

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

**BLPOA Community Center
6996 South S.R. 10
Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana**

October 29, 2020

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Peggy Stalbrink
Rich Stalbrink
Larry Wickert

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison

Call to Order by President

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at 6:06 pm, CDT (7:06 pm, EDT) on October 29, 2020 in the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, Knox, Indiana.

Review and Approval of September 24, 2020 Minutes (as Amended)

Paul Byer moved to approve the draft minutes of the September 24 meeting with the phrase "at www.carruthstudio.com or" deleted from the discussion of the Proposal for Fundraiser. The motion was seconded by Diane Blais. The motion carried.

Election of Members to Board of Directors

Carolla reported three of the seven positions on the Board of Directors are scheduled for election. The Board members serve two years on staggered terms. She said the three positions up for election are currently held by Diane Blais, Bruce Fingerhut and Peggy Stalbrink. Carolla indicated the three incumbents have all expressed a willingness to continue in the positions.

Brian McMillin moved that the members re-elect Diane, Bruce and Peggy to the Board and that the nominations be closed. Rhonda Milner seconded the motion. The motion carried and Carolla thanked the three nominees for their continuing service.

Report of Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup

Carolla reported that the PTC is taking the necessary steps through the Board, the Troyer Group and the DNR for the preparation of design plans and to seek regulatory approvals. Lisa Herber reminded us that her preference is to have three inches of asphalt over the compacted aggregate. Carolla said we want to be responsive to DNR preferences and will attempt to accommodate them, but the Troyer Group informed us that the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (“AASHTO”) design guidance authorizes two inches, and two inches were placed through DNR for the first three miles of the Erie Trail from North Judson. If our budget proves sufficient when construction bids are let, the PTC would gladly support the placement of three inches. But we intend to reserve the ability to place two inches if bids are too costly for three inches. She said Jonathon Geels, our primary contact at the Troyer Group, has met with the Starke County Surveyor, Bill Crase, regarding both the regulatory issues (most particularly resulting from the bridge over Bartee Ditch) and the bidding issues. From these discussions, Jonathon is hopeful we can be successful on both fronts.

Report of Norwayne Field Bike Rack and Signage Initiative

Carolla reported that 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 Kankakee Valley REMC RoundUp Program. Amanda Steeb, Communications/Marketing Director for KVREMC, represented her group and delivered a \$1,500 check to advance the grant. The bike rack was built by Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”) students. Jerry Gurrado attended as Executive Director of SCILL and was joined by instructor Rachel Moore. Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of North Judson, represented the Park Department and Town. Deb Mix represented Moving Starke County Forward and Purdue Extension. Larry Wickert helped cut the ribbon and with Steve represented the PTC.



Earlier on the morning of October 9, Paul erected a new sign identifying contributors to the bike rack and providing direction to the Erie Trail and the Great American Rail-Trail (the “GART”). The new sign was constructed by OTEs and was financed through the Hardesty Memorial Endowment Fund. Steve said the new sign is on the park side of an existing PTC way-finding sign identifying the Erie Trail, the American Discovery Trail, and US BR 35. The new sign is the first way-finding sign in Starke County for the GART, a transAmerican route announced after the original sign was placed. Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Andrew Rowe expressed the Town’s willingness to place additional signs to reference the Great American Rail-Trail.

Deb Mix said she spoke with Amanda Steeb at the ceremony to outline PTC aspirations for additional bike racks. She told Steeb the PTC hopes that ten racks will ultimately be built, with the next two slated for placement on the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail now in process. Whether SCILL will be able to deliver ten benches is dependent on how far we can stretch the funding. Deb reflected that Amanda responded enthusiastically and communicated the satisfaction of the RoundUp board. Larry said the ability of SCILL students to move forward depends on classes being in session in Knox. With the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes may be periodically and are currently suspended. As a result, progress with the construction of bike racks will necessarily be slowed.

Report of October 15 Facebook and Website Workgroup Meeting

On October 15, Carolla, Linda, Kathy and Steve participated virtually in the initial meeting of the Facebook and Website Workgroup Meeting. Carolla demonstrated a website that seemed a good model for a revamped PTC website. The model’s homepage was clean and uncluttered. Linda said the mobile version of our current website is difficult to use, and that is something which needs to be addressed. A core element of the model was a "Join" link--standing alone at the top of the page.

A second workgroup meeting was scheduled virtually for November 4 when we will also join Stephen Antisdell, a representative of our webmaster, Precept Partners. Following the first meeting, Stephen urged that if we “have a general outline of the discussion points from the Workgroup you could share in advance of our call that would be great.”

This workgroup is expected to cover a broad spectrum of issues. Additional members of the PTC are encouraged to join the workgroup.

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

Kathy provided the Treasurer’s Report as set forth on the next page and expressed her appreciation to KVREMC RoundUp for its \$1,500 contribution to the bike rack project. She thanked Linda, Paul, and Deb for renewing their annual memberships. Kathy said that just before the meeting, Russ and Diane made a contribution to become lifetime members. Their generous \$500 check will be reflected in the Treasurer’s Report offered at the next meeting.



**Treasurer's Report
October 29, 2020**

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

Balance forward from 9/24/20 **\$71,067.89**

INCOME

10/06/20 Deposit 48.25
Dues: Paul & Linda Byer

10/13/20 Deposit 1,500.00
KVREMC Balance of Bike Rack Grant

10/28/20 Deposit 23.97
Dues: Deb Mix

Total Income **1,572.22**

EXPENSES

10/9/20: Check #1066 to OTES (55.00)
Wayfinding/appreciation sign at Norwayne Field

Total Expenses **55.00**

Ending FFBT balance as of 10/29/20 **\$72,585.11**

/s/Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

Kathy reported upon restricted grants and donations, with unrestricted funds as outlined below. She reflected that her report does not address what is sometimes call “soft match” for items such as bike racks, benches, or dedicated real estate.

RESTRICTED GRANTS and DONATIONS

Luminous Fund Grant 2 (2018)	Signage BLS (incl. "You are Here").	\$4,124.94
Luminous Fund Grant 3 (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	2,780.00
Luminous Fund Grant 4 (2020)	Northwest extension	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Historic Signage (-\$55 for GART Norwayne Field sign)	7,480.25
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	2,780.00
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant.	2,778.00
Marshall County Horse Association Bench	Matching NLT Grant	350.00
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	2,779.00
Lucas lake house guests' donation	Future Vision/website	700.00
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st phase for trail extension	33,225.00
Mitchel-Kane.	Northwest extension	2,000.00
Stalbrink donation	Scholarship (or "most needed use").	100.00
Blais/Vlaming bench	Trail head @ 450/210	350.00
McMillin bench	Trail head @ 450/210	350.00
KVREMC bike rack	Balance of grant award	1,500.00 (Rec 10/9/20)
	Total Restricted	66,297.19

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS	TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)	\$72,585.11	\$66,297.19	\$6,287.92

As of October 29, 2020 /s/ Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

Diane moved to approve approve the treasurer’s report, including the report of restricted funds from grants and donations, as well as unrestricted funds. Peggy seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Completion of Erie Trail Gate Repairs at County Road 100 West

On October 19, Bruce completed repairs to the damaged gate on the northeast quadrant of the intersection of the Erie Trail and Starke County Road 100 West. Repairs required purchase and replacement of the horizontal timber section and resetting with new steel rods. The gate on the southeast quadrant suffered damage during the same June 2019 incident, but the damage was not as severe. Bruce and Jeff Mencl previously repaired the gate on the southeast quadrant. Steve said Bruce deserved kudos for an effort that required both ingenuity and expertise. Bruce said merely that the timbers were large and heavy.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Update on In-Scale Model of Our Solar System Initiative

Steve said this discussion warranted a brief history. During the April 2019 membership meeting, the PTC was informed the Constellation of Starke would apply to the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (commonly referred to as “OCRA”) to fund an “In-Scale Model of Our Solar System” along the Erie Trail, starting with the Sun at the Main Street trailhead and ending west of US 35. In July, the Constellation of Starke requested the PTC to consider a resolution in support of the application. In August 2019, membership approved a supportive resolution and further urged that the Constellation of Starke

“consider placement of the Sun rendering northwest of Main Street, and within the Town of North Judson, to form a hub that would connect the Erie Trail, Norwayne Field, and a new nonmotorized trail northwest toward English Lake.” The Constellation of Starke was one of four finalists for an OCRA award, and it expects to receive \$330,000 as a finalist, but funding was not included to support the scale model solar system project.

Starke County Community Foundation Director of Development, Jessica Martinović, then included the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System concept as part of a new application—this time to the Lilly Endowment’s GIFT VII program. This effort by Jessica and the Community Foundation resulted in the award of a \$100,000 Community Leadership Grant. The money will be used to promote a number of arts and cultural opportunities being pursued by the Foundation and the Constellation of Starke. Included among these is \$25,000 dedicated to the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System.

Jessica formed a workgroup to help develop and coordinate the in-scale model using the Lilly Endowment funding. She led the initial workgroup meeting by teleconference on October 21 with Bob Aloï, Marty Lucas, Mike Jachum and Steve. A second meeting is set for December 2. An early draft would place the Sun model at North Judson with the planets in-scale both in terms of distances and size. The most distant plant, Neptune, would be about 1/2 mile west of US 35. Consideration is being given to including Pluto just west of CR 700 East—also in scale as to size and distance.

Carolla reflected that the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System would be an attractive and informative addition to the Erie Trail. She envisioned school children visiting sites in the exhibit and then sharing the experience with parents. Kathy noted that the Sun and all the planets between it and Jupiter would be placed west of the Bogus Run bridge. Bob Albert, the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”) liaison to the PTC, said his Board has given its blessing to the project and looks forward to implementation.

Concepts for Murals in Starke County and on the Erie Trails

Larry said the same Lilly Endowment Grant that is supporting the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System is also supporting the development of murals in Starke County. Anthony Brooks has completed murals in North Judson and San Pierre, and the Constellation of Starke is seeking locations for at least four more. The hope is to attract visiting artists to advance aspirations of the Constellation of Starke Creatives’ Network.

Larry added that Kathy and Steve last winter drove Anthony Brooks to the Erie Trail sites of the former creamery near Main Street and the signal bungalow near County Road 200 East. He said he spoke with Anthony a few weeks ago about the possibility of doing a mural at one of these sites but has not received a follow up. “I don’t know where that stands.”

Kathy said in late August Paul repaired the face and corners of the signal bungalow where it fronts the trail and the bench underwritten by Rich and Peggy Stalbrink. With the completion of these repairs, the bungalow now offers a relatively smooth surface for a mural. Paul is shown in the image on the following page as he begins repairs.



Image by Linda Byer

Bob said the HVRM is supportive of a mural at either the creamery or signal bungalow, but he believes the latter would likely be easier to develop. Russ suggested an approach would be to encourage local high school students to develop a concept by offering a modest cash prize for the one chosen. Referenced as a potential contact was Heartland Artist Gallery in Plymouth. Larry said that the Constellation of Starke Creatives' Network would coordinate the effort, and Jacque Ryan was "kind of in charge". Kathy responded that Jacque told her she "hoped to attend tonight's meeting" but was unable. Jacque said she would call Kathy for an update on PTC actions. Larry suggested Kathy also talk to Jacque about the murals project, and Kathy responded that she would.

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob offered highlights of recent HVRM activities. "A lot of things have been happening." Indiana state officials in late September announced the recipients of the Arts, Cultural and Destination Marketing Organization Grant. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, HVRM had been unable to run trains for months, but received \$12,900 to help pay for things like utilities and insurance, as well as taking the extra precautions needed now that trains are running again. Trains were seriously vandalized with broken windows, but a Facebook funding initiative "went viral" and provided \$7,000 for repairs. Bob believes this amount may be sufficient. Starke County Tourism sponsored a Bloomers Run from North Judson on October 17, with some of the proceeds targeted for the HVRM. Bob was the engineer on C&O Steam Engine 2789 for a rare trip from the train yard to the park at the intersection of the Erie Trail and Indiana Highway 10.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Bob said that with most or all at full capacity, “This weekend we’ll run four trains.”

Report of October 15 Board of Directors Meeting

Carolla said the Board considered but deferred action on preparation of a revised PTC mission statement. She will prepare another draft for further discussion.

She said the Board reviewed the October 9, 2020 Q3 update she sent to Lisa Herber of DNR’s Division of Outdoor Recreation for the Southeast Erie Trail Extension. Carolla then provided a current timeline, details, and an allocation breakdown for payments made on the project. She informed Lisa that Jonathon Geels had shared the draft Environmental Assessment, but she would have Steve and Kathy review it before providing to DNR. This review has since been completed.

In response to a request for comment by Jonathon regarding design specs, the Board determined:

- (1) The gates should be unlocked, and readily openable for access by emergency vehicles, with a 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.**

The Board urged the Troyer Group seek timely approval of all DNR permits associated with the crossing of Bartee Ditch, including a Flood Control Act permit. Jonathon believes an “approval letter” might be obtained in lieu of a formal permit. Carolla was

delegated authority to coordinate with Jonathon in pursuit of an approval letter. Doing so may save time and would save \$200 otherwise required to file a permit application.

The Board also received a Report of the Norwayne Field Bike Rack and Signage Initiative similar to the report provided to the membership earlier this evening.

During the membership meeting, Russ expressed support for continuing the wooden gates as the design to be used on the existing trail. He said that the existing gates were not without challenges but seemed to be holding up reasonably well. He liked the idea of visual continuity between the new and existing portions of the trail. When the Troyer Group began to develop design elements, it was asked to address problems associated with decay experienced on some of the existing gates—probably the result of carpenter ants. Paul said he understood the new design was for metal gates, and that new EPA requirements make the preservation of wooden structures even more difficult than when the existing gates were constructed. Carolla said the PTC would consult with Jonathon with respect to the pros-and-cons of gate design before the Troyer Group tenders plans for DNR approval.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership meeting was scheduled for January 11, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) by videoconference. Carolla will later distribute instructions for virtual participation through Google Meet.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m., CDT (8:18 p.m., EDT).