

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

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

April 15, 2021

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Peggy Stalbrink
Nancy Staresina
Rick Staresina
Larry Wickert

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”) Liaison

Call to Order by Board Chair

Bruce Fingerhut, Chair of the Board of Directors, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at 5:35 pm, CDT (6:35 pm, EDT) on April 15, 2021. Kathy Lucas introduced new members Rick and Nancy Staresina of Valparaiso. Rick said they were pleased to join the PTC and that he hoped to assist with trail maintenance. Others who were in attendance then introduced themselves.

Review and Approval of March 11, 2021 Minutes

Paul Byer moved to approve the draft February 11, 2021 meeting minutes without amendments. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Report of Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup

Bruce reported that the Department of Natural Resources has approved the terms of the design phase of the PTC’s grant for the southeast extension, including the floodway permit for the bridge crossing. He said Carolla Heilstedt has submitted, and this week

received approval of, the January through March quarterly report with the final design information.

Kathy said this month's Treasurer's Report will include payment for the final expenses of the design phase that shows all but \$15 of the DNR grant for this portion used. Rick asked if DNR was funding the southeast extension of the trail. Kathy responded that Gov. Holcomb's Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-01-07) funds 80% with a required minimum 20% local match.

Steve Lucas added that an important element of DNR approval of the final design and quarterly report was allocation of the entire credit for two-mile easement from the HVRM. He said that how to allocate this important contribution, sometimes called a "soft match", has been uncertain. Prior restricted allocations for the design phase had assigned a large portion to cash match contributions from the Hardesty Memorial Fund (through the Northern Indiana Community Foundation), the Luminous Foundation, the Indiana Greenways Foundation and a direct PTC contribution (including from the Mitchell-Kane Fund). The DNR instructed that instead of the allocations the PTC has used within our restricted and unrestricted columns, *all* the HVRM real estate soft match should be recognized and applied to the design phase. A result will be that the amounts remaining in the four cash funds will be shown to increase from the March report, but the change does not represent new or different funding, only a reallocation as directed by DNR. He said Kathy might have additional comments regarding the allocation when she gives the Treasurer's Report.

Linda Byer asked if the PTC has selected a contractor. Bruce responded that with DNR consent, we have selected Thomas Construction and Welding, Inc. of Culver. Carolla has emailed Thomas Construction to inform the company of the selection. She signed the construction contract and forwarded it to Thomas Construction's Jason Young on April 14, which would become effective when he attaches the agreed certificate of insurance and returns the contract to her with signature.

Steve said INDOT is still working out details on specifications for the trail crossing over US 35. His understanding from communications with The Troyer Group is that the final touches on these specifications would not have major fiscal implications.

Report of Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup

Steve said that on March 23, he and Kathy had an introductory teleconference with Thomas Hayes and Stephanie Wolkamp, attorneys for Midwest & Bluegrass Railway which is purchasing the rail line in and northwest of North Judson, concerning a trail easement to the Kankakee River. They said they would draft an easement for the PTC to review. The meeting was cordial, and we later shared a few emails, but nothing has been decided.

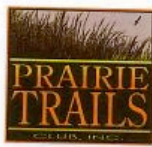
On a related note, in early March Professor J.P. Hall and a team of Ball State graduate students began a study of downtown North Judson aimed at historic preservation and revitalization. One of their expressed interests is in a northwest extension of the Erie Trail. Steve said he is scheduled on Tuesday for a Zoom Conference with graduate students Cooper Shields and Caitlin Lehman to help illuminate PTC aspirations.

Update on Bass Lake Festival 5K Run-Walk

With Carolla's absence, this item was deferred until the May membership meeting.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report including Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

Kathy provided the Treasurer's Report with Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as follows:



Treasurer's Report April 15, 2021

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 3/11/21 \$55,018.05

INCOME

4/06/21	Sharon Richie donation honoring Dale Grube	50.00	
4/14/21	Rick Staresina, new membership	25.00	
	Total Income	75.00	55,093.05

EXPENSES

3/22/21	Troyer Group Payment #8	7,586.73	
3/25/21	Troyer Group Payment #9	1,949.52	
	Total Expenses	(9,536.25)	

Ending FFBT balance as of 4/15/21 \$45,556.80

/s/Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer
As of April 15, 2021

PTC Restricted/Unrestricted Funds

RESTRICTED GRANTS/DONATIONS					
Luminous Fund Grant 2 (2018)	Signage BLS (including "You are Here")	4,124.94			
Luminous Fund Grant 3 (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	[5000-1496.25]*		
Luminous Fund Grant 4 (2020)	Northwest extension	5,000.00			
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Historic Signage Erie Trail	6,911.50			
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	[5000-1496.25]*		
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	[5000-1496.25]*		
Marshall County Horse Association	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00			
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	[5000-1496.25]*		
Lucas lake house guests' donation	Future Vision/website	700.00			
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st installment for trail extension	15.00	[less 7,586.73 & 1,949.52 to Troyer]*		
Mitchel-Kane	Northwest extension	4,000.00			
Stalbrink donation	Scholarship (or "most needed use")	100.00			
Blais/Vlaming bench	For trail head @ 450/210	350.00			
McMillin bench	For trail head @ 450/210	350.00			
KVREMC bike rack	Balance of grant award	1,500.00			
	Total Restricted	37,416.44			
BANK ACCOUNT			TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)			45,556.80	37,416.44	8,140.36
*[Reallocated per DNR Claim Summary Document & Request for Payment]					
As of April 15, 2021 /s/ Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer					

Kathy said she learned earlier in the day that Bruce sold the PTC's mower for \$4,000, which will be reflected in next month's report. The group applauded Bruce's efforts in selling the mower for our asking price.

She also said the report was notable because, as Steve said earlier, it implemented a DNR directive that the HVRM real estate match be credited in total, and final payments were made to The Troyer Group for the design phase of the project. A consequence is amounts remaining within restricted donations from the Luminous Fund, the Hardesty Memorial Fund, the Indiana Greenways Foundation, and the PTC's cash contribution (each of which were in the amount of \$5,000) increased. With the final two payments to The Troyer Group for design and engineering, and the use of more cash from the design element of the DNR's NLT Grant, the amount of this element remaining was reduced to just \$15.

Kathy added that achieving full credit for what is sometimes called a "soft match" from the real estate will simplify the calculations in the construction phase. But there are more soft match credits that will have to be reconciled as construction advances—for benches, bike racks, signage, and perhaps most notably, the materials and labor from the Starke County Commissioners. She asked if there were questions.

Bruce moved to approve without amendment the Treasurer's Report with the PTC Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Rhonda Milner seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Update on Our Solar System in Scale Initiative (“OSSIS Project”)

Since the PTC’s March meeting, Steve communicated with our webmaster at Precept Partners, Steve Antisdell, about inclusion of the OSSIS Project on our website. Precept Partners needs text as a place marker to connect the anticipated QR code. Temporary text was provided for the “top level page”, and Precept Partners provided the QR code.

Steve showed the members what the workgroup for the OSSIS Project “demo” for the sign. A single QR would be used initially, but Precept Partners suggested the Sun and other heavenly bodies could later be assigned distinctive QRs “as content is developed and available. (It’s easy enough to update the QR codes on the signs with weather proof stickers (like license plate “year” stickers).” There could be different subsets for inner planets and outer planets or for each individual model. Steve said he has identified a technical problem with the scaling language on the demo, and the workgroup is working on a solution. He asked the PTC membership for comments.

Several members expressed enthusiasm for the initiative. Larry Wickert asked who was constructing the OSSIS Project signs. Steve replied that it was OTES. Larry suggested the workgroup should consider developing two QRs for each sign—one connecting with overarching information and the second focused on the particular heavenly body. Bruce said he thought it important that the PTC participate in locating individual signs so that the likelihood of damage to them and injuries to the visiting public would be minimized.

Maintenance Committee Update

Consistent with a Board of Directors discussion last June, the membership on August 27 authorized the Maintenance Committee to sell the Toro TimeCutter HD MyRide mower which the PTC bought in 2018. Bruce reported during the current meeting that efforts were successful, and he sold the mower this week for \$4,000. As the members directed in August, proceeds will be reserved and used for trail maintenance.

Last summer Paul and Linda were authorized to buy glyphosate for the second chemical treatment of plants along the trail. In August Linda reported that hot, dry weather limited plant growth, so this financial expenditure and the related labor to apply the chemicals were unwarranted. Last month Paul reported the pandemic increased significantly the cost of glyphosate. But during the current meeting, he said through aggressive pricing research and using discounts, he was able to buy glyphosate at almost the same price as approved for last year’s second treatment.

Bruce recalled one of the first stages of Erie Trail development was a bridge deck placed about 15 years ago on the north half of the Bogus Run bridge. The main bridge crossing is now on the south half of the bridge, but the north half is still used by walkers, and its deck is deteriorating. For both safety and aesthetics the deck needs new planks. After a discussion with input from Paul and others, the consensus was that materials for the new skim deck would cost nearly \$1,500. Steve moved to authorize members of the Maintenance Committee to expend up to \$1,500 for materials to rehabilitate the north half of the deck. Russ seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

On April 10, a workday was conducted as scheduled to suppress invasive species along the Erie Trail between County Road 700 South and County Road 125 East in Aldine. The effort augmented another last summer in the same corridor but was focused farther northwest. Paul, Linda, Bruce, Diane, Russ Blais, Rhonda Milner, Anita McMillin, Kirt Verhagen, Kay Reibold, Larry, Kathy, and Steve participated. Rain was predicted and deterred several members who would have otherwise participated, but the weather was suitable until noon for what turned out to be a productive effort.



Paul Byer cutting fallen limb (left) and Rhonda Milner with Anita McMillin removing sapling siberian elms (right). Images by Kathy Lucas

Bloomer Run T-Shirt Donation by Members Individually on Behalf of PTC

Russ took the lead in responding to a request from Brenda Palmer, Executive Director of the Starke County Chamber of Commerce, to help fund the purchase of T-shirts for the Bloomer Run. The event is scheduled to begin May 1, 2021 at 10:00 am, CDT in North Judson in support of non-profits partnering with Starke County Tourism. Russ and Diane fronted a \$100 donation and then received support from members Bruce, Rich and Peggy Stalbrink, Brian and Anita McMillin, and Steve and Kathy. With the donation, the back of the T-shirts will include the PTC's website address at www.prairietrailsclub.org. These members made the donation individually on behalf of the PTC. No PTC funds were used.

Discussion of Bass Lake Loops Bike Ride

During the February 11 meeting, the members discussed what was then described as the proposed September "Bass Lake Century Bike Ride". The event has since been renamed the "Bass Lake Loops Bike Ride". Bruce described an email from T.I. Jones concerning the possibility of PTC participation. Steve provided a written response where he outlined how the event could incorporate the Erie Trail. Dr. Jones later said the event would be

held exclusively on public roads—more particularly, Indiana State Route 10 and County Road 210. Following discussion by the membership, it was determined the PTC would not participate as an organization because the route does not include the Erie Trail.

Update on Signage Proposals Recognizing Early Trail Activists and Joint Billboard with HVRM

(1) Sign Recognizing Early Trail Activists

Bruce reflected efforts are on track for signage to recognize early Erie Trail activists. He had asked during the March meeting that preliminary language for the signage be shared when its minutes were circulated to members and friends. He emphasized that nothing had been finally decided. This circulation occurred March 13 with preliminary language as follows:

In recognition of the founding organizations and members of the Erie Trail, and their vision in 2005 to provide outdoor recreational opportunities to our community. Their dedication to physical and mental wellness along with the development of tourism in Starke County is evident in this beautiful trail.

Through their endless hard work and resolve, this trail is part of three cross-county trail systems: The American Discovery Trail from Delaware to California; The Great American Rail-Trail from Washington, DC to Washington state; and USBR35 from Ontario to New Orleans.

Friends of The Erie JK (today's Prairie Trails Club)
Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, North Judson, IN
Northern Indiana Community Foundation
Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Territorial Engineering LLC, Walkerton, IN
Indiana Trails Fund

[QR Code here]

No one has commented on the preliminary language.

Kathy noted that among these early trail activists were Rhonda, Anita and Bruce. The proposal is for two similar signs, one at the North Judson trailhead on Main Street and the other at US Highway 35.

(2) Joint Billboard Sign with HVRM

In his capacity as PTC Liaison to the HVRM, Larry reported speaking with its President, Todd Flanagan, about a joint billboard at the intersection of the Erie Trail and US Highway 35. This concept originated with the HVRM, and Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, said there was definitely interest. The two organizations would share the cost of making the sign and its maintenance. Bruce suggested inquiring whether Vanadco in Argos or another company might be interested in managing the sign, with space for advertising, and proceeds shared between the HVRM and PTC.

With construction of the two-mile trail extension from US Highway 35 anticipated for this summer, the consensus was that signs should not be placed there until construction is completed. But discussions concerning sign terms and design can move forward.

Starke County Convention & Visitors Commission Funding Opportunity

Bruce reported the CVC Board of the Starke County Convention & Visitors Commission has a funding opportunity for which the PTC may qualify. \$6,600 is available to fund events that promote and encourage conventions, visitors, and tourism within Starke County. Advertising, promotional activities, trade shows, special events and recreation are included. Salaries and organizational operating expenses are excluded. Applications must be submitted by May 30. The CVC Board stated “awardees will be notified no later than June 30, 2021.”

Following discussion the members determined to apply for a grant to support the grand opening of the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail this summer. Bruce and Rhonda agreed to prepare the grant application.

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert reviewed anticipated HVRM activities. He said the Museum will kick off the summer season with two trains run in association with the Bloomer Run on May 1. He said the HVRM will comply with social distancing requirements and “we’ll be playing it by ear.”

Bob said the HVRM is anxiously awaiting finalization of sale by the Town of North Judson to the Midwest & Bluegrass Railway. He provided an interesting update on the purchase and rehabilitation of railway equipment and memorabilia.

Chesapeake Golf Course Event on May 2

Peggy reported she was again participating in the annual bazaar at the Chesapeake Run Golf Club, 6430 South 250 West, North Judson, scheduled this year on Sunday, May 2, from noon to 4:00 p.m. Event table rental proceeds will go to a family who has had a child diagnosed with cancer. Peg said anyone is welcome to donate something to put on her table. Her cell is 219-928-5258, and you may text or call.

Insurance and IRUS

Kathy suggested that as the Erie Trail and the PTC mission expands, it may be prudent to consider general liability issues and other legal issues in the context of the Indiana Recreational Use Statute (or “IRUS”). HVRM has a quitclaim deed, subject to the Rails-to-Trails Act, to what was formerly the Erie Railroad southeast of North Judson. To date the PTC has had no proprietary interest in the trail, but as a condition to obtaining the NLT grant for the two-mile southeast trail extension, we obtained an HVRN easement for the north one-half of the corridor between US Highway 35 and County Road 700 East. Also, the Town of North Judson reserved an easement for trail construction in favor of the PTC on the railway northwest to English Lake. She said IRUS (IC 14-22-1-2) provides that landowners who do not charge a fee for others to use property for “swimming,

camping, hiking, sightseeing, or any other purpose,” do not assume responsibility for injuries occurring on their property.

Kathy said a discussion concerning IRUS and possible insurance needs would ideally include the special skills sets of Kirt and Carolla. With neither present at this meeting she would not seek to commit either of them to a workgroup. But she would like to ask if they might be willing to work with us in this regard. Bruce expressed support for the concept.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership meeting was scheduled for Thursday, May 20, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana. The meeting will include social distancing and wearing masks consistent with Indiana state protocols.

Next Board Meeting

The next Board meeting was tentatively set to couple with a groundbreaking ceremony in early May for the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m., CDT (8:07 p.m., EDT).