**Detroit City Council – Committee of the Whole**
**Tuesday, September 25, 2012**
**Rodney Stokes' Comments**

Mr. President and members of Detroit City Council, thank you for the invitation to be here today. I'm excited about the opportunity to forge a partnership between the City of Detroit and the State of Michigan to restore and maintain one of the City's most recognizable gems – Belle Isle Park.

My name is Rodney Stokes, I work as an Advisor to Governor Snyder on City Placemaking. In other words, I work to help Michigan cities improve their public spaces. I have worked over 30 plus years with the MDNR and have assisted communities all over Michigan to improve their parks & recreation areas and redevelop their riverfronts.

I have been involved with Detroit's riverfront parks system: Chene Park, Mt. Elliott, Erma Henderson Marina, Gabriel Richard, Dequindre Cut Trail and yes - Belle Isle. I also worked for the City of Detroit Recreation Department, serving as Interim Director from 2002-2003.

Having served as Director of both the DNR and Detroit's Recreation Department, and with over 40 years of experience in the Parks and Recreation profession, I feel qualified to say that I recognize what this partnership can mean for the city and for the state. I also recognize and clearly appreciate the council's concerns for moving cautiously with its responsibility for and role in city property.

Before we discuss the proposed lease before you, I would like to introduce the individuals here with me today who will help with the overview and answer any questions you may have.

Keith Creagh, Director, DNR

Kirk Steudle, Director, MDOT

Also, in the audience is Bill Rustem, Director of Strategy, for Gov. Snyder, Harvey Hollins, Director of Urban Initiatives for Gov. Snyder and Ron Olson & Bruce Ross, from our Parks & Recreation Division of the DNR. On a personal note, Bruce is a native Detroiter, who grew up going to Belle Isle, which was also the site of his first job. He understands first-hand what a special place it was, what it is now, and what it can be.

President Pugh and council members, I think it is important to say that the Governor sees restoring Belle Isle as an important way the City and State can partner and work together to enhance quality of life and "placemaking" as well as help spur further economic development and revitalization in Detroit. Those from my generation have fond memories of family gatherings, picnics and weekends in the Park. We want to work and partner together with you to assure that our kids, and theirs, have the chance to build the same memories.

The Governor hopes that the proposed partnership to preserve, protect and enhance Belle Isle will ultimately help free up critical City resources (both financial and staff related) for other city needs and services.

Finally, the Governor has expressed that a "restored Belle Isle is important for all of us, Detroiters and Michiganders."

At this time, I would like to highlight the Provisions within the proposed lease:

**LEASE OVERVIEW:**

- First and foremost, I think it is very important to point out that this is a proposed lease. It goes without question that Belle Isle needs your support for restoration. The only way for the state to assist the city with Belle Isle without owning the park is through a lease like the proposal currently before you. And that's also key under this proposed arrangement; the city maintains ownership of Belle Isle.

- The lease simply provides the mechanism whereby the DNR and MDOT can undertake restoration of the land and facilities on Belle Isle.

- The DNR will manage the land and waterways in the Park and;
  MDOT will manage the roads and bridges.

- At the City's request; the City will retain authority over the greenhouses.

- Given that the proposal before you is a lease, the State as lessee will compensate the City (or lessor), through the management, operation maintenance, and improvements.

**OPERATIONS AS A STATE PARK:**

As a state park, Belle Isle becomes eligible for key available state funds and resources that it otherwise wouldn't be able to tap. Those include State Park Endowment, State Park Improvement, and Recreation Passport Funds.

That's why this designation is critical and would allow the City of Detroit and Belle Isle the opportunity to benefit from these funds. There is no other funding mechanism available. In fact, state law and our Constitution stipulate that these funds can only be spent on State Parks and/or State

Recreation areas. No state general funds or tax dollars are used to operate any of our State Parks.

**ROADS & BRIDGES:**

As stated earlier, MDOT will have management responsibility over roads & bridges through the life of the lease. Director Kirk Steudle, Director of MDOT, is here to provide an overview of that portion of the lease. Kirk….

**DNR RULES & ORDERS:**

There are Administrative Rules that govern the operations of State Parks. However, there is a process that allows the Director of the DNR to modify any and all Administrative Rules in order to address park-specific needs. In other words, the Director has the authority to establish a customized set of park rules that would apply specifically to Belle Isle. We recognize Belle Isle as a unique place and expect that rules that apply to other state parks may need to be modified to best meet the needs of Belle Isle visitors.

**Example**: Picnic Shelter Rental – We may need to establish an online or a "1-800" service to handle shelter reservations because of the number of requests the City currently receives. We will know more as we work through the transition period. Another example would be to examine the hours of operation for what best fits the needs of Belle Isle users.

**RECREATION PASSPORTS:**

Entrance to Michigan State Parks and Recreation Areas is via the Recreation Passport system. This is a requirement for motor vehicles. Pedestrians, individuals on bikes, as well as individuals entering on public transportation

(buses) can enter absolutely free. The Recreation Passport is a one-time annual purchase, and it will allow you to not only enter Belle Isle, but also the other 101 State Parks and Recreation Areas, for the entire year. Motor vehicle operators can obtain their Recreation Passport when they register their vehicle at Secretary of State Offices or at a state park or recreation area.

If the lease is approved, the Recreation Passport fee requirement will be waived for Belle Isle until March 31, 2013. After that time, a passport will be required. Again, those walking, those biking, those taking public transportation and those arriving by boat will not require a passport. All funds from passport sales are placed in the Park Improvement Fund which is used to support all of Michigan's State Parks.

**PARK REVENUE:**

During the Term of the Lease, any other revenue derived from Belle Isle (such as contracts or fees for events) will go into a sub-account established specifically for Belle Isle. This revenue will go back into the management & operation of Belle Isle and will NOT go to support any other park.

**ACCOUNTING AUDIT:**

The DNR will provide the City with an annual accounting of Belle Isle revenue. Also, the City has the right to review and audit our records related to Belle Isle Park Revenue.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT, FIRE PROTECTION & EMS SERVICES:**

The lease calls for the City and the State to jointly develop a security plan during the Transition Period. We are committed to working cooperatively to enhance the security of Belle Isle and ensuring accessibility so that families can safely enjoy all the park has to offer.

**REPORTS:**

The State will provide an Annual Report on Belle Isle to the Mayor of the City of Detroit & Detroit City Council.

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE & NON PROFIT ENTITIES:**

There will be an 11 member Advisory Committee to advise the Parties on implementation of improvements and Master Planning for the Park. The Advisory Committee will consist of 5 members appointed by the Governor; 3 members appointed by the Mayor; 2 members appointed by City Council; and 1 member, who will chair the Committee to be jointly appointed by the Governor and the Mayor.

The lease also calls for both the State and the City to work cooperatively with the Belle Isle Conservancy.

This input – of both the advisory committee and Conservancy – will be critical to the process. In fact, they will be instrumental in helping craft the "master plan" for Belle Isle. Again, I can't underscore enough how this is designed to be a partnership where we're all working together to take care of the special place that is Belle Isle.

**TRANSITION PERIOD:**

There is a 90 day transition period called for in the lease where the many details can be worked through to ensure an orderly management of Belle Isle and smooth transfer of operations. The City and State are full partners in that transition. Items to be discussed are many; including existing grants, permits, contracts, etc…

**TERMS, OPTIONS TO TERMINATE, QUIET ENJOYMENT AND SURRENDER OF POSSESSION:**

The Term of the lease is for 30 years with the option (at the City's discretion), of two more - 30 - year extensions.

If the City decides not to sign the second or third extensions, then the lease calls for a 1 year notice not to extend.

**STATE TERMINATION PROVISIONS:**

State: If the state wishes to terminate the lease, the state has to give an 18 month notice and identify the reason(s) or obstacles to continuation of the lease. The City has the right to call up to 3 negotiating sessions where the parties shall work to resolve the obstacles identified by the State.

**CITY TERMINATION:**

The City can terminate the lease with the State for cause. The City must notify the State of how they breached the lease and provide a 30-day period for the State to cure the problem.

Next I will turn it over to Director Creagh to give you a general overview of how the State/DNR works to manage state parks overall as well as preliminary plans for Belle Isle. Keith …

- Keith will speak & show PowerPoint.

**IN CLOSING:**

We believe this lease is good for both Detroiters and Michiganders. Belle Isle is truly one of the city's and state's most special places. The proposed lease affirms that the city retains ownership of one of its most important assets and destinations. Park goers will benefit from much needed renovations and safety measures and be able to count on long-term investments and improvements. Tight resources dedicated to the park can be used for other city priorities and programs.

Restoring Belle Isle is also part of the city, region and state's vision to connect the East and West Riverfronts and continue the work of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and the numerous public-private partnerships underway. This work will help generate economic development and neighborhood revitalization that is core to Detroit's and Michigan's comeback.

This proposed lease is truly a unique opportunity to make an important difference and help restore Belle Isle, **together**. Thank you for your time and consideration. We now look forward to helping address your questions and concerns and seeing how we can make this opportunity a reality.

- Q & A from Council.