

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

Videoconference

January 11, 2021

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Joan Hardesty
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Deb Mix
Max Rehlander
Kirt Verhagen

Mandi Glanz
Kathy Norem

Call to Order by President and Introductions

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at 5:35 pm, CST (6:35 pm, EST) by videoconference on January 21, 2021. Those in attendance introduced themselves or were introduced by Carolla.

Review and Approval of October 29, 2020 Minutes

Deb Mix moved to approve draft October 29, 2020 meeting minutes distributed by the Secretary earlier in the day. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Report of Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup

Carolla addressed extension of the Erie Trail at and southeast of US Highway 35 to Starke County Road 700 East. She said we received final construction plans from our consultant, the Troyer Group, through Jonathon Geels, and these were under review by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. She said INDOT recommended piano-key style markings for the US 35 crossing. Members of the workgroup have reached out to adjoining landowners who have expressed interest and to representatives of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”) regarding a notice by the DNR to potentially affected landowners regarding rehabilitation of the bridge over Bartee Ditch. Carolla said she spoke with Bob Albert, HVRM Board Member and Liaison to the PTC, with respect the crossing and more generally the construction plans. She added that we are awaiting state agency action on pending environmental permit applications.

Carolla said earlier in the day Jonathon passed along a listing of contractors that have been qualified by Starke County to implement the construction phase of the project. Bruce Fingerhut expressed concern most of the listed persons are primarily farmers or landscapers, and he doubted they would offer bids. Max Rehlander and Kathy Norem suggested additional possibilities for contractors, and Carolla said she would follow up with a note to Rik Ritzler, Starke County Highway Superintendent. The expectation is that other than for the crossing of US 35, INDOT approval of a contractor is unneeded.

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

Kathy Lucas provided the Treasurer’s Report with Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. She thanked Russ and Diane Blais for becoming lifetime members. Their \$500 contribution is very helpful because it is unrestricted and may be used to serve any PTC need. She reflected on the small but painless contribution through Amazon Smile and noted the report identifies how to apply this funding source. She thanked Moving Starke County Forward for reimbursing the OTES cost of new signage at the Norwayne Field bike rack. Kathy thanked Randall and LuAnn Glass for new memberships and Peggy Stalbrink for her donation. Peggy intended to prepare materials for the Christmas sale at Chesapeake Run Golf Course, but the event was cancelled with the COVID-19 pandemic. The two billings this month are to the Troyer Group for the southeast trail extension and to Precept Partners to assist with the website upgrade. The Treasurer’s Report follows:



Treasurer’s Report
January 11, 2021

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)	
Balance forward from 10/29/20	\$72,585.11
INCOME	
11/02/20 Deposit Lifetime Membership: Russ & Diane Blais	500.00
11/12/20 Amazon Smile donation* Percentage reward for purchases made	10.24
11/24/20 Deposit Half of bike rack sign from Moving Starke Co. Fwd	55.00
11/24/20 Deposit Membership: Randall & LuAnn Glass	50.00
1/08/21 Deposit Peggy Stalbrink craft sale donation	30.00
Total Income	645.24
EXPENSES	
1/05/21 Check #1069 to Troyer Group Payment #7, Invoice No. 15798	(20,791.25)
1/08/21 Check #1068 to Precept Partners	(125.00)
Total Expenses	(20,916.25)
Ending FFBT balance as of 1/11/21	\$52,314.10

/s/Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

*NOTE: It's easy to choose PTC to receive a small portion of your purchases, which in this time of COVID-19 could add up for our club. From the Amazon Smile page, just type in "Prairie Trails Club Inc." and it will become your designated charity. This costs you nothing additional, works with Amazon Prime membership, and to date I have received no unwanted mail or solicitations as a result of exercising this option. (Of course, there are many other worthy charities that can be designated in the same manner.)

Kathy then outlined the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. She noted that 80% of funding for work by Troyer Group was allocated to the Next Level Trails grant and our 20% local share was divided in equal 1/4 shares among the Luminous Fund, the Hardesty Memorial Fund, the Indiana Greenways Foundation and the PTC participation. Credit from DNR in NLT-1-07 for what is often referred to as the “soft match” has not yet been included. The Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds addressing all projects is set forth in more detail below:

RESTRICTED GRANTS/DONATIONS

Luminous Fund Grant 2 (2018)	Signage BLS (incl. “You are Here”)	4,124.94
Luminous Fund Grant 3 (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	1,740.44 (less 1,039.56 Troyer Pmt. #7)
Luminous Fund Grant 4 (2020)	Northwest extension	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Hist. ET Signage	7,480.25
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	1,740.44 (less 1,039.56 Troyer Pmt.#7)
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant	1,738.43 (less 1,039.57 Troyer Pmt. #7)
Marshall County Horse Ass’n	Bench (NLT Grant-Location TBD)	350.00
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	1,379.44 (less 1,039.56 Troyer Pmt. #7)
Lucas lakehouse guests	Future Vision/website update	700.00
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st Installment for trail extension.	16,592.00 (less 16,633.00 Troyer Pmt. #7)
Mitchel-Kane	Northwest extension	2,000.00
Stalbrink donation	Scholarship (or “most needed use”)	100.00
Blais/Vlaming	Bench for trailhead @ 450/210	350.00
McMillin	Bench for trailhead @ 450/210	350.00
KVREMC	Bike Racks	1,500.00
	Total Restricted	45,505.94

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS	TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
	\$52,314.10	\$45,505.94	\$6,808.16

As of January 11, 2021 /s/ Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

Bruce moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report with the PTC Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds, including the match allocations. Diane seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Report of November 4, 2020 Facebook and Website Workgroup Meeting

Carolla reported on the second workgroup meeting held virtually on November 4 when our members were joined by Stephen Antisdell, a representative of webmaster, Precept Partners. At Stephen Antisdell’s suggestion, we provided a general outline of discussion points in advance of the meeting. She said workgroup members have begun collecting new images to use in the updated website. Carolla added that she has started assembly of the website structure using Wix.com Ltd., a software company, providing cloud-based web development services. She said she has experience in the application of Wix which allows users to create HTML5 websites and mobile sites through the use of online drag and drop tools. During the meeting, she demonstrated the first structural elements of the new website. She said currently the workgroup included Kathy Lucas, Linda Byer, Steve Lucas and herself, but additional PTC members are encouraged to join.

Update on In-Scale Model of Our Solar System Initiative

Steve said on December 2, 2020, Starke County Community Foundation Development Director, Jessica Martinović, chaired the second meeting of a workgroup for the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System being funded by the Lilly Endowment's GIFT VII program. During the meeting, Bob Aloï provided preliminary plans for the design and location of the planets along the Erie Trail. Steve said in the mix for consideration is the inclusion of Pluto, which would be on the two-mile trail extension now in development, and just west of County Road 700 East. If Pluto is to be included, additional funding may be needed. As with the planets, Pluto would be in scale as to size and distance from the Sun. The third meeting for the workgroup is set for January 21

Kirt Verhagen asked Steve where the Sun would be located for the In-Scale Model. He responded that was a good question and one the workgroup is pondering. The Sun would be somewhere near the trailhead at Main Street, North Judson, but "as you're aware," there are already improvements immediately east of Main Street. A possibility is beginning a hundred feet east near the site of the former creamery, or perhaps a second possibility would be to place the Sun west Main Street. "That would require HVRM to concur." Bruce suggested it might make sense to place the Sun west of Main Street and to coordinate the location to maximize exposure to the Railroad Museum. Kirt agreed. Steve said he would pass to the workgroup on January 21 thoughts the PTC membership might have on placement of the Sun or otherwise concerning the project.

Kirt asked how large the Sun image would be. Steve responded that the workgroup is anticipating only a segment of the Sun would be depicted—perhaps an identified part of the circumference—because of its large size as compared to the planets. Jupiter might also present challenges.

Report of Virtual Discussion with Great American Rail-Trail Representatives

Steve said on January 5, he participated in a virtual meeting with representatives of the Great American Rail-Trail concerning our advancement with the Erie Trail—both to the southeast and to the northwest. They expressed enthusiasm for our two-mile extension now underway and said they were interested in attending our ribbon cutting ceremony when the project is completed. They also thanked us for referencing the Great American Rail-Trail in last year's trail brochures.

Steve added we discussed developments with respect to a North Judson Redevelopment Commission initiative to sell the railway, or part of it, northwest of town. A representative of the Great American Rail-Trail said he has spoken with Redevelopment Commission Attorney, Justin Schramm, to underline the importance of the rail corridor for extension of the trail toward English Lake.

As reported by WKVI Radio, the Redevelopment Commission last week opened the three bids received for the railroad's purchase. The highest bid was from Midwest & Bluegrass Rail which offered \$2.725 million for the entire 33-mile route. The other two bids were

only for the portion of the route in LaPorte and Porter Counties northwest of English Lake. Co-Alliance offered \$2.3 million and Columbia Rail just over \$1.6 million. Also, WKVI reported the Redevelopment Commission can look at the companies' future plans for the rail line, how they operated railroads historically, and any existing relationships with entities involved with the railroad corridor. The Redevelopment Commission is scheduled to this evening discuss the three bids in an Executive Session.

Steve said he informally passed along to North Judson the PTC's interest in providing input regarding this important initiative. The Great American Rail-Trail representatives offered us their continuing support.

Report of Starke County Park Board Yellow River Kayak Workgroup

Kathy Norem was invited to report on a Starke County Park Board initiative to obtain a grant on a one-to-one match with the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (“IDDC”) for the development of five Yellow River launch sites. Local match for the grant was provided through the Starke County Park Board, the Hardesty Memorial Fund, and the Northern Indiana Community Foundation. Kathy said Mary Perren, Constellation of Starke Program Facilitator, is chairing a workgroup to pursue the grant. Mary on Friday hand-delivered the grant application in Indianapolis. Kathy added, “Mary has done a wonderful job.

Steve said he was asked to represent the PTC in the Yellow River Kayak Workgroup. The Board of Directors of the Prairie Trails Club tendered a letter of support for the project and communicated with the Indiana Greenways Foundation which provided its own letter of support. The effort in Starke County would augment a similar initiative upstream in Marshall County.

Steve said Mary Perren emailed him that she received a confirmation of filing from the IDDC “earlier today”. Mary added that finalists will be announced February 15, and if the Yellow River Kayak project is among them, Starke would need to give a presentation in March, with awards to be announced soon thereafter. The total project cost is \$140,000. Starke County has \$70,000 in local commitments and is seeking a \$70,000 match from the IDDC. This initiative is for Phase 1 of the project, and additional funding would be sought to continue making improvements such as ADA accessibility. Proposed launch sites are County Road 1100 E, Indiana Highway 23, County Road 700 E, Wythogan Park in Knox, and English Lake. The Park Board is meeting tomorrow night and will consider preparing permit applications to keep the project on schedule. Steve said Mary provided a copy of the final grant application to share with anyone interested.

Kathy Lucas noted that the Indiana Greenways Foundation expressed a willingness to facilitate quick review of a request for additional funding to support the IDDC application. The Greenways Foundation supports blueway projects on navigable waters such as the Yellow River, as well as greenway projects such as the Erie Trail. Ultimately, though, Mary expressed the workgroup’s appreciation for support by the Greenways Foundation, but said it had sufficient funding match for the current project. A deep expression of gratitude was passed along to the Foundation.

Proposal for Recognition of Early Trail History and Pioneer Proponents

Kathy Lucas said there is growing interest in developing signage, a website history, or both to memorialize the development of the Erie Trail. She noted Bruce, Rhonda Milner, Brian McMillin, Anita McMillin, Marty Lucas, and Corinne Becknell Lucas were essential in advancing the trail, and there are likely others in Starke County or at the Indiana DNR who deserve recognition. She said she has begun assembling images to this end.

Bruce spoke of early efforts, including work on the bridge over Bogus Run. He also spoke of an early project for gravel west of Main Street which was funded by a \$4,400 grant from the Northern Indiana Community Foundation. Another important success was when Rhonda saved what is now the trailhead bordered by Indiana Highway 10 and Starke County 250 East. Bruce agreed a historical initiative was worthy and perhaps could be implemented simultaneously with a ribbon cutting for two-mile extension of the Erie Trail now in progress.

SICIM and the Starke-Pulaski Native Plants Initiative

Carolla thanked Mandi Glanz for attending and invited her to address the members. Mandi is the regional specialist for Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management (“SICIM”) in Northwest Indiana who in 2020 replaced Erica Luchik. Mandi said part of SICIM’s mission is to assist landowners with the development of a plan to control invasive plant species. She said Erica had said good things about the work of the PTC and understands that our organization scheduled workdays that are directed to invasive species control. Mandi also outlined activities that can be pursued through the Indiana Weed Wrangle Contest, with the current competition taking place between September 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. She referenced the Starke-Pulaski Native Plants Initiative which is an effort in Starke County and Pulaski County to promote native plant species and to suppress invasive species.

Carolla thanked Mandi for attending and reflected that the PTC is privileged to have as members Linda Byer, who is a biologist, and her husband, Paul Byer, who is a licensed herbicide applicator. She said the control of invasive species along the Erie Trail was a huge task, and she looked forward to the possibility of working with SICIM in the future.

Maintenance Workgroup

Paul referenced repairs he has performed to the decks of the bridges over Bogus Run and Fell Ditch. He spoke to more fundamental work that is needed, particularly on the north side of the Bogus Run bridge. Paul said the 2 x 12 planks are costly to replace, and he urged that we prospectively use 2 x 8 planks. Diagonal planks are nice to look at but also cause challenges for maintenance. He suggested perpendicular might be more practical, and it was agreed the Troyer Group should be informed.

Carolla suggested scheduling a workday to assist Paul with making the needed bridge work. Paul responded that might be a good approach, but the weather needs to improve

before going forward. Kathy Lucas asked if Paul would mind obtaining estimates for needed lumber and other materials so we can revisit the subject at the next meeting. Paul said he would do so.

Kathy thanked Paul and Bruce for floating and removing a large TV from Bogus Run near the bridge. She said it was a remarkable undertaking.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 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 6:44 p.m., CDT (7:44 p.m., EDT).