

# **Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting Prairie Trails Club Inc.**

Videoconference

**October 15, 2020**

## **Board Members**

Diane Blais  
Bruce Fingerhut  
Carolla Heilstedt  
Kathy Lucas (nonvoting)  
Steve Lucas  
Brian McMillin  
Peggy Stalbrink

## **Call to Order and Quorum**

Carolla Heilstedt, President of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC"), called to order a meeting of the Board of Directors ("Board") on October 15, 2020 at 5:32 p.m., CDT (6:32 p.m., EDT). Board members Diane Blais, Bruce Fingerhut, Carolla Heilstedt, Steve Lucas, Brian McMillin and Peggy Stalbrink were present, as well as Kathy Lucas, Treasurer. Carolla recognized a quorum.

## **Approval of Minutes of June 30, 2020 Meeting**

Diane moved to approve draft minutes of the Board meeting that was held on June 30, 2020. Brian seconded the motion. The motion carried.

## **Consideration of Mission Statement**

Steve said on March 19 the Board approved "interim language" for a PTC mission statement "which could be relied upon by a member as our current mission statement". This language was as follows:

**The mission of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. is to help develop, manage and maintain the Erie Trail and approved Connectors in Starke County and to advance the Erie Trail with respect to the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail, and US Bike Route 35.**

The Board was acting on the mistaken belief the PTC did not already have a mission statement. In fact, our listing with the Indiana Secretary of State as a nonprofit entity includes the following:

**Mission: to promote, construct, maintain and develop a network of linear, free access outdoor, public, family friendly, recreational, non-motorized, firearm free terrestrial and aquatic amenities in rural northern Indiana.**

Steve reflected that he believed the mission statement posted with the Secretary of State is problematic because he is unsure how the PTC would enforce the prohibition on firearms, but perhaps more importantly because the PTC assists with Connectors that have share-the-road status (which are motorized) and because we are promoting a trail extension through the Town of North Judson (which is not a rural area).

Steve said PTC member Kathy Carrier expressed concerns, which were shared previously with the Board, that the March 19 interim language was too limiting to PTC functionality. Also, Steve said the Starke County Park Board is seeking to improve opportunities for the use of kayaks and canoes on the Yellow River—a kind of watercourse sometimes referred to as a “blueway”. Steve then offered amendments to the interim language to try and address some of Kathy’s concerns by stating that “providing information” is part of our mission and by making an added reference to the Panhandle Pathway, as well as including in the mission support for blueways.

Bruce said he believed the interim mission statement, and the proposed amended version, are too long. He was involved in a workgroup in which the facilitator said a mission statement should be brief and general. He suggested that the mission statement be framed to support the development of “corridors” and not make reference to particular transAmerican routes.

Carolla said she favored the new reference to the concept of blueways because that is a focus of the Park Board, and Starke County has important recreational opportunities on the Yellow River and the Kankakee River.

Diane said she preferred to retain specific reference to the transAmerican routes. These are an extraordinary opportunity within our community, and reference to them is more vibrant than one that is general to corridors.

Steve said he had also participated in workgroups that developed mission statements. Often they were written as broadly as practical to give flexibility. But in our small non-profit entity, with limited financial and human resources, we need to have sidebars to help us stay focused and effective.

Kathy said she had worked on developing mission statements both within the governmental and the private sectors. Often the statements which resulted were broad, and this result may make sense when an organization produces much of its own financial resources and has a flexible working staff. But the PTC needs to be able to identify to potential donors, and to other worthy non-profits, what the PTC does and what it does not.

Carolla said a viable approach might be to develop a brief mission statement that is clarified with goals and objectives. She said she was willing to prepare draft language to this end. After further discussion, the Board requested Carolla to draft language for its consideration.

## **September 30 Quarterly Report for Southeast Erie Trail Extension**

Carolla reported that on October 9 she provided to Lisa Herber of DNR’s Division of Outdoor Recreation the requisite 2020 Q3 update for the Southeast Erie Trail Extension. She included the PTC’s quarterly update timeline, details, and invoicing for this quarter, as well as a matching

allocation breakdown for payments made to date on the project. She informed Lisa that Jonathon of the Troyer Group had sent additional documentation, including the Environmental Assessment, but before passing that along she would have it reviewed by Steve and Kathy.

Carolla said Jonathon asked for PTC feedback with respect to the plan set. He called attention to the gates and to the pickets on the bridge.

With respect to the gate detailed on the plan set, Paul Byer stated in an October 14 email that he thought “the gates might be a bit wide, as a lot of objects can go through them. Is there [a] place for horse entrance to trail?”

During the Board meeting, Bruce reflected he measured gate openings in response to Jonathon’s inquiry. One opening was 38” wide, but he believed the original width was narrowed because the gate now has a slight lean. Typical openings were 42” to 44” wide, and he thought these widths were appropriate. Carolla said her understanding was that the minimum width for ADA accessibility was about 32” so 42” to 44” were seemingly compliant.

Kathy reflected that the gates designed by the Troyer Group have locks. Board members agreed that unauthorized entry to the trail was sometimes a nuisance but had not been a large problem on the existing trail. There was consensus that gates should not be locked and should be made easily openable for access by emergency vehicles.

With respect to the pickets, Carolla recommended the horizontal pickets. She believed they may be more durable and more easily maintained. Steve noted that Jonathon also reported the vertical pickets would be more expensive. In his email, Paul reflected “The horizontal railing looks good. [It’s] more prone to graffiti but I think less likely to be pushed out. From what I see, [it] looks good.”

In summary, the membership consensus was as follows:

- (1)The gates should be unlocked, and readily openable for access by emergency vehicles, with a designed closed width of approximately 42” to 44”.
- (2)Horizontal pickets should be used for the bridge.
- (3)Reasonable access to the trail should be provided for riders on horseback.

Steve said on January 3, the PTC received an Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment from the DNR that indicated our project would require formal DNR approval under the Flood Control Act for work on the Bartee Ditch bridge. Approval is ordinarily in the form of a written permit. Jonathon reported that Troyer Group engineers were recently able to proceed, on a project similar to ours, on the basis of an “approval letter” rather than a formal permit. If we can obviate the need for a written permit, there can be savings of the \$200 permit fee, and perhaps shortening the approval turnaround. But it’s important the PTC communicate to DNR that we intend to comply with our grant commitments. He recommended that the Board delegate to Carolla authority to determine the most-effective approach for Flood Control Act compliance.

Diane moved that the Board approve the membership consensus as to the gates, pickets, and access on horseback, as well as to delegate to Carolla authority to address compliance with the Flood Control Act at the Bartee Ditch bridge. Peggy seconded the motion. The motion carried.

## **Update on Bike Racks Initiative**

On October 9, a ribbon-cutting ceremony acknowledged placement at Norwayne Field in North Judson of the first bike rack completed with funding from the RoundUp Program at Kankakee Valley REMC. Amanda Steeb, Communications/Marketing Director for KVREMC, represented her organization and delivered a check for \$1,500 to advance the grant. The bike rack was constructed by students at the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”). Jerry Gurrado was in attendance as Executive Director of SCILL and was accompanied by instructor Rachel Moore. Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of North Judson, represented the park and municipality. Deb Mix represented Moving Starke County Forward. Larry Wickert and Steve represented the PTC.



Image by Peggy Bohac

A few minutes before the celebration, Paul and Steve placed a sign onsite that acknowledged donors and is the first wayfinding sign in Starke County for the Great American Rail-Trail. The sign is on the reverse side of the one depicted in the image.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:24 p.m., CDT (6:24 p.m., EDT).