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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Civic Center Tree-removal Project to Change Park's Landscape, Make Patrons Safer**

**Traverse City** – Consumers Energy is in the process of updating and replacing power lines along two sides of Civic Center Park, which will greatly change the landscape of that property -- for the better, according to Parks and Recreation Director Kristine Erickson.

Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation, which stewards Civic Center Park, has three easement agreements with Consumers Energy that permit tree trimming and removal. To accommodate current power line projects along Garfield Avenue and Front Street, weather-permitting, Consumers Energy will trim or remove trees from the north and west sides of the park between November 13 and 30. Portions of the running/walking path will be closed during the tree removal process.

The result of more than 12 months of meetings and planning with Consumers Energy, Erickson says this project "is a win-win-win resulting from a successful partnership that benefits the county, the community, and Consumers Energy." The Parks director explained that the trees to be removed – approximately ten that are dead or dying and two dozen that, due to location and age, pose customer reliability issues or a potential danger to running/walking path users – are within the defined easement corridors at the Civic Center.

To ensure continued energy reliability to the Traverse City area, Consumers has planned upgrades and rebuilding of the high-voltage electric distribution line running from Old Mission Peninsula south to Traverse City. The work is part of Consumers' cross-town system that serves Munson Hospital and other customers. Work completed in 2016 included tree-removal and new poles and wires along portions of Garfield Avenue and Cass Road.

Erickson says the Civic Center project presents an opportunity to develop a long-term forestry plan for the park at little cost to the county, to create a safer park environment for patrons, and for Consumers Energy to make necessary improvements to infrastructure to improve our growing region's electric reliability. "The county is not in a position to pay for tree removal, wood removal, and stump-grinding," said Erickson. "This is a chance for us to beautify the north and west sides of the park with native plants and trees, to clean up some very overgrown areas, and put careful thought and planning into park reforestation."

Each year through its Community Tree Planting Grant Program, Consumers Energy helps communities plant over 1,000 trees of "the right species" away from power lines and water/sewer service stubs. This project, said Erickson, will be eligible for funding from the program, which offers \$100 per tree, up to \$2,500. There also are \$7,500 in funds paid by Consumers for one of the easement agreements set aside for planting trees and landscaping next spring. There might be even more assistance with park landscaping, according to Erickson, from the developer of the Rite-Aid-Starbucks project (corner of Garfield and Front) who has approached Parks and Recreation about a potential temporary grading easement in return for some landscape design costs. "If that were to happen," said Erickson, "the northwest corner of the Civic Center might substantially improve in appearance, with fresh landscaping and better access to the park."

"In the meantime," said the Parks director, "we appreciate the positive, professional working relationship we have with Consumers Energy and look forward to completing this project to the benefit of both organizations." Consumers also is meeting with leaders from Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) and Northwestern Michigan College (NMC) to discuss needed easements and construction plans that could result in tree removal.

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