

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

Videoconference

July 27, 2020

MEMBERS

Christopher Balzer
Tabitha Balzer
Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Paul Byer
Linda Byer
Joan Hardesty
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Peggy Stalbrink
Richard Stalbrink
Kirt Verhagen
Larry Wickert

Call to Order by President and Introductions

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) by videoconference at 6:04 pm, CDT (7:04 pm, EDT) on July 27, 2020. Members in attendance were introduced.

Proposed Trailhead at Starke County Roads 450 East and 210 (Bass Lake)

Carolla said Mary Perren, Constellation of Starke Program Facilitator, sent an email earlier in the day to report Rik Ritzler, Starke County Highway Superintendent, and she preferred to wait until the next meeting to present plans for the trailhead proposed for the south end of Bass Lake. Mary noted there were “some design changes since the most recent rendering.” She and Rik would develop a presentation to explain the changes and what they expect for this Stellar Grant project.

Steve Lucas added that he met with Rik and Mary at the Starke County Highway Department office on June 11. They discussed signage possibilities to help users with wayfinding between the planned trailhead and the main stem of the Erie Trail, as well as to better identify Connector S-13 (currently Starke County Roads 450 East and 800 South) between the trailhead and the Erie Trail. Signage could also be developed for wayfinding north of the trailhead. He said Kathy Carrier has expressed possible interest in assisting with the initiative.

Russell Blais reminded the membership that he and Diane Blais are storing five benches that were acquired during the Lids to Benches Initiative. Two of these are committed for use on the two-mile southeast Erie Trail extension now in progress. One of these is being underwritten by the Marshall County Horse Association and the second is a direct PTC cost share for DNR's Next Level Trails Grant. Roberta McKendry underwrote the third for placement near the marina.

Russ said he and Diane underwrote the fourth bench in partnership with Rick and Mary Vlaming. He has spoken with Rik Ritzler about the need for benches at the proposed trailhead and believes the Stellar Grant project would welcome donation of this bench in lieu of a \$750 estimated purchase price. Russ said his understanding was the proposed trailhead design also anticipated the need for a second bench. He recommended that the PTC donate the uncommitted fifth bench for the proposed trailhead.

Kathy Lucas moved to offer PTC donation of the fifth bench to Starke County for use on the proposed trailhead at Starke County Roads 450 E and 210. Rhonda Milner seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

Brian McMillin said he and Anita McMillin requested to underwrite donation of the fifth bench at the standard rate of \$350. Peggy Stalbrink moved to approve the request. Joan Hardesty seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

Report of Workgroup for Southeast Trail Extension

Carolla reported she submitted the requisite 2020 Second Quarterly ("Q2") Report for the PTC's Next Level Trails Grant in early July. The Q2 Report followed consultation with the PTC Board of Directors and recognized the need to "stay within the margins" for funding. The workgroup conferred with Jonathon Geels of the Troyer Group on possible upgrades to the project, but these took cost estimates well beyond the funding authorized in the approved grant.

The Q2 Report reflected the preliminary design was 32% complete on July 1. The Troyer Group provided a "preliminary cost estimate", including an itemized breakdown of trail construction activities, materials, and estimated unit pricing. This estimate involved a thorough review of current bids and the "FY2019 INDOT Unit Pricing" spreadsheet. The Q2 report provided for the minimum State recommended two inches of asphalt on four inches of compacted aggregate. A "natural surface" equestrian trail would be provided as set forth in the grant application. The Q2 report reflected the Troyer Group has started the final design phase and is in mid-process on updating plans, details, and specifications. Also, the Troyer Group started work on specification sections and IDEM Rule 5 documentation needed for bidding and construction permitting.

Carolla said the cost estimates used by the Troyer Group for trail construction, with the ten-foot wide asphalt trail the biggest item, were based primarily on costs incurred for similar projects in LaPorte, St. Joseph, and Marshall Counties. Her hope is construction costs in Starke County may be somewhat less, and work additional to what is set forth in the Q2 Report may be possible. Two potential augmentations are thicker asphalt or an improvement to the existing parking area west of US 35 with an ADA accessible parking slot.

Kathy reported that Lisa Herber, the PTC's contact person in the DNR for our grant, at first questioned the terms of the Q2 Report. She sought the inclusion of items which would seem attractive, but as calculated by the Troyer Group, would have exceeded our financial abilities and were beyond the terms of our contract with the DNR. After further communications with DNR, Jonathon Geels reported that Herber approved the Q2 Report as submitted. Herber acknowledged trailhead parking at US 35 was not part of the grant so the PTC does "not have to keep that." With respect to the equestrian trail, the final plans may call for "a packed dirt surface with signage to identify the separate trail uses to reduce costs."

Carolla observed the process is "a lot of work for two miles of asphalt," but the end result should be worth the effort. Kathy agreed. Consistent with the Troyer Group analyses, the Q2 Report reflected the project is on schedule.

Diane expressed her appreciation to Carolla and Kathy for their efforts in continuing to move the process forward. "I'd like to say 'thank you' for the work you've done."

Report of Trail Maintenance

Steve said there had been a wonderful response this spring and summer by the PTC's Maintenance Committee and others along and adjacent to the Erie Trail. He directed a special thanks to Paul Byer for extraordinary work on June 4 and June 5, using his own equipment, to apply chemical treatments to invasive species and weeds between US 35 and County Road 100 West. Paul and Linda Byer removed large trees which had fallen in a storm on the asphalt pavement and the equestrian trail east of Fell Ditch, with the greatest need near US 35. Steve thanked Bruce for major support in addressing the storm damage, as well as for mowing along the Erie Trail west of CR 100 West to the Bogus Run bridge.

Paul reported he used almost all of the isopropylamine salt of glyphosate which the PTC previously authorized for chemical treatments. He expressed the view that if a second application were accomplished in the late summer or early fall, significant long-term progress could be made on the control of invasives and weeds. The cost for chemicals applied in early June was somewhat less than \$400. Linda did a check during the meeting and reflected that chemical costs were essentially unchanged.

Paul also spoke about the need to remove large cottonwood trees with root growth that is causing the pavement to buckle at several locations along the Erie Trail. He said the need is probably most noteworthy at Aldine near where a large cottonwood was removed two years ago. Estimates on the removal of two additional cottonwoods in this area were in the vicinity of \$1,000 (\$500 for each tree). He added that the trees needed to be felled by professionals to avoid damage to the trail or to adjoining properties and fences.

Russ said the estimates Paul obtained were consistent with his own experiences. He said there was a critical need for the service and supported authorizing Paul to move ahead with both chemical acquisition and securing professional services for cottonwood tree removals.

Russ moved to approve authorization for Paul to expend an amount, not to exceed \$1,400 and effective until December 1, 2020, for purchase of chemicals to treat invasive species and weeds along the Erie Trail and for removal of two cottonwood trees, as identified by Paul. Kathy seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

A person or persons took down the horizontal rails from the southern segment of the split rail fence located on the east end of the Erie Trail at Bass Station. The result was an unauthorized opening to drive motor vehicles on the trail. On July 2, Bruce made repairs with a dowel rod to pin the rails to the posts. He took the images below. The first shows a portion of the fence in its damaged condition and the second following repairs:



Report of Bike Racks Initiative and Norwayne Field Progress (North Judson)

Carolla said she met with the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”), picked up the first bike rack completed with funding from the RoundUp Program at Kankakee Valley REMC, and transported it for application of powder coating. She later delivered the bike rack to Paul and Linda for storage. Bruce picked up the bike rack from the Byers and delivered it to the North Judson Park and Recreation Board for possible placement at Norwayne Field. The North Judson Town Council discussed the matter on July 6 and agreed Nick Radtke, Park Board President, should be the contact person. The hope is to place the bike rack in coordination with upgrades in process at Norwayne Field, with new public restrooms supported by the Stellar Grant project and a new splash pad. Carolla said the splash pad was progressing quickly and might be finished yet this season. Bruce emailed that he and Paul expected to place a pad for the bike rack in August near the splash pad and a gazebo on the southwest side of Norwayne Field.

Larry Wickert said he expected SCILL to reconvene operations when Knox schools resume in early August. He reported he had discussed bike rack construction with the instructor, and they agreed new racks should be less ambitious in design than the one slated for Norwayne Field. He thought two new racks a semester was a reasonable goal.

The PTC has committed to providing two bike racks on the two-mile southeast Erie Trail extension. The membership agreed that offering a bike rack for the proposed trailhead was also a positive objective. Carolla reflected that because of school closings, Covid-19 has been a disruptive factor to planning and construction activities. Kathy said the PTC has received \$1,000 of the \$2,500 approved in the KVREMC grant. The hope is a brief ceremony can be held after the initial bike rack is placed at Norwayne Field, to include representation from KVREMC, and then the outstanding \$1,500 would be forwarded to the PTC.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

Kathy circulated copies of the Treasurer's Report for the period from June 10, 2020 through July 27, 2020. The Board of Directors gave approval of the period prior to June 10 during its teleconference held on June 11, 2020. Kathy welcomed new members Judge Kim Hall and former Starke County resident, Kirt Verhagen. She then submitted her report:



Treasurer's Report July 27, 2020

I)	FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)		<u>Balance</u>
	Balance forward from 6/10/20		\$ 92,369.34
	<u>INCOME</u>		
	7/22/20 New Membership Judge Kim Hall	23.97	
	7/22/20 New Membership Kirt Verhagen	<u>23.97</u>	
	Total Income	47.94	92,417.28
	<u>EXPENSES</u>		
	6/12/20 Check #1060 Troyer Group payment #3	(6,522.50)	

6/12/20 Check #1061 Troyer Group payment #4	(2,235.00)
6/22/20 Check #1062 PTC Maintenance magnetic signs (7)	(71.00)
7/9/20 Direct Pay – Go Daddy Erie Trail domain name	(134.80)
7/27/20 Check #1063 Troyer Group payment #5	(4,331.25)

Total Expenses (13,294.55)

Ending FFBT balance as of 7/27/20 **\$79,122.73**

II) Northern Indiana Community Foundation (NICF)

NICF balance as of last quarterly report, 3/31/20 **3,913.18**

Total of 2 accounts: **\$83,035.91**

Kathy offered restricted and unrestricted funding allocations as set forth below:

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	3,626.00	(\$1374 allocated to Troyer bills #1-5)		
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Historic Signage Erie Trail	7,535.25	(\$71 for PTC magnetic signs)		
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	3,626.00	(\$1374 allocated to Troyer bills #1-5)		
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant	3,625.00	(\$1375 allocated to Troyer bills #1-5)		
Marshall County Horse Association	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00			
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	3,625.00	(\$1375 allocated to Troyer bills #1-5)		
Lucas lake house guests' donation	Future Vision/website	700.00			
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st installment for trail extension	46,765.00	(\$21,985 allocated to Troyer bills #1-5)		
Mitchel-Kane		2,000.00			
Scholarship Fund		100.00			
	Total	76,077.19			
SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS			TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)			79,122.73	73,077.19	6,045.54
Northern IN Community Fndn. (NICF)			3,911.70	3,000.00	911.70
			83,034.43	76,077.19	6,957.24
As of July 27, 2020 /s/ Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer					

These allocations for the first time reflect local cost shares for the so-called “hard” match of cash that applies to the Next Level Trails Grant. “Soft” match participation for items such as real estate, Starke County Highway Department participation, benches, and bike racks will be included later. Carolla reflected she thought the hard match allocation in the current report made sense with soft matches to be included later. Kathy said this concept was new to her, and she welcomed insights and perspectives from members.

Russ moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report with the PTC Restricted/Unrestricted Funds including allocations for hard match as set forth above. Rhonda seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

Website Updates

Kathy said that following the advice received from our webmaster, Precept Partners, Bruce secured the domain name “Erie Trail” through GoDaddy and updated our contract with GoDaddy as web host.

Steve added that Steve Antidel of Precept Partners updated the “ABOUT” tab on the PTC’s homepage with respect to “Erie Trail Volunteers” and “Future Vision”. He said Steve Antidel provided professional services for the updates without fee as a courtesy to our organization. Previous references to the “North Judson-Erie Trail” were simplified to the “Erie Trail” consistent with membership actions taken months ago to demonstrate a more inclusive view. The door is opened for a new five-year plan to carry forward from our first Vision statement that becomes five years old in 2021.

A new PTC maintenance sign for the Erie Trail, developed by Diane through OTES, is as shown below and now on our website. The sign is flexible and magnetic.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Kathy encouraged PTC volunteers to post the new magnetic sign when working on the Erie Trail or a Connector. She added that if a volunteer lets her know of an intention to work, she will provide signs.

MATAG Virtual Conference and Greenways Foundation Virtual Luncheon

Tabitha Balzer reported the Mid America Trails And Greenways (“MATAG”) 2020 Virtual Conference is scheduled for Tuesday, August 18, at 11:00 a.m., CDT (12:00 noon, EDT). The Indiana Greenways Foundation is helping host the event. She said registration for MATAG 2020 is free, but donations are greatly appreciated.

Tabitha also noted the Annual Indiana Greenways Foundation Virtual Luncheon is set for Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 11:00 a.m., CDT (12:00 noon, EDT). In addition to her PTC membership, Tabitha is Vice President of the Greenways Foundation.

Starke County Chamber of Commerce Annual Golf Outing

The Starke County Chamber of Commerce’s Annual Golf Outing is set for October 2, 2020 at 11:00 a.m., on the Hamlet Golf Course. Kathy said Donna Henry telephoned to ask if the PTC would donate \$75 to “sponsor a hole” for the event. Kathy said that the PTC has refrained from contributing its funds to other non-profit organizations because of possible IRS issues and because the PTC is itself dependent upon grants and donations from private citizens and foundations.

Russ said he and Diane were willing to make a personal sponsorship of \$75 on behalf of the PTC. In this way any uncertainty concerning PTC sponsorship would be avoided, and the Chamber’s request would be met. The members thanked Russ and Diane for their generosity.

Informal Update on HVRM Activities by Bob Albert

Carolla said Bob Albert emailed earlier today to say he had a conflicting meeting and would be unable to participate in tonight’s meeting. He anticipates updating us on HVRM activities at our next membership meeting. Linda said similarly to the PTC, the HVRM has been struggling with the challenges caused by Covid-19.

Membership Meeting Scheduled for August 27

The next meeting of the PTC membership was scheduled for August 27, 2020 at 6:00 p.m., CDT (7:00 p.m., EDT). Location of the meeting will be announced later.

Workday Scheduled for September 19

A workday was scheduled for Saturday, September 19, 2020 at 9:00 a.m., CDT (10:00 a.m., EDT) to help control Invasive species, weeds, and branches encroaching on the Erie Trail between Starke County Roads 300 East and 400 East.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 pm, CDT (7:58 pm, EDT).