

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

**BLPOA Community Center
6996 South SR 10
Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana**

March 24, 2022

MEMBERS

**Russell Blais
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Sharon Smead
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen**

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison
Carol Blastic**

Call to Order by Secretary and Introductions

Steve Lucas, Secretary, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) on March 24, 2022 in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana at 5:29 pm, CDT (6:29 pm, EDT). He then asked members and guests to introduce themselves. Rhonda Milner, Vice President, joined the meeting in session and assumed the chair.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of February 22, 2022

Russ Blais moved to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2022 membership meeting, including modifications identified in the Secretary’s March 20 email regarding plans for a weed wrangle. Sharon Smead seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Election of Liaison to Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

During the February 22 meeting, President Carolla Heilstedt deferred election of the PTC Liaison to the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum to allow for discussions between Larry Wickert and Linda Byer. This officer position is not to be confused with HVRM Liaison to the PTC, a position held by Bob Albert. Larry and Linda have spoken with each other and agreed to Linda serving this year as the PTC’s Liaison to the HVRM.

Debbie Mix nominated Linda Byer to serve as PTC Liaison to the HVRM. Rich Vallicelli seconded the motion. Linda was elected to the position unanimously.

Consideration of Fiscal Reconciliation of NLT-01-07

Kathy Lucas, as PTC Treasurer, underlined the importance of bringing to completion promptly, including documentation, outstanding items pertaining to the PTC's financial obligations to the State of Indiana for NextLevel Trails Grant 01-07 for the extension of the Erie Trail at and southeast of US Highway 35. She provided for discussion an outline of these items and sought comments from the members present.

Items requiring membership action are summarized in Part A through Part E as set forth below:

A. Completion of Bike Rack Acquisition and Placement

Four bike racks were built by students in the SCILL program using a funding grant through the KVREMC RoundUp program. Three of the four were slated for the two-mile extension as part of our grant application. The fourth was placed at Norwayne Field in North Judson. The funding grant did not include delivery, powder coating, and site placement on an ADA compliant concrete pad. Prior to the DNR's October 22 inspection, two of the pads were placed as anticipated in construction plans near County Road 700E and 600E.

The final bike rack was recently powder coated. Kathy reported that "earlier today, I was informed by Carolla that she now has the bike rack and that Carolla is working to get an invoice from Technicoat." Unlike the two bike racks that were already placed on the trail extension, there is no specific reference in the plans to where the third should be placed. Kathy said that she has written to the DNR Grant coordinator for the extension to ask consideration for placement at the new trailhead being developed by Starke County, with support from Indiana OCRA funding, at the intersection of County Road 450 East and County Road 210 South. If the request is denied by DNR, the bike rack would be placed along the extension. In either event, the PTC will need to provide materials and labor for site placement.

B. Acquisition of Final Invoices from Starke County

Larry Wickert completed with the Starke County Highway Department projects for brush removal mostly west of County Road 600 East and for the placement of signage required by DNR approaching the trail from along 600 East and 700 East. He has requested but not yet received an invoice for these projects. Kathy needs a copy of the invoice so she can make payment.

C. Completion of Signage Placement Along the Erie Trail Extension

Payment has been made for all signs. PTC volunteers Russ, Larry, Steve, Rich Vlaming and Paul Byer have placed signs along the Erie Trail over the past ten days. These were five black-and-gold Erie Trail signs, one NLT-01-07 funding acknowledgement sign, and two transAmerican signs.

Still to be placed near US Highway 35 are one black-and-gold Erie Trail sign, one NLT-01-07 funding acknowledgement sign, and two transAmerica signs. The latter two require digging for which an Indiana811 ticket was submitted to gain utility clearance and for which digging must be completed by April 10 when the clearance expires. A third trans-America sign needs to be placed near County Road 600 East.



St. Patrick's Day, 2022: Left Paul Byer, Rich Vlaming and Larry Wickert place first directional transAmerican sign with logos for the Great American Rail-Trail, American Discovery Trail, and USBR 35. Center, beneath prior existing HVRM rail bank sign, is the first Next-Level Trails funding acknowledgement sign. Right is one of four signs to delineate trail section from west of Starke County Road 600 East to east of the Bartee Ditch Bridge where equestrian and bicycle/pedestrian travelers share the asphalt trail. Images by Kathleen Lucas

D. Augmentation of Barriers at Bartee Ditch Bridge

At DNR direction, PTC volunteers performed several tasks to enhance user safety at or near Bartee Ditch Bridge. Illustrative are an angled safety wing and strategic placement of signage on and near the bridge to form a visual barrier and help warn bicyclists of a surface change. See, e.g., Prairie Trails Club Inc. Meeting Minutes., Nov. 16, 2021, p. 12. [www.prairietrailsclub.org/ files/ugd/953cf9_bfcd52b81a8a4586b978a8efd0fe140b.pdf](http://www.prairietrailsclub.org/files/ugd/953cf9_bfcd52b81a8a4586b978a8efd0fe140b.pdf) An additional augmentation sought by the DNR is the planting of native dogwoods or viburnum whips to develop as a hedge-type barrier to augment bridge fencing. Russell reported Diane Blais and Linda Byer are actively seeking a source for these plantings.

E. Completion and Compilation of Hourly Volunteer Labor Statements

A major element of the soft match which the PTC committed as soft match was in the form of labor by membership. Reasonably detailed records of the match have been maintained for work performed through early March. These records need to include the work yet to be performed and then compiled for submission to the DNR consistent with agency guidelines.

Relocation of US Bike Route 35 Following Two-Mile Trail Extension

Although the DNR is the State agency most vitally concerned with NLT-01-07, INDOT is also significant to the process. INDOT issued a written permit to authorize the crossing over US Highway 35. This major advancement to the Erie Trail and to the trail system was not an element of the PTC's grant application to the DNR.

Also, INDOT is the State agency that is most concerned with US Bike Route 35. Brandon Burgoa is the Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator of INDOT's Technical Planning & Programming Branch. He attended the October 22, 2021 Grand Opening ceremonies on behalf of INDOT. Since the PTC received the NLT-01-07 grant, he has worked with us to formulate a possible relocation of USBR 35 to capitalize on the more direct and motor-vehicle free route that the two-mile extension affords compared to its current share-the-road use of County Road 800 South and County Road 700 East.

Kathy has scheduled a Zoom conference with Brandon, and potentially, a representative of Adventure Cycling Association, for March 29 to consider the relocation, as well as some technical corrections to the published route between North Judson and County Road 450 East. Since 2005, Adventure Cycling has shepherded the growth of US Bicycle Routes nationally.

Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report

Kathy Lucas provided written copies of the Treasurer’s Report as follows:



**Treasurer’s Report
March 24, 2022
Bass Lake Property Owners Community Center
Knox, Indiana**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 2/22/22	\$58,808.91
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INCOME

03/03/22	Amazon Smile Donation	<u>\$8.55</u>
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Total Income	8.55
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EXPENSES

03/20/22	Check #1106 to OTES <i>(Signs identifying equestrian & bicyclist shared use area)</i>	\$430.00
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03/19/22	Check #1107 to K. Lucas Treasurer <i>(Reimbursement for 990N Filing for PTC 501(c) status)</i>	40.00
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Total Expenses	\$470.00
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ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 03/24/2022	\$58,347.46
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Deb and Rich both said they recently switched their personal accounts to contribute through Amazon Smile in favor of the PTC. Kathy thanked them and reflected that amounts received through Amazon Smile are modest but with time add up nicely.

Deb asked why the Treasurer's Report did not identify Restricted and Unrestricted funds. Kathy responded that Fiscal Reconciliation of NLT-01-07 will be challenging. There is a great deal of subjectivity, particularly in the calculation of soft match, for what will or will not qualify. Designations of "Restricted" or "Unrestricted" have always been guidance and not an accounting concept. Kathy said when Reconciliation is completed she plans to resume submission of a table for Restricted and Unrestricted funds.

Sharon then moved to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. Deb seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Announcement Purdue University Extension has Nominated the PTC for Designation by the Greenways Foundation as 2022 Outstanding Trail Group

Deb reported on behalf of, and with the imprimatur of the Purdue University Extension, she filed with the Greenways Foundation of Indiana documentation to nominate the Prairie Trails Club Inc. as its 2022 "Outstanding Trail Group". Award winners would be announced at the Greenways Foundation's 14th Annual Luncheon & Awards Event set for Tuesday, April 26 at the Ritz Charles Conference Center in Carmel. The event is set to begin at 10:30 am, CDT (11:30 am, EDT).

Kathy reflected that the event is a nice opportunity to observe trail development projects in Indiana. Keynote speakers are Indiana State Representative Carey Hamilton, Co-Chair of the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus, and Thomas McDermott, Jr., Mayor of the City of Hammond. Particularly in Indiana's Year of the Trails, designated by the Indiana General Assembly, the event should be well attended and interesting.

Report of Grant Applications

Kathy reported she filed timely on March 19 a Luminous Fund Grant Request for 2022. The Luminous Fund and benefactors Kathy and Dave Carrier have made wonderful contributions to the PTC and have been invaluable to advancement of the Erie Trail. The Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne Grants will contact us following review of the application.

Kathy also reported our partners for trail advancement north of the Kankakee River on February 25 made a major grant application to Healthcare Foundation of La Porte for the "Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail". That grant would utilize part of the easement held by the PTC with the Northern Indiana Railroad for trail development. The effort between English Lake and LaCrosse is being coordinated by Justin Kiel, President of the LaCrosse Town Council. Kathy assisted Justin in developing the grant application.

Sponsorship Designations on the Erie Trail

Linda Byer was unable to attend the meeting but asked that notes from her participation in the March 12, 2022 HVRM Board of Directors Meeting be passed along. These notes were read into the record as follows:

"The monthly treasurer's report [for the HVRM] included a balance of \$7,000+ from the trail. [Linda] spoke up to let them know that the funds being raised and deposited to HVRM were not related to the Prairie Trails Club at all and...questioned what arrangement HVRM had with Erie Trails Travelers. Many did not realize there were two different entities. President Todd Flanigan suggested that [the PTC] work it out with the [Erie Trail Travelers]. That is when [Linda] pointed out that the [Erie Trail Travelers] only existed by using HVRM 501(c)(3) status.

“Treasurer [of the HVRM], Bob Barcus, then explained that the previous Board had established the arrangement [with the Erie Trail Travelers] without any written agreement or oversight. He has tried several times to meet with them to no avail. [Linda] explained ...concern on what trail sponsors were getting for their money....

“Bob [Barcus] and [Linda] also brought up the fact that, at one time, the Starke County Parks Board had offered to take over the trail by leasing it and discussed the possibility of pursuing that again.... [Bob Barcus] is going to try and get answers to questions regarding the sponsorships. There will be more discussion of this at the [HVRM] April meeting.”

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, said with regard to sponsorships, the HVRM Board has “no idea what’s going on. It’s between [the sponsors] and Donna Osborne.”

Kirt Verhagen said his family foundation contributed funding to the Erie Trail Travelers to support trail services. in particular for mowing from the North Judson trailhead to the former rest park at State Highway 10 and for trash pickup at the rest park. In addition, funding has supported a bicycle sculpture and the placement of a bicycle repair station at the rest park.

Kathy asked Kirt if he believed a portion of the \$7,000 in the HVRM treasury could be used for asphalt repairs to the Erie Trail. Kirt responded, “I don’t know why not.”

Sharon said she had hoped to develop an equestrian trail southeast of the rest park, but the bicycle sculpture makes it impractical to maneuver a horse trailer. She said there are eight miles of designated equestrian trail but nowhere to park horse trailers. Kirt asked about balancing the placement of the art of the bicycle sculpture with the aspirations of equestrians. Sharon said she agreed the sculpture was attractive and that “You can’t please everybody.” Other members echoed positive reactions to the aesthetics of the bicycle sculpture.

Kathy said it was discouraging to trail volunteers to put in countless hours of labor in trying to control vegetation, repair asphalt, and replace bridge decks, and then to have sponsorship signs erected without regard for those efforts. For the two miles on the northwestern end of the trail, she agreed the Verhagen Family and the Fingerhut Family have contributed significantly. Mowing is an important regular component of those two miles. Presumably with placement farther southeast, there was another sponsorship sign being planned last year. An annual mowing is helpful in that mile, and it has been performed by Paul and Linda regularly. The entity considering the new sponsorship was invited to a PTC meeting to outline what activities it anticipated. But the entity neither responded nor appeared for the meeting.

Kirt said the Erie Trail Travelers are a small and very informal group. He acknowledged the ETT is not a registered nonprofit organization. He added that if there are to be waste baskets at the former rest park, they need to be emptied regularly. Bob said the HVRM had managed trash at the rest park before the placement of waste baskets and that it had recently been called upon to empty trash from them.

Rhonda said it was a “good discussion.” Expectations pertaining to sponsorship need to be clarified.

Participation in April 23 Bloomer Run

Brenda Palmer, Starke County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, emailed Kathy inquiring whether a donation would be made by or on behalf of the PTC in support of the April 23 Bloomer Run in North Judson. Following discussions with PTC members during our February meeting, Kathy emailed Brenda to advise her that she and Steve would make a \$100 donation on behalf of the PTC, similarly to what Russ and Diane did last year. Kathy said she hopes to place a table at the site of the Bloomer Run and that other PTC members might volunteer to assist with populating the table.

National Trails Day on June 4

The American Hiking Society designated June 4 “National Trails Day” for 2022. National Trails Day is a day of “service or advocacy for hometown trails”. Rhonda suggested that the PTC recognize National Trails Day by collaborating with HVRM to develop a bicycling event or by participating in a group work day at a specified location on the trail.

North Judson Trail Extension Proposal from Main to Railroad Street and On

Kirt presented a detailed and nicely-crafted PowerPoint proposal to extend the Erie Trail from its trailhead on Main Street, to Railroad Street, and then to the former Pennsylvania Railway. Most of the route would be on property owned by the Northern Indiana Railroad on which the PTC has a 14-foot wide easement. The proposed route would cross HVRM property at three locations: 1st between the former C&O and Erie Railroad tracks on the southeast side of Main Street; 2nd, just south of Arlington Avenue; and 3rd on the west side of Railroad Street.

The proposal anticipates a multi-purpose joint use of the “triangle” which is formed by the active railway (formerly, C&O tracks), Sycamore Street, and Ohio Street. The triangle could serve as a pocket park for the Town of North Judson, a trailhead, and also provide a site for informational kiosks for the town, HVRM and the trail.

In his presentation to the membership, Kirt had the trail going across the triangle. Bob Albert suggested the trail avoid HVRM control boxes located there so Kirt agreed he would modify the route to follow Ohio Street and then return to the former C&O tracks. This route would be predicated on availability of a trail of sufficient width to satisfy DNR minimum requirements. Crossing or closing Ohio Street at its elbow are options.

Kirt said if the concept was acceptable to PTC membership, he would and Larry would help guide a team to carry it forward for review and conceptual approval by the HVRM and the Town of North Judson. When a route is better defined, the PTC would present it to the Northern Indiana Railroad. The membership expressed support for Kirt’s efforts.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was scheduled for Thursday, April 28, 2022 at 5:30 pm, CDT (6:30 pm, EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m., CDT (8:04 p.m., EDT).