

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

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

**November 3, 2022**

**MEMBERS**

Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Anita McMillin  
Brian McMillin  
Rhonda Milner  
Deb Mix  
Sharon Smead  
Peg Stalbrink  
Kirt Vanderhagen  
Larry Wickert

**GUEST**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison

**Call to Order by Vice President**

On November 3, 2022, Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:36 pm, CDT (6:36 pm, EDT).

**Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of September 21, 2022**

Without amendment, Brian McMillin moved to approve the September 21, 2022 draft membership meeting minutes. Paul Byer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

**Review and Approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds**

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



**Treasurer’s Report  
November 3, 2022**

**FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)**

<b>Balance forward from 09/21/22</b>		<b>\$68,171.78</b>
<b><u>INCOME</u></b>		
09/23/22	Membership Dues, Merchandise <i>P &amp; R Stalbrink dues, 2 Erie Trail logo shirts</i>	\$100.00
09/26/22	Membership Dues <i>K. Verhagen and M Hollett through PayPal</i>	47.28
09/26/22	Membership Dues <i>R. Staresina through PayPal</i>	23.64
09/27/22	Membership Dues <i>D. Mix through PayPal</i>	23.64
10/04/22	Membership Dues <i>A.Noble</i>	<u>25.00</u>
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 219.56</b>
		<b>\$68,391.34</b>
<b><u>EXPENSES</u></b>		
10/25/22	Check #1124 to Precept Partners <i>Website updates including OSSIS</i>	<u>\$75.00</u>
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$75.00</b>
	<b>ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 11/03/22</b>	<b>\$68,316.34</b>

## RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

### Benches

Blais-Vlaming Bench	For 210/450 site or other	\$350.00
McMillin Bench	For Bass Lake area	350.00

### Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl UR Here)	1,418.54
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	4,205.10
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50

### Northwest or Other Extension

Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #6 (2022)	NW Extension or operations	10,000.00
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	NW Extension or operations	6,000.00
VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	5,000.00

### Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	3,368.42
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	2,518.42
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42

### Miscellaneous

Stalbrink donation	Scholarship or "most needed"	100.00
Brochure Fund	2022 Erie Trail Brochure	<u>700.00</u>

TOTAL RESTRICTED 47,041.40

### FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST

TOTAL IN BANK	\$68,316.34
— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$47,041.40</u>
= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$21,274.94

Kathy expressed appreciation to the persons who renewed their memberships. She said she had just forwarded through Paul the check for printing the Erie Trail brochures, and this check has yet to be processed by First Farmers Bank & Trust.

Rhonda asked if there were questions or comments. Hearing none she asked if there was a motion for approval. Sharon Smead moved to approve the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as submitted. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion and the motion carried.

### Update on New Brochures

Linda Byer said that Bowen Printing Inc. in Plymouth has completed printing 5,000 new Erie Trail brochures as directed by the membership. The cost of printing was \$1,300, which is anticipated to be reflected in the PTC's December financial report. Of this amount, \$700 will be covered by the Brochure Fund, and the remaining \$600 will be taken from Unrestricted Funds. With an expenditure of this amount, the PTC's 501(c)(3) tax exemption is significant.

Linda brought a box of the new brochures to the meeting. She said the brochures are available for distribution in bundles of 100. Linda and Paul have already placed the brochures in the box at the US Highway 35 trailhead and in a new box at the southeast

end of the trail at Starke County Road 700 East. At the close of the evening's meeting, several members took additional copies for distribution.

Development of the new brochures was a major PTC project and required the members to work as a coordinated team. The topic will be revisited at the December meeting to help assure that initial distributions are provided to public and private entities, including notably our generous sponsors.

### **USBR 35 Realignment Final Approval (and Approval as Preferred Route for Great American Rail-Trail)**

Steve said discussion of new brochures provided a neat segue to the next topic. Beneath the map on the inner fold of the brochure is the statement:

*Note some route approvals are pending.*

Representatives from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, which participates in defining the preferred route of the Great American Rail-Trail, included the nine miles of the Erie Trail which existed in May 2019 at the Great American's inception. During the celebration with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources on October 22, 2021 of the opening of the two-mile southeast extension, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy noted it had been added to the preferred route. The full extension is now identified in TrailLink by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy at <https://www.trailink.com/trail-maps/erie-trail/>

*The two-mile extension has now also been made the approved route of US Bike Route 35. A handout documenting the approval was distributed during the meeting which provided as follows:*

### **USBR35 RELOCATION APPROVAL October 26, 2022**

Brandon S. Burgoa, Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, within INDOT's Technical Planning and Programming Section, reported in an October 26, 2022 email that the realignment of US Bike Route 35, as proposed by the Prairie Trails Club, was approved within Starke County. After an INDOT review, final action was taken by Adventure Cycling Association in partnership with AASHTO (the "American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials"). His email noted that Adventure Cycling Association also announced for USBR35 in Indiana a second realignment approval in Marion County. Adventure Cycling has stated in a recent press release:

#### **Indiana**

USBR 35: Sections of USBR 35 have been realigned to move them from roads to extensions of the Erie Trail in Starke County and the Pennsy Trail in Marion County. The route crosses the state from the Michigan border to Louisville, Kentucky, passing through Indianapolis.

On behalf of INDOT, Burgoa offered thanks to the "Prairie Trails Club Inc., as well as other local stakeholders and individual volunteers, for the diligent work in making the USBR 35 realignment a huge success."

He added, “The community’s passion supporting the [southeast two-mile]... Erie Trail Extension and the USBR 35 realignment is a clear testament to the endless possibilities that can be achieved through genuine grassroots organization and passion.”

Notable among the local stakeholders lending support to the relocation are the Board of Commissioners of Starke County and the Starke County Highway Superintendent. In its Memorandum of October 20, 2021, the Board expressed support for “the modification of USBR 35 in Starke County to use the non-motorized Erie Trail from North Judson to Starke County Road 700 East. The modification is harmonious with a Jurisdictional Approval by [the Board] in support of funding to extend the trail, would support public safety, and would be maintained consistent with operation of public motorways in Starke County.”

[Below]... is an updated description for a **SOUTHEAST BOUND** traveler on USBR 35 from the Kankakee River bridge at English Lake and LaPorte County through Starke County to the Tippecanoe River bridge in Pulaski County. A description will be developed for a **NORTHWEST BOUND** traveler. References are made to Adventure Cycling cuesheet turns both northwest and southeast of the realignment. These are made for context and to help with PTC non-motorized trail and connector development.

The Adventure Cycling cuesheet has for several years provided for a crossing of the Kankakee River *southbound* at English Lake on LaPorte County Road 650 West (which becomes Starke County Road 650 West after completing the crossing). Turn left (east) onto Starke County Road 400 South. Turn right (south then becoming southeast) onto English Lake Road. At North Judson turn left onto Arlington Avenue, sharp right onto Mulberry Street and right again onto Sycamore Street. Turn left onto Luken Street then left again onto Main Street.

Southeast from Main Street the Adventure Cycling cuesheet is REALIGNED to a simplified,\* more direct, and non-motorized route that turns right onto the Erie Trail for eleven miles to Starke County Road 700 East. For this eleven miles, county roads are no longer used and several former cuesheet errors are also eliminated. From the southeast terminus of the current Erie Trail, for USBR 35 turn right (south) onto Starke County Road 700 East.

With entry onto Starke County Road 700 East the realignment is completed. Continue south for 0.2 miles to the Starke-Pulaski County Line. With a slight jog\* and a STOP sign at the intersection with Starke County Road 900 South (also known as Pulaski County Road 800 North) continue straight onto Pulaski County Road 200 East. In about one mile cross the Tippecanoe River and turn left (east) onto Pulaski County Road 675 North toward Monterey.

\*The Adventure Cycling cuesheet sometimes identifies minor jogs at road and trail intersections as a pair of turns. This approach is applied at Erie Trail road crossings of Starke County Road 700 South and 800 South. The jog at the Starke-Pulaski County line intersection is identified on the cuesheet as a pair of turns, but the jog is almost unnoticeable.

**Kathy praised the special efforts by Brandon Burgoa at INDOT. She said he joined the October 22, 2021 grand opening of trail extension and has been supportive throughout the USBR35 review process. Steve said he agreed and doubted that we would today have achieved approval for the relocation without Brandon’s assistance.**

## **Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report**

**Kirt Verhagen updated the efforts of the Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup. He said a meeting has been set for November 11 with a representative of the Northern Indiana Railroad and local stakeholders to view onsite the proposed route through North Judson. He said efforts are also underway to obtain a letter of intent from a private landowner to allow extension of the trail immediately northwest of the municipal limits.**

## **Report of Maintenance Workgroup including October 1 Weed Wrangle**

A weed wrangle was held as scheduled to remove invasive species and push woody vegetation from adjacent to and above the asphalt trail from the Bogus Bridge going west. Participants were Linda, Paul, Russ Blais, Rich Vallicelli, Larry Wickert, Kathy, Steve and Kevin Kennedy. Kevin is an active participant with the HVRM as well as on the Nickel Plate Trail.

Paul reported on several options for rehabilitating the deck and underpinnings of the Fell Ditch Bridge. Replacing the plank surface with a concrete surface was an option, but it would be expensive. He offered a rough estimate of \$13,000 for materials alone. Also, delivery of concrete presented logistical challenges and heavy trucks could damage the trail surface. Steve suggested that this option should also be evaluated and approved by a professional engineer because of the additional weight-bearing required by concrete.

Paul said a less costly option would be replacement of the existing wood elements with new and fully treated wood. For simplicity and maintenance he recommended that the current diagonal surface planks be replaced with planks perpendicular to the trail. Paul estimated the cost of materials for this approach might be roughly \$3,700. There would also need to be a significant labor support from the PTC membership. Our liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, Bob Albert, said that this replacement of timbers with timbers would be acceptable to the HVRM.

Linda reflected that either a new concrete surface or replaced timbers would require trail closure while work was in process. Work could be performed in the spring or summer.

With the consensus of the membership, Rhonda requested Paul obtain a cost estimate from a hardware supplier for the timber and other materials needed to rehabilitate the Fell Ditch bridge next spring or summer. The expectation is that during the December meeting a motion would be entertained to authorize purchase of the materials. Also, volunteers would be solicited to assist with labor.

Paul was authorized to inquire whether a local brush hog operator might be interested in contracting to help clear portions of the trail of honeysuckle and similar species. Larry said he could assist with inquiries. Action on this project may be taken in December.

Linda asked whether Buckeye Pipeline had been approached to repair the asphalt it damaged west of the Bogus Bridge during this summer's activities. Kathy responded she had not yet followed up on this need but would do so.

## **Report of Placement of Horse Hitching Rack**

During the June 22, 2022 membership meeting, Sharon recommended using the last \$300, remaining from DNR's Next Level Trails 01-07 grant, to place a horse hitching rack at the southeastern trailhead on Starke County 700 East. Bob Albert said that placing the rack on either side of SC 700 East was acceptable to the HVRM. In June the membership also authorized Sharon to work with Paul and Linda to identify and purchase materials.

Sharon reported that she and Paul erected the hitching post on November 3 in about "two hours, no problems." As the two agreed, Paul subsequently placed eye bolts near the tops of the outside posts to clip on hay bags if a rider wants to give a horse "a bite to eat."



*Above* Horse hitching rack shown installed on November 4. Image by Kathy Lucas

*Left* Paul Byer and Sharon Smead erecting horse hitching rack on November 3. Image by Linda Byer

Placement of the horse hitching rack was the final element of PTC responsibilities under the NLT 01-07 grant.

### **Report of Bass Lake Beach House/Trailhead Project Committee**

Steve said as a representative of the PTC he was invited to participate in a Starke County Committee proposing a grant application to upgrade Bass Lake Beach, including a kiosk and trailhead. The first meeting was held on October 17 in Knox. The core subject was whether the beach house should be torn down and replaced with a new building or whether it should be revitalized. There was also discussion of possible extension north of Bass Lake of Starke County Road 600 East with a bridge over the Yellow River.

Steve said he believed several PTC members probably had interest in upgrading the bath house. Some would probably favor a new building and others revitalizing the existing one. But he doubted the membership would have a consensus on which option was preferable. He asked members for their thoughts. Several expressed the perspective that Steve should stay engaged with the committee and pursue the concept of enhancing connectivity with the Erie Trail and trail systems among state and county park facilities.

Steve said the next committee meeting was set for November 6 at the Bass Lake Beach. He planned to attend.

### **Report of OSSIS Project Celebration**

As requested by the Starke County Community Foundation, the PTC joined in the OSSIS Project Celebration held on October 16. The celebration was coordinated by Jacque

Ryan, Director of Development. Kathy and Deb Mix joined Jacque, Northern Indiana Foundation Director Corrinne Becknell-Lucas, and Marty Lucas, project designer. at a table just east of Main Street on the Erie Trail with information and treats for visitors. This site is in the vicinity of the Mercury signage as the planet closest to the Sun. Steve awaited visitors at the Neptune signage, the planet farthest from the Sun. The Neptune signage is east of the Starke County 800S intersection with the Erie Trail. He offered information and treats as well as doing vegetation control.

Kathy said she was informed by the Community Foundation that it plans to add a model of the Sun near Main Street. Because of the great size of the Sun relative to the planets, this model will indicate scale but likely with only a segment of its circumference. Also, signage for Pluto is expected to be placed on the north side of the two-mile extension of the trail within sight of Starke County Road 700 East. A temporary model with Pluto was displayed near the Main Street Trailhead.



Image by Kathy Lucas

### **Update on PTC Purchase of Laptop**

Pursuant to a PTC discussion in September, Kathy provided a summary of discussions she had at Best Buy in Valparaiso regarding the purchase of a laptop with ownership in the Prairie Trails Club. The laptop would serve a variety of purposes. These include the preparation and retention of financial information, images, mapping, data, grant applications, reconciliations and other important documents. She hoped that when she was outside Indiana or otherwise indisposed, or when convenient to our organization, the laptop would be possessed and managed by another member.

Kathy said she understood cost was an important factor and so sought to identify the elements of a laptop which would be essential to functionality. She considered including Microsoft 365 with Excel but decided instead to try a program that included an alternative to Excel that was less expensive. She also focused on a basic system which would have modest storage and memory. Kathy said she believed that with our sales tax exemption she could purchase a laptop that would cost \$629. If possible she would use the Geek Squad service for which she already has an account.



Deb said that Excel is the system in common usage. Some grant applications require the use of Excel. While the system can sometimes be challenging, it's the language that is spoken and she recommended obtaining Excel. Others concurred.

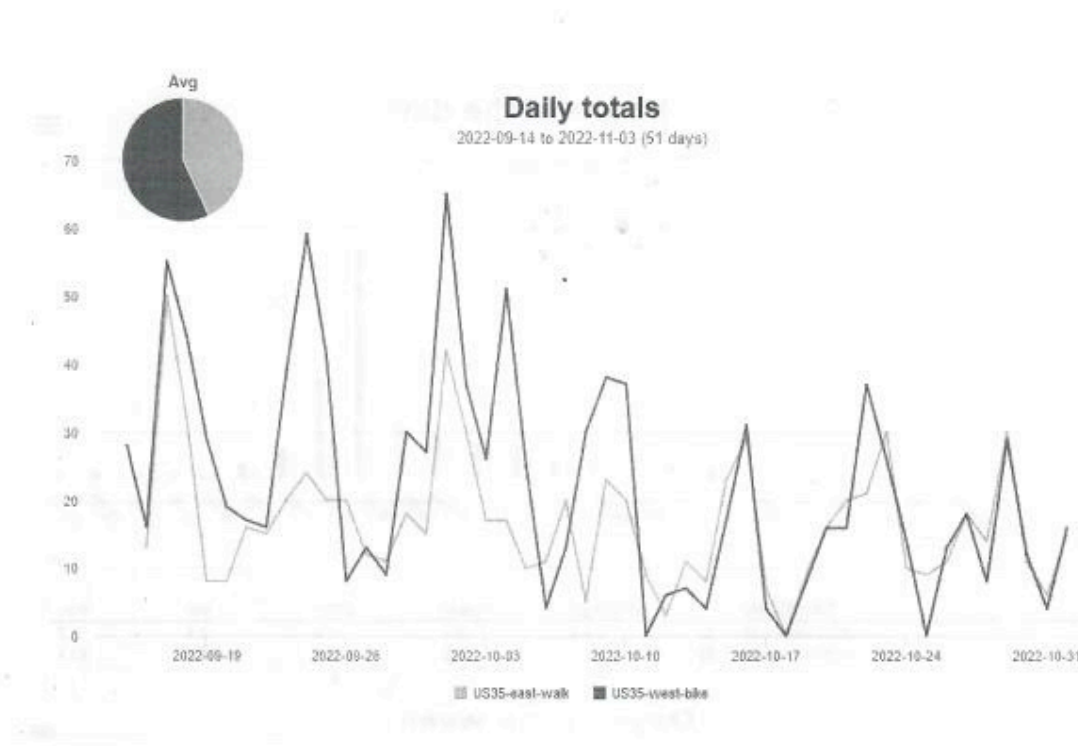
Sharon said the PTC is a vibrant organization and should be looking to the future. Deb added that images are constantly improving and newer images take more bytes than in the past. The consensus of the membership was that the laptop support robust storage and memory.

Paul said that he believed an adequate system was likely to cost at least \$1,000. He moved that Kathy be authorized to purchase a laptop consist with our needs. Sharon seconded the motion and the motion carried.

### Update on Trail Counters

Joan Hardesty has provided invaluable leadership in managing and reporting data from our trail counters. Rhonda thanked her on behalf of the membership.

Joan has kept regular tabs on data collection. She has also monitored battery power and was pleased to inform members that the batteries have not yet needed to be replaced. She distributed graphics for four sets of data from September 14 to November 3 for both counters covering: (1) Hours of the day, (2) Days of the week, (3) Daily totals, and (4) Weekly totals. As an example, set forth below is the summary of (3) Daily totals:



The graphic is designed to show bicycle traffic west of US Highway 35 and pedestrian traffic east of US Highway 35 for the two-mile extension made possible by the NLT 01-07 grant. A person wishing to estimate total traffic on the Erie Trail here might add numbers showing as gray lines (pedestrians) to the darker lines (bicycles). The graph

numbers, and whether pedestrian versus bicycle traffic is being accurately assessed, should be ground-truthed. Observation for a full 24-hour period might be ideal, but most traffic is believed to occur between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm. The intention is to undertake ground-truthing in the spring.

### **Informal Review of HVRM Activities**

Bob Albert reported that the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum had its most successful October on record in terms of ticket sales. Each of the Pumpkin Trains were at or near sellouts. The only remaining train rides this year are the Santa Trains on November 26 and December 3, 10, and 17.

Bob added, “We took the little steam engine out to English Lake and startled kayakers on the river below.”

Bob said Mammoth Solar is planning to drill about ten feet below the Erie Trail at three locations. HVRM gave approval for the activity about two weeks ago. No harm to the trail is expected, but Mammoth Solar would be responsible for repairs if damage were to occur.

### **Confirmation of December 1 Membership Meeting**

The membership meeting set previously was confirmed for Thursday, December 1, 2022 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox). Members may choose to bring holiday treats.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m., CDT (7:45 p.m., EDT).