

**PUBLIC TRANSIT COMMITTEE REPORT**

**to the**

**ZEELAND CITY COUNCIL**

**December 20, 2004**

### Committee Establishment

During the establishment of the 2004-2005 Goal Setting Session of the Zeeland City Council, one of the goals established by City Council was a study of public transportation needs within the City of Zeeland. One of the ways City Council thought this could be studied was to appoint a "Blue Ribbon" Committee of representatives of various sectors of the community. During the summer months of 2004, Mayor Hoogland worked to identify citizens willing to serve on the Public Transit Committee. With the consent of City Council, the committee was appointed at the July 19, 2004 City Council meeting. The committee consisted of the following representatives with their affiliation.

- Al Dannenberg, Chairman - Zeeland City Council
- Randy Content - Churches
- Jeff Zylstra - Royal Park
- Jan Jonker - Parkview Home
- Marcia Wirth - Zeeland Public Schools
- Steve Bouman - Zeeland Christian School
- Mike Vande Bunte - Retail
- George Smart - Zeeland Hospital
- Kelly Adler - Haven Park
- Ruth Stegeman - At-large

### Committee Goal

The committee first met on August 26, 2004 and continued to meet during the months of September and October. At the first meeting of the committee it was clearly established that the goal of the committee was to:

**"Determine the need for public transit within the City of Zeeland and if a need is determined, how does the City best fill that need?"**

### Service Needs

The committee decided their first task was to address part one of the goal: determine the need for public transit within the City of Zeeland. At the time the committee was meeting, statistics showed that the City of Zeeland Max Ridership was at an all time high in 2004 for the months of January, February, April and August. Additionally, for the months of March and July, 2004, ridership was the second highest since 2000. Specifically, in calendar year

2004 ridership has ranged from 590 passengers in May to 700 passengers in January. (Source: Linda Lefebre of Max Bus)

Ruth Stegeman shared that a recently completed United Way Needs Assessment found that throughout Ottawa County, the need for public transportation was the number one need for those areas not served by public transportation. The area of the County Zeeland resides did not reflect these findings however based on the fact that we do indeed offer public transportation in Zeeland. Several of the other members of the committee also spoke of ridership on public transportation from users of their respective facilities.

Based on the ridership numbers of Max Bus for calendar year 2004; the need to serve that portion of the population that does not have access to private transportation whether it be as a result of financial difficulties, physical disabilities, age, etc; and provide an alternative means of transportation for the general public, the committee determined that there is a need for public transportation within the City of Zeeland.

### Public Transportation Service Alternatives

With a need for public transportation in Zeeland determined, the committee turned its focus on the best method of providing public transportation in Zeeland. One of the first things the committee tried to accomplish was a listing of the various service providers that might be willing to provide public transportation in Zeeland. The committee offered the following alternatives:

- Agency (usually social service) = Typically this is an agency that receives some sort of funding support to provide rides to a specific client. Examples in Ottawa County include welfare to work funding and Community Mental Health for mentally disabled individuals.
- Zeeland Public Schools = This is a form of public transportation albeit for school related purposes. Nevertheless, the committee felt that this was an option that should be explored.
- Ride Broker = Under this arrangement the City retains a broker who goes out and secures needed transportation. Life Service System (LSS) has done this brokering of rides for several years. However, in the case of LSS, they only cater to specific client groups and thus you must meet their eligibility requirements.

- Private Company = In this instance the City contracts with a private company to provide public transportation in Zeeland. This is essentially the arrangement that the City of Holland has for the Max Bus System. Under this scenario, it was thought that maybe one of the local taxi companies would be willing to provide services in Zeeland under this type of public-private contractual agreement.
- Church Provided = With many local churches having busses available for their members, it was thought that quite possibly one or more of them might be interested in providing public transportation in Zeeland.

With the list above determined, the committee sought to gain more information on each of the options and to invite representatives to speak at a future committee meeting if they so desired. Additionally, the local media printed stories in their respective papers explaining that Zeeland was at least exploring alternative means of providing public transportation in Zeeland. In the end, other than Max Bus, only one other potential provider (a local taxi service) initiated a meeting with Zeeland to express an interest in providing public transportation in Zeeland.

In addition to checking into the other services, the committee also felt it would be appropriate to contact other communities (similar to Zeeland) to see how they deal with public transit needs. A survey of a number of communities found the following results:

- |                 |   |                                       |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| ▪ South Haven   | - | Vanburen Public Transit (Dial-a-Ride) |
| ▪ Saugutuck     | - | Inner Urban (Dial-a-Ride)             |
| ▪ Grand Haven   | - | Harbor Transit (Dial-a-Ride)          |
| ▪ Norton Shores | - | None                                  |
| ▪ Coopersville  | - | None                                  |
| ▪ Wayland       | - | None                                  |
| ▪ Hastings      | - | Barry County Transit                  |
| ▪ Greenville    | - | City owned (Dial-a-Ride)              |
| ▪ Belding       | - | City owned (Dial-a-Ride)              |
| ▪ Hudsonville   | - | None                                  |
| ▪ Ionia         | - | City owned (Dial-a-Ride)              |
| ▪ Ludington     | - | Ludington Mass Transit (Dial-a-Ride)  |
| ▪ Lowell        | - | North Kent Transit                    |
| ▪ Marshall      | - | City owned (Dial-a-Ride)              |

### Zeeland Public Schools

The committee made contact with Mr. Dave Meeusen of Zeeland Public Schools to discuss the school's ability to provide public transportation services for the City of Zeeland. Zeeland Public Schools have 47 busses with 1% having lifts. The peak hours of need for Zeeland Public Schools are from 6:30 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. and from 2:15 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Cost for transportation is approximately \$21 per hour plus \$.80 cents per mile. Based on the fact that Max bus is currently available for 73 hours per week, an equivalent charge from Zeeland Public Schools for one bus would be \$79,716 not including the per mile charge.

Given that the peak hours for Zeeland Public Schools needs coincide with the peak hours of need for public transportation in Zeeland and the fact that estimated cost would exceed the cost for Max Bus service, the committee did not recommend further pursuit of this option.

### Taxi Cab Service

One private taxi cab company that services the Zeeland area did express an interest in providing public transportation in Zeeland. Information found during a meeting with this company was that they do not have any vehicles that offer wheelchair service and they currently use cars and mini-vans for service. They estimated the cost to bring someone from Zeeland to Holland Hospital would be \$10 one-way. (Current charge for Max is \$2 albeit this is a subsidized amount from the City.)

The biggest question surrounding this option was the ability of a taxi cab company to meet the demand for public transportation during peak hours and the fact that the particular company the committee met with did not have any vehicles that could offer wheelchair service. Furthermore, unless there was some type of "inter-connect" agreement with the City of Holland and Holland Township, there was some concern that with a taxi cab service we could bring Zeeland residents out of the City, but we could not bring non-residents into the City.

### Church Provided

Chairman Dannenberg reported that he spoke with a representative from a local church about utilizing church vans/busses. Mr. Dannenberg reported that

it appeared that the biggest obstacle was that the vans/busses are not wheelchair equipped. It was noted that it is very expensive to equip vehicles for wheelchair accessibility.

The committee also questioned the ability of churches to meet the demand for service during peak hours especially. Unless several churches joined together, only one bus would be available. Furthermore, like the taxi cab issue, unless some type of "inter-connect" agreement was in place, again there would be a problem with getting non-residents into the City of Zeeland.

#### Ride Broker or Agency Provided

Although initial contacts were made for this type of service, it became quickly apparent that this type of option would be difficult to meet the needs of public transportation in Zeeland. Aside from the fact that inter connections would also be a problem with this service, the more apparent problem seemed to stem from the fact that these services typically cater to individuals that meet certain criteria. With a public transit system, it was acknowledged that we would need to have public transportation available for all in Zeeland.

#### Recommendation

As a result of exploring other potential public transportation services in Zeeland, it was the unanimous consensus of the committee that Max Bus continues to be the best alternative for meeting Zeeland's public transportation demands at the current time. The committee offered this recommendation based on the following criteria:

- (1) Ability to meet demand: Current needs in Zeeland show that the greatest demand for public transportation is early in the morning and later in the afternoon. Concerns arose with other potential providers that might have limited vehicles to service ridership needs and/or other providers having peak service demands from their original customer base at the same time as ours. Additionally, there was also some concern that other potential providers may not be able to meet some of the physical needs (wheelchairs for example) of potential riders in Zeeland.
- (2) Cost of service to patrons. One of the goals of public transportation is to provide an alternative transportation option to a private vehicle at a "reasonable" cost. Of the two options that we were able to obtain dollar estimates for service (taxi cab and Zeeland Public

- Schools), the options appeared to be a higher cost alternative for both the patron and the City.
- (3) Connectivity with Holland. An additional benefit of the Max Bus system over the other alternatives identified by the committee was the ability of the Max Bus system to take city residents to areas outside of the City, but more importantly, non-residents into the City of Zeeland. With the other alternatives explored, unless there was some type of "inter-connectivity" agreement established with Max, we would have to charge non-residents a higher fee to obtain rides into the City or more likely, deny them service.
  - (4) Possibility of fixed route addition. Finally, during the time the committee was meeting, the Max Advisory Committee made it known that they were seriously considering the addition of a fixed route within the City of Zeeland. Although the committee was unable to obtain cost estimates associated with the addition of a fixed route, the committee felt this would be an added service to the needs of the City's public transportation offerings.

Associated with item number (4) above, the Public Transit Committee would also like to recommend that the City consider establishing/continuing a public transit committee that could be used to assist our Max Advisory Committee. This committee would help our representatives to the Max Advisory Committee by forwarding suggestions on marketing, fixed routes, contract amendments, etc. to the representatives who can then in turn forward the suggestions to the Max Advisory Committee. This suggestion was offered primarily based on the fact that although the committee felt Max Bus continues to provide the best public transit alternative to Zeeland at this time, committee members readily admitted that it is not a perfect system. The establishment of a committee was seen as a way to provide citizens interested in public transit in Zeeland a method of sharing ways that they thought Max Transit could be improved in Zeeland.

### Conclusion

The committee members would like to thank Zeeland City Council for providing us with the opportunity to explore public transit within the City of Zeeland. As a whole, the committee feels they have gained a better understanding of the need for public transit in Zeeland, alternatives to providing the service and a belief that Max Transit is the best alternative at the current time. The

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committee would however encourage City Council to continue to monitor the use of Max Transit and seek the opinions of interested citizens on how to continually improve the system.

Respectfully submitted,

*City of Zeeland Public Transit Committee*