

**MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.**

**BLPOA Community Center
6996 South S.R. 10
Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana**

November 21, 2019

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Paul Byer
Linda Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Joan Hardesty
Carolla Heilstedt
Mary Hollett
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Jeff Mencl
Rhonda Milner
Andrew Prokop
Sharon Smead
Peggy Stalbrink
Rich Stalbrink
Rick Vlaming
Larry Wickert

GUEST

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison

Call to Order by President

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at 6:05 pm, CDT (7:05 pm, EDT) on November 21, 2019 in the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, Knox, Indiana. Introductions were made around the table. Andrew Prokop was welcomed as our newest member.

Approval of October 15, 2019 Minutes

Russell Blais moved to approve the draft minutes as final minutes of the October 15, 2019 meeting. Peggy Stalbrink seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

Kathy Lucas circulated copies of the Treasurer's Report for the period that followed the October meeting. The report provided in substantive parts:

I) **First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)**

Balance forward from 10/16/19

\$ 37,708.05

INCOME

10/16/19 Deposit	500.00	
<i>Brochure ads: Fingerhuts, Irish & BL Pubs, Sportyz, JK Deli</i>		
10/24/19 Deposit		
<i>Joan Hardesty Dues & Donation</i>		50.00
11/18/19 Deposit		
<i>Benches: Blais/Vlaming; McKendry</i>		700.00
11/18/19 Deposit		
<i>Brochure ads: MBS, Christos</i>		200.00

Total Income \$1,450.00

EXPENSES

10/15/19 Check #1048 to OTES		
<i>5 You-Are-Here signs & 2 Vin Fiz signs</i>		(385.00)
10/21/19 Check #1049 to J. Mencl		
<i>Reinbursement for gate materials</i>		(53.80)
10/23/19 Check #1050 to Lucas Corral Design		
<i>Update & redesign of signage and web maps</i>		(650.00)
11/12/19 Bank Fee (mobile deposits)		(3.00)

Total Expenses. (\$1,091.80)

Ending FFBT balance as of 11/21/19

\$ 37,066.25

II) **Northern Indiana Community Foundation (NICF)**

NICF balance as of 9/30/19

3,935.17

Total of both accounts:

\$41,001.42

Kathy thanked Russ and Bruce Fingerhut for their special efforts in seeking and delivering donations from donors for our new brochures. She urged members to also pass along our thanks to the donors. She then broke down restricted and unrestricted funding as set forth below:

RESTRICTED GRANTS/DONATIONS

Luminous Fund 2 (2018) Signage for Bass Lake General 4,301.19 (OTES \$110 Vin Fiz)

Luminous Fund 3 (2019)	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Interpretive Signs	7,132.50 (OTES \$275 & Lucas Design \$650 signs/linked maps)
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2019)	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00
PTC Commitment	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00
Marshall CHA & Blais/Vlaming/McKendry	Benches	1,050.00
Lucas lakehouse guests' donation	Future Vision/website	700.00
TOTAL		\$33,183.69

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS	TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
First Farmers Bank & Trust	\$37,066.25	\$30,183.69	\$6,882.56
Northern Indiana Community Foundation	3,935.17	3,000.00	935.17
BREAKDOWN	\$41,001.42	\$33,183.69	\$7,817.73

Rhonda Milner moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report including the update of Restricted and Unrestricted funds. Anita McMillin seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Monthly Report of Erie Trail Southeast Extension Workgroup

During the October meeting, the workgroup reported that a draft document with Indiana DNR for grant and cost share allocation was moving forward, and the workgroup was optimistic a contract with the Troyer Group would come to fruition. Kathy had suggested several changes to the proposed contract with Troyer Group, most of which related to liability issues.

During the current meeting, Carolla reported both of these subjects were addressed. On October 29, the PTC and the Troyer Group, Inc. entered an “Agreement between Owner and Engineer for Professional Services”. The survey and data collection phase will be performed through Bob Aloï of Territorial Engineering, LLC in Walkerton, and subsequent phases through Jonathon Geels of Troyer Group in Mishawaka. On November 8, the DNR emailed the workgroup to congratulate us the delivery of a fully executed contract that will expire on May 1, 2022.

Carolla said Jonathon Geels has been given the go-ahead for Territorial Engineering to begin the survey phase. As referenced during our October PTC meeting, Paul Byer has cleared brush from atop ballast placed for the former Erie Railroad to help facilitate a survey, but the workgroup has not been informed that surveying has begun. Members of the PTC and the general public were cautioned that the two-mile rail segment east of US 35 is now a worksite, and entry should not be made without direct authorization from the Troyer Group.

The DNR informed the workgroup by email on November 18 that \$68,750 was approved for Phase 1 of the PTC grant and contract with the State of Indiana. As PTC Treasurer, Kathy made a written request for this amount the following day. After its deposit in the PTC account with Farmers Bank & Trust, the workgroup will augment the grant with local share for contractual payment to the Troyer Group in a lump sum of \$73,285. The lump sum is based on estimated payment for survey and data collection, preliminary design phase, environmental coordination, final design phase and bidding and negotiation

phase. The workgroup anticipates the \$73,285 payment will likely be made to the Troyer Group prior to the PTC's January meeting.

Erie Trail Connections Update

Kathy reported she and Steve joined Rich and Peggy Stalbrink for a Vibrant Communities meeting held in LaCrosse on October 21. The meeting was focused on the potential for development of towns and cities in LaPorte County. We discussed progress through Next Level Trails funding in Lake, Porter and Starke Counties that will extend segments of the Great American Rail-Trail and the American Discovery Trail as non-motorized routes. A major advancement of this trend toward connectivity would be served by a non-motorized route from North Judson northwest to LaCrosse and then west to Porter County.

She added that the Indiana Greenways Foundation ("IGF") partnered with the Indiana Parks and Recreation Association for an October 31 workshop in Portage. The IGF provided us with a \$5,000 grant as a critical part of the PTC match for the Next Level Trails funding to extend the Erie Trail for two miles southeast of US 35. This workshop focused on connecting towns to trails. Starke County participants included Brenda Palmer, Executive Director of the Starke County Chamber of Commerce. Kathy said "Steve and I also participated at the request of Mitch Barloga," IGF President. The hope is a coalition can be developed among Northwest Indiana trail proponents. Kathy added that she and Steve would make a contribution to the Starke County Chamber, for PTC membership, to advance broader understanding of our activities and the potential benefits to Starke County of a strong trail system.

Report on Moving Starke County Forward

Kathy said she communicated recently with Deborah Mix regarding the Moving Starke County Forward Organization and this summer's challenge of "100 miles in 100 days". For bicycle riders, the event was redefined this year as a 1,000 mile challenge. She praised Jeff Mencl for his extraordinary effort in logging 1,068 miles. Kathy said she would follow up with Deb to help confirm the final results of the challenge.

Kathy said she also spoke with Deb concerning the status of the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (SCILL) and the outstanding commitment to develop bike racks. A follow-up report will be provided during the next meeting.

Report by Brochure Workgroup

Linda Byer distributed the final design but with a slightly smaller layout for the four-fold brochure. No modifications were sought from the membership. She said the printer needs to purchase larger paper, but she expects printing to occur when that happens.

Identification of Chair for Workgroup to Develop Redesigned Website and Update Future Vision Statement

During the October meeting, Carolla established a workgroup to develop a redesigned website with inclusion of an updated vision statement. She appointed Bruce, Rhonda, Kathy, Sharon Smead, Steve and herself to the workgroup. Carolla has since worked with Steve Antisdell of Precept Partners, LLC to implement Google-for-Nonprofits. After brief discussion she agreed to serve as chair for the workgroup.

Update on Constellation of Starke Initiative

Larry Wickert provided an update on the Constellation of Starke initiative. He said Starke County representatives made the final presentation to OCRA for the Stellar Communities Program application “a week ago, Tuesday. I thought it went well. We came a long way” with our application “in a very short time. On December 5, “we’ll find out who gets the designation.” He also talked about the new mural in North Judson designed and painted by Anthony Brooks, who grew up in Starke County.

Consider Authorizing Annual Membership without Dues for Special Service

Steve said members have suggested to him authorizing an annual membership, without dues, where a member provides special services. He offered governance language that might implement this idea: “Following a membership resolution that finds a person provides special service to or on behalf of the Prairie Trails Club Inc., which clearly exceeds a value of \$25, the board of directors may approve an annual membership for the person without payment of dues.” He gave as an example a young person who has a particular skill but for whom the \$25 membership fee could be challenging.

Rich suggested an alternate and preferable approach might be for members to support a scholarship for such a person. Steve agreed and said that he was not urging immediate approval of the idea. Even if the idea has merit, it should have board support. Also, the offered wording was intended just a starting point and not likely final language.

Bob Albert said the PTC needed to be cautious about authorizing labor in lieu of dues. There may be a conflict with the IRS if a person claims a charitable deduction.

Bruce moved to refer the concept to the board of directors for further discussion. Larry seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Board of Directors Election

Four of seven members of the board of directors were up for election. Carolla, Sharon and Steve indicated they were willing to continue service. Russ nominated Brian as the fourth member. Brian said he was willing to serve. No other nominations were offered, and no other member volunteered to serve on the board. Bruce moved the nominations be closed. Rick Vlaming seconded the motion. The motion carried. Carola Heilstedt, Sharon Smead, Steve Lucas and Brian McMillin were elected to two-year terms and join Bruce Fingerhut, Diane Blais and Peggy Stalbrink, whose terms expire at the end of 2020.

Report of November 16 Joint Workday with CISMA

A dozen volunteers participated in a joint PTC and Starke/Pulaski County CISMA workday directed to removing invasive species along the Erie Trail immediately east of County Road 250 West for a distance of 100 to 150 yards. The CISMA was led by its Northwest Indiana Regional Specialist, Erica Luchik. Paul and Linda Byer led the PTC effort. Plant species that were removed included Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera*), black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) and winged burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*). Linda and Erica also identified oriental bitter-sweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) shortly before we concluded for the day, but our group was unable to treat very much.



Joint workday in progress facing west (November 16, 2019) *Image by Erica Luchik.*

Brian noted that the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway and other organizations use a chipper to help minimize the visual impacts of invasive species and other vegetation control projects along trails. He asked about the feasibility of the PTC investing in a chipper. Kathy asked where the chipper would be stored. Jeff said large chippers should be operated by trained professionals. Paul reported that he observed a small chipper for sale at a retail store for less than \$100, but this chipper had been sitting for several months and he was unsure whether it was operable. Bruce moved to approve up to \$100 for Paul and Linda to purchase a chipper. Rhonda seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Next Meeting

The next PTC meeting was scheduled for the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana for Thursday, January 16, 2020 at 6:00 pm, CST (7:00 pm, EST).

Adjournment

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