its current offices, he said. Funding might be available as soon as 2008, but that is not certain yet.

However, "when it comes to a big building, it makes sense to involve the community," he stated. This summer, possibly June, the USFS will hold a three-day "charrette" to discuss plans with the community.

A "charrette" is a multi-day planning technique for consulting with all stakeholders. The intensive design process involves the collaboration of all community members and groups at the beginning of a project to develop a comprehensive plan or design.

In addition to housing "The Chip's" administrative headquarters, Bouchonville suggested the city might want to partner for its Visitor's Center, something that also has been a goal for WAP. Other partnerships might be with the DNR or Cass County.

In other matters, County Commissioner Jim Dowson reported that the Minnesota Department of Health issued a 60-page favorable report on Cass County's proposal to build a critical access hospital, possibly at the soon-to-close Ah-Gwah-Ching state nursing home near Walker.

This week, Dist 4B Rep Larry Howes, R-Walker, will introduce a bill on the House floor to approve a hospital bed license for the proposed facility.

Dowson noted that others also are interested in re-use of AGCC, including a higher education institution that has contacted

the county.

Mitch and Mara Loomis reported on official ground-breaking April 25 for the Walker Area Community Center. Bids have gone out and will be opened May 11 at the Whistle Stop.

Walker Area Partners' next meeting is May 24, noon, at Hope Lutheran Church.