

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

**Fellowship Hall, United Methodist Church
210 Central Avenue
North Judson, Indiana**

February 22, 2022

MEMBERS

**Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Sharon Smead
Rich Vallicelli
Larry Wickert**

Call to Order by President and Introductions

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) on February 22, 2022 in the Fellowship Hall of the North Judson United Methodist Church at 5:24 pm, CST (6:24 pm, EST). She asked the members to introduce themselves.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of December 15, 2021

Paul Byer moved to approve the minutes of the December 15, 2021 membership meeting without amendment. Brian McMillin seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Election of Officers

Carolla opened the floor for the elections of officers. She stated she was willing to serve another year as President at the will of the membership. Similarly, Rhonda Milner said she was willing to serve another year as Vice Chair; Steve Lucas said he was willing to serve another year as Secretary; and Kathy Lucas said she was willing to serve another year as Treasurer. No other person was nominated or volunteered for these offices. All were reelected unanimously.

Larry Wickert needed to attend another meeting and was not present. He is currently the PTC Liaison to the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”). Steve reflected Larry was newly elected to the Board of Directors in December and might wish to end service as Liaison. Carolla deferred action on election of the Liaison until the March meeting so

Larry and Linda Byer, who is also an active HVRM member, could confer regarding how the Liaison function might be best served.

Consideration of DNR Punch List Items and Completion of Southeast Trail Extension

Lisa Herber, Grants Coordinator for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, on the morning of October 22, 2021 led a compliance review for NLT-1-07 Grant for the two-mile southeast extension of the Erie Trail southeast of US Highway 35. Herber developed a “punch list” of items needing final resolution—many of which resulted from COVID-19 supply chain delays. Most punch list items were addressed in October and November as described in the Minutes of our November 16 meeting.

Images showing placement were shared with Herber through our consultant at the Troyer Group, Jonathon Geels. The day after Jonathon spoke with her on January 26 about any remaining issues, he emailed the PTC to report:

1 “From the State’s perspective the project is closed.” He wrote there is not “an official timeline for any of the punch list items (which are still required, but not ‘urgent’). Lisa’s preference is [that they be resolved] before [the Erie Trail] gets heavy traffic this Spring.”

2. Jonathon added that a railing extension required for the bridge over Bartee Ditch “can be managed one of two ways: install native dogwood or viburnum ‘whips’ spaced 5’ on center that will eventually grow into a hedge-type barrier or construct an additional railing similar to [what was installed by PTC volunteers this Fall on] the northside [of the bridge]. Lisa Herber “said to use our best judgment on the length of the extension to help deter any accidents. So, if it looks like the northside may need some additional length, an option is to plan whips on that side as well. Given cost, I may recommend the planting option....”

3. Jonathon wrote Herber was “pretty adamant about sign location for the Equestrian signs matching the plans and that they need the ‘ahead’ placard....”

With this communication from Herber, the PTC has a project completion date under NLT-1-107 of January 26, 2022. The membership then discussed how best to accomplish the tasks specifically identified by the DNR, as well as any other responsibilities.

The decision was to determine if native dogwoods or viburnum whips might be available for purchase and planting this spring. Diane Blais volunteered to contact Marc Vendl at Lowe’s Home Improvement Store in Plymouth for species availability. She will share species names with Linda who will identify which are native. Linda and Diane were also authorized to arrange for purchase and delivery of any qualified species.

The decision was to obtain signage to inform the public that for the section from Starke County Road 600 East through the Bartee Ditch Bridge, they share the asphalt portion of the trail. The word AHEAD shall appear prominently, and signs are needed for the public traveling both northwest and southeast. These signs would be installed as anticipated in the plans. In addition, signs are needed to inform the public where the shared section terminates. Steve was authorized to obtain or have signage designed to accomplish the spirit of these purposes.

Larry recently received signs from the DNR to acknowledge that the two-mile extension was funded in major part through Gov. Holcomb’s NextLevel trails program. He reported these signs do not have holes but he will drill them prior to placement. They were not accompanied by posts, so the PTC needs to provide posts.

Two other sets of signs have been received and have posts and hardware for placement. One set identifies the extension as part of the "Erie Trail". The second set identifies the extension as host to the transAmerican Great American Rail-Trail, American Discovery Trail, and US Bicycle Route 35.

Members indicated they will place the signage and plant the whips as soon as the items are obtained and weather and ground conditions allow. The hope is to do so by late March.

Carolla added that she has forwarded PTC payment for powder coating for the third bike rack. She will take possession of the bike rack for membership placement at the two-mile extension. Although the bike rack is identified in the NLT grant application, the plans do not specify where it is to be located. Deb said Moving Starke County Forward wishes to provide plaques or signs, similar to what they provided at Norwayne Field, to acknowledge their role in obtaining the grant for the bike racks. Kathy added a photo opportunity should be provided to all participants in the bike racks initiative.

Anita asked about ballast spill-over and sporadic gaps along the edges of the asphalt trail. Linda responded that Thomas Excavating & Welding rolled the edges to make them more level and uniform. Also, Larry oversaw work to help with future trail management that was done on behalf of the Starke County Highway Department. No outstanding punch list item is the responsibility of Thomas Excavating.

Steve reflected this month's Treasurer's Report includes the final payment owed by the PTC to Thomas Excavating. ACSTAR Insurance Company, the surety for construction performance, has asked the PTC to release the bond. He said release seems warranted but he wanted to ask the members if anyone had concerns or disagreed. There was a brief discussion that ended with a consensus the bond should be released. Steve said he would authorize bond release within the coming week.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

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



**Treasurer's Report
February 22, 2022
Fellowship Hall, United Methodist Church
North Judson, Indiana**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 12/15/21

\$125,459.61

INCOME

12/16/21	Gene Novello, Bass Lake Resident & President BLCD <i>Donation</i>	\$350.00
12/20/21	Steven Randall and LuAnn Glass <i>Dues and donation</i>	50.00
12/20/21	Naylor Pipe Co. (R. Blais, Board Member) <i>Donation</i>	400.00
01/11/22	American Online Giving	<u>97.10</u>
	Total Income	897.10

EXPENSES

11/11/22	Check #1099 to Traffic Control Systems <i>("Erie Trail" signs)</i>	\$324.00
11/16/21	Check #1100 to Precept Partners <i>(Website updates to recognize southeast extension)</i>	225.00
01/26/22	Check #1103 to Precept Partners <i>(Annual website maintenance)</i>	270.00
02/09/22	Check #1104 to Thomas Excavating & Welding <i>(Final invoice for trail construction)</i>	65,928.80
02/09/22	Check #1105 to Lucas Corral Design <i>(Base Map revision and You-Are-Here signage design)</i>	<u>800.00</u>
	Total Expenses	67,547.80

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 02/22/2022 **\$58,808.91**

Kathy made a special note of appreciation to Gene Novello for his generous donation. She thanked Steven R. and LuAnn Glass for their renewed membership with an added donation. She expressed appreciation to Russ Blais for his continued financial support through the Naylor Pipe Company, which is in addition to his tireless efforts as a PTC volunteer. Kathy said that Precept Partners and Lucas Corral Design provide prompt services at reduced rates to us as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. She expressed satisfaction with delivery of final payment to prime contractor, Thomas Excavating & Welding, following the successful trail extension—but added that there are still significant challenges to winding up the project at the State level. She added her thanks to Jonathon Geels of the Troyer Group who provided invaluable services even after completion of the project's design stage.

Sharon Smead moved to approve the Treasurer's Report as set forth in these minutes. Rich Vallicelli seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Report of BIC Committee

The Branding, Identity and Continuity (“BIC”) Committee reported significant progress on two of its four current projects. These projects were to (1) update our current “2016 Erie Trail Future Vision” with a 5-year “Future Vision 2022”; and (2) update the Base Map and publish a revised Erie Trail brochure with completion of the two-mile trail extension southeast of US Highway 35.

Future Vision 2022: Draft 3 was shared with the membership in a February 16 email. The draft was developed through the combined efforts of the BIC Committee members. It updates the 2016 Erie Trail Future Vision by setting goals and priorities to advance our trail systems. Although now containing only text, when completed Future Vision 2022 will be a five-year plan that includes imagery.

Steve said the BIC Committee welcomed any additions or corrections during the evening’s meeting and added that he has already incorporated a technical correction from Joan Hardesty. No other changes were offered during the meeting. He said Draft 3 would thus form the core of our final document. One caveat was that the BIC Committee may make adjustments to help coordinate with 5-Year Plans now under consideration by the Starke County Parks Department and by the North Judson Parks and Recreation Board. He said the hope was to return to the membership for consideration as to final approval of Future Vision 2022 in April or May.

New Base Map and Revised Brochure: With successful completion of the two-mile trail extension southeast of US Highway 35, Yancy Lucas created a new base map for the Erie Trail and its Connectors. In addition to recognizing the extension as a reality and not just a plan, the new base map also anticipates corresponding changes to the routing of the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail, and US Bike Route 35. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy recently recognized the new two miles as being part of the “preferred route” of the Great American Rail Trail. The Starke County Commissioners have given their approval to rerouting US Bike Route 35 onto the extension, as well as to correcting some errors on other aspects of the route in Starke County. These changes are now being shepherded by INDOT for final approval by Adventure Cycling. Review for relocation of the American Discovery Trail is being pursued through its coordinator for the Northern Branch in Indiana. The Committee expects changes to the Connectors to be considered by the Starke County Parks Department and recommended to the County Commissioners for approval this year.

Earlier in the day, Yancy provided a second draft of the new base map for distribution and discussion by the membership. In accordance with a recommendation by Russ, this draft includes the phrase “some route approvals pending” so the PTC can move forward with updates on the PTC website, a new brochure, publication in the BLPOA handbook, and signage before all approvals are received. The membership expressed enthusiasm for this approach and for the second draft. Russ and Linda suggested clarifying the route of Indiana Highway 10, represented on the draft by a white line and an ellipse “10”, by showing the connection to US Highway 35 south of Bass Lake and adding a second ellipse “10” east of Bass Lake. Russ recommended that Yancy be asked to make these technical adjustments and that the BIC Committee determine its strategy for making the new base map available online and in other contexts.

Diane congratulated the BIC Committee on its progress and moved to endorse proposals to advance both Future Vision 2022 and the updated base map and its applications to our brochures and other documents. Brian second the motion and the motion carried.

5-Year Plan Updates for Starke County Parks and for North Judson Parks and Recreation

The five-year plans for Starke County Parks and for North Judson Parks and Recreation are in their final stages of development. Announcements are expected in March. The PTC has commented extensively on both five-year plans. The hope is that some of our suggestions will be incorporated into them.

Bloomer Run on April 23

Brenda Palmer, Executive Director of the Starke County Chamber of Commerce, emailed Kathy to inform her the 3rd Annual Bloomer Run is scheduled for North Judson on April 23. Kathy said the PTC has avoided using its funding, which is derived from membership fees and donations, to help fund another organization's activities. But last year Russ and Diane Blais personally donated \$100 to the event for 100 shirts, in the name of the PTC. As a result of the donation, "Prairie Trails Club" is among the names printed on the shirts. The course for the event does not use the Erie Trail, and some of proceeds are donated to HVRM. Kathy said that if membership is interested in sponsorship, she and Steve would this year donate \$100 on behalf of the PTC.

Linda said the event is popular locally and supports worthy beneficiaries. She said it also provides an opportunity to shed a positive light on PTC activities. She believed the PTC could place a tent near the run and underline our intention to extend the Erie Trail through North Judson toward English Lake. Deb supported sponsorship indirectly through Kathy and Steve. The consensus was to assist with sponsorship. Kathy said she would inform Brenda Palmer the Lucas family would donate \$100 on behalf of the PTC.

Whether by intent or coincidence, April 23 marks the annual "Celebration of America's Trails" started by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in 2013. The Great American Rail-Trail is a signature routes of the RTC. Participation in the Bloomer Run offers an opportunity to highlight locally the Great American Rail-Trail.

National Trails Day on June 4

Kathy reflected that the American Hiking Society has identified June 4 as "National Trails Day" for 2022, "a day of service or advocacy for hometown trails". She urged that the PTC schedule an event for June 4, whether a major participation event or an informal group bike ride.

Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/ 3K Walk on July 30

Members were reminded of our commitment, on the morning of July 30, to stage the "Bass Lake Blastic Blast" 5K Run/3K Walk as part of the annual Bass Lake Festival.

Weed Wrangle in September or October

Phil Woolery sent an email on February 16, indicating that during a meeting of the Starke Pulaski Native Plants Initiative of CISMA, Linda agreed to discuss with our membership a possible plant species control event along the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail. Phil chairs the Starke Pulaski Native Plants Initiative and is also Purdue University's Ag and Natural Resources Extension Educator for Starke and Pulaski Counties.

Linda said the species control event is sometimes called a "weed wrangle". She told members much of the two-mile extension is bordered by vegetation which includes "a lot of invasive species." She added that if the PTC can move swiftly and aggressively to control these species, our organization may not have as much difficulty with vegetation management in the future. She said she did not yet have a specific date in mind but suggested we schedule the event between mid-September and the end of October.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was scheduled for Thursday, March 24, 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 7:25 p.m., CST (8:25 p.m., EST).