

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

Shelterhouse #2, North Judson Town Park

September 24, 2020

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Paul Byer
Linda Byer
Joan Hardesty
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Max Rehlander

GUESTS

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison
John Bawcum, Friends of Panhandle Pathway

Call to Order by President and Introductions

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at 5:33 pm, CDT (6:33 pm, EDT) on September 24, 2020 in the North Judson Town Park. The attendees introduced themselves.

Review and Approval of July 27, 2020 Membership Meeting Minutes

Paul Byer moved to approve the draft minutes without amendments as the final minutes of the August 27, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Joan Hardesty. The motion carried.

Report of Workgroup for Southeast Trail Extension

Carolla reported design work is advancing for the southeast extension of the Erie Trail. On September 14, Jonathon Geels of the Troyer Group wrote that the design phase is 69% completed, and the PTC is on schedule to meet timeline obligations for the DNR grant. The Troyer Group is reviewing designs with the Starke County Planning Commission for zoning compliance. The IDEM rule 327 IAC 15-5 (commonly known as “Rule 5”) exhibits are being prepared for the environmental assessment and drainage plans for construction documents. The Troyer Group is approaching completion of the red flag investigation for hazardous materials, historic and archaeology confirmations, and potential endangered species impacts.

Jonathon reported that following an August site visit, structural design calculations and details required for the Bartee Ditch bridge are in process, Details would be reflected in the final construction plan. Department of Natural Resources feedback was incorporated in the plans, including trail section depth, connections, bench locations, and bike parking

locations. He indicated the Troyer Group was working with INDOT for final approval of crossing permit coordination, including online forms and plan information.

Jonathon reported on September 18 that he met earlier in the day with Starke County Surveyor, Bill Crase. He said Bill thought our proposal for drainage and erosion control was sufficient to meet his expectations. Jonathon is sending plans and specifications to Bill's office, with Rule 5 documents, for Starke County approval. Once County approval is obtained, we will send documentation to the State for review and approval.

Jonathon said he and Bill Crase also discussed bidding strategy. Bill is going to send him the approved Starke County bidder list for companies which are licensed and bonded. "As we go through that, we are going to strategize ways to reduce construction costs."

Also on September 18, Jonathon acknowledged receipt of the PTC direction, as included in the August 27 meeting minutes, for the placement of benches and bike racks. The Troyer Group will "have the bench placements and bike rack locations updated on the plans on our upcoming review plans" consistent with this direction.

Steve Lucas said we are approaching the conclusion of the design phase for our project. Making changes is still possible, but once DNR approves the final design, it will become markedly more difficult. If a member or other interested person believes we are not on track for an aspect of design, please let us know as soon as possible.

Max Rehlander said he has been monitoring progress and believes it to be consistent with his training and experience for this kind of project. He added that progress is being made.

No one in attendance offered changes or sought clarification. Carolla concluded by saying there would be regular updates on progress or challenges. She is also set to provide a quarterly report to the DNR for the period ending September 30.

Report of September 15 Starke County Park Board Meeting

At Larry Wickert's suggestion, Kathy and Steve attended the September 15 meeting of the Starke County Park Board on behalf of the PTC. The Starke County Parks Department is developing a new website that will include an overview of the Constellation of Starke and meeting minutes from the Board's inception. The website will feature the Starke County Forest, the Bass Lake Beach & Campground, Koontz Lake, and the Starke County Memorial Plaza now in development on the Courthouse lawn.

Todd Flanigan and Bob Barcus spoke on behalf of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (the "HVRM") and said they were looking forward to a new era of cooperation to advance the HVRM and other local not-for-profits such as the PTC. Kathy applauded HVRM's efforts and agreed that the HVRM, the PTC, and Starke County will all be served by cooperation.

In August, the Park Board employed Mark Wilson of Jones Petrie Rafinski for a feasibility study with respect to improved access for kayaking and canoeing on the Yellow River in Starke County. The firm made its preliminary report to the Park Board, indicating that new or improved access sites are under consideration in Knox and upstream to Marshall County. There was also discussion of DNR's Yellow River access site at English Lake, just a few feet upstream from confluence with the Kankakee River. Bob Barcus said English Lake was a good illustration of how cooperation among the HVRM, the PTC, and Starke

County can be mutually supportive. A railroad bridge at English Lake can be upgraded with a platform and river access to become a highlight of train passenger excursions. A trail paralleling the railway could use the corridor as its river crossing, and Starke County would benefit from an enhanced destination for tourism.

Starke County Park Board Richard Ballard expressed enthusiasm for the growing spirit of cooperation. He said the Park Board, HVRM, and the PTC serve different but compatible functions. He suggested that linkages be developed on the websites of the three entities to help feature the recreational opportunities available in the county.

During the PTC meeting, Bob Albert, HVRM liaison, added further insight concerning the possibilities for upgrading the railroad crossing at English Lake. He said there has been a cost estimate of \$174,000 for an eight-foot wide walkway east of the railroad, and with new ties for the railroad itself, an estimate of \$250,000. He said the concept is included in the “Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Master Planning Project” (August 18, 2019).

Report of Bike Racks Initiative and Norwayne Field Progress

In the first week of September, Bruce Fingerhut led an initiative to place the first bike rack funded through KVREMC RoundUp and built by SCILL students. He individually prepped a site at Norwayne Field and adjacent to the directional sign pointing to the Erie Trail, including the logos identifying the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35. The bike rack is near a new splash pad, which is expected to be functional in the spring, as well as restroom facilities to be funded partially from a Stellar Communities award.

On September 3, Bruce with assistance from Steve prepared a concrete pad for the bike rack. On September 9, Bruce and Paul drilled the concrete and “fastened down” the bike rack.



Image by Peggy Bohac

Kathy said Andrew Rowe, North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, authorized the PTC to place a sign on the directional sign’s back side to acknowledge organizations that contributed to the bike rack. She reflected that if feasible and agreeable to the membership, the new sign might also include the logo of the Great American Rail-Trail. The Erie Trail did not yet

include the GART when the existing sign was placed. During the meeting she showed Paul an image of the existing sign, and he said he thought it was probably feasible.



Image by Peggy Bohac

Diane Blais moved to authorize that Kathy work with OTES and prepare a sign thanking contributors, displaying GART's logo, and with a directional arrow similar to the existing sign. Linda Byer seconded the motion. The motion carried. Kathy said Deb Mix is now coordinating with KVREMC's representative regarding a photo opportunity on site.

Report of September 19 Workday

A workday was held as scheduled on September 19 for vegetation control on the Erie Trail between Starke County Roads 125 East and 700 South. PTC participants were Rhonda Milner, Kirt Verhagen, Max, Linda, Paul, Kathy and Steve. Below Max removes a Siberian elm.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Invasive species were removed or treated within the village of Aldine, most prominently Siberian elm, bush honeysuckle, and tree of heaven. The participants took care not to harm a grove of American plums, as well as occasional native cherry and white oak trees.

Linda also discovered four o'clock flowers. Earlier in the week, Steve daylighted and did vegetation control at the Erie Trail intersection with County Road 700 South.



Image by Michael McGregor

Report of Other Maintenance Activities

Consistent with an authorization made during our last meeting, Paul arranged for C & J Affordable Tree Service to fell on August 31 two large cottonwood trees west of Starke County Road 200 East. Their roots had begun damaging the trail's asphalt surface. Below is one of two conjunctive trees, both of which approximated 37" in diameter. A third was also felled. The green coloring evidences post-cutting chemical treatment of the stump.



Image by Kathy Lucas

In late August and early September, windfalls required volunteers to remove trees from both the asphalt and equine portions of the Erie Trail. Below is a cherry tree removed on September 3 near US 35 by Linda, Paul, Bruce, Peter Croyle, Kathy and Steve.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Bruce re-erected and painted Erie Railroad Mile Marker 198 just west of the Erie Trail crossing of Indiana Highway 10. The monument had been absent from the site for several years. Bob Albert said he noticed the monument “was back up”.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report & Restricted/Unrestricted Funds

Kathy reported she has created annual spreadsheets for PTC financial records from 2017 when our account was opened at the First Farmers Bank & Trust. She brought copies of each of the spreadsheets for membership review or comment. Kathy said complete spreadsheets will be available going forward for review. She circulated copies of the 2020 spreadsheet to date along with entries from the FFBT check register for the period from August 27, 2020 through September 24, 2020. Unless a member expressed a different perspective, the register or a similar document would constitute the Treasurer's Report for regular monthly meetings. A copy of the FFBT check register entries since the August meeting follows:

PTC FFBT Check Register 2020

Number	Date	Description of Transaction	C	Debit (-)	Credit (+)	Balance	Column
Transfer	8/24/20	NCF (Balance transferred from PTC Fund)			\$3,915.28	\$88,688.01	Mtg 8/22/20
Deposit	8/28/20	Dues (R.Milner, J. Hardesty)			\$50.00	\$88,738.01	
Deposit	8/28/20	Dues (S. Smead, R. & P. Stalbrink)			\$75.00	\$88,813.01	
Deposit	9/1/20	Dues (A. Noble)			\$25.00	\$88,838.01	
1064	9/1/20	C & J Affordable Tree Service		\$900.00		\$87,938.01	
PayPal Trans	9/1/20	Dues (R. Vlaming + \$20 donation)			\$43.39	\$87,981.40	
1065	9/10/20	Troyer Group payment #6 (Invoice 19094)		\$16,925.00		\$71,056.40	
Deposit	9/18/20	Donation (Gary Brouillard, Lafayette trail rider)			\$50.00	\$71,106.40	
Online Order	9/11/20	Domain fee		\$63.51		\$71,042.89	
Deposit	9/11/20	Dues (Max Rehlander)			\$25.00	\$71,067.89	Mtg 9/14/20

Kathy offered restricted and unrestricted funding allocations as set forth below:

PTC Restricted/Unrestricted Funds

RESTRICTED GRANTS/DONATIONS

Luminous Fund Grant 2 (2018)	Signage BLS (including "You are Here").	\$4,124.94	
Luminous Fund Grant 3 (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	2,780.00	(-846 Troyer Pmt #6)
Luminous Fund Grant 4 (2020)	Northwest extension	5,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Historic Signage Erie Trail	7,535.25	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	2,780.00	(-846 Troyer Pmt #6)
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant	2,778.00	(-847 Troyer Pmt #6)
Marshall County Horse Association	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00	
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	2,779.00	(-846 Troyer Pmt #6)

Lucas lake house guests' donation	Future Vision/website	700.00	
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st installment for trail extension	33,225.00	(-13,540 Troyer Pmt #6)
Mitchel-Kane	Northwest extension	2,000.00	
Stalbrink donation	Scholarship (or "most needed use")	100.00	
Blais/Vlaming bench	For trail head @ 450/210	350.00	
McMillin bench	For trail head @ 450/210	350.00	
	Total Restricted	64,852.19	

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS (First Farmers Bank & Trust)

TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
\$71,067.89	\$64,852.19	\$6,215.70

Kathy said the summary of contributions pertaining to the Next Level Trails grant does not yet reflect match contributions from sources such as dedicated real estate of the former Erie Railroad, Starke County Highway Department materials or labor, benches, and bike racks. These matches are an extraordinary element of the grant formula that gives local match credit for other than direct financial contributions. These contributions need to be identified in some manner for transparency and to show compliance with our contract with the DNR. Kathy said she would welcome any thoughts the membership might suggest for reporting these matches. If there are no suggestions, she would request advice from the Starke County office of the Northern Indiana Community Foundation. No suggestions were offered, and Carolla agreed that seeking advice from the NICF made sense.

Linda moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report with the PTC Restricted/Unrestricted Funds including match allocations as set forth above. Russ Blais seconded the motion. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

Informal Update on HVRM Activities

Bob said much of what he might have reported regarding HVRM activities has already been discussed in prior agenda items. He added that his organization was exploring with the new short line operator the feasibility of a “Santa Train” from North Judson to LaCrosse to Union Mills and back.

Proposal for Fundraiser

Joan provided a follow-up to her August 27 meeting suggestion for a PTC fundraiser. She circulated product and Fundraising Catalog 6 from the Carruth Studio. In response to a question, she said the sales minimum is \$400. Members interested in participation can obtain more information by contacting Joan.

Indiana Greenways Foundation Annual (Virtual) Luncheon

Kathy said that earlier in the day she and Steve attended the Indiana Greenways Annual Luncheon, which with the COVID-19 pandemic, was this year held virtually. Awards were

issued to individuals, organizations, and governmental entities for exceptional service in the development and management of trails in Indiana. Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb was the guest speaker, and he was the recipient of a special award for his initiation of the Next Level Trails program.

Indiana State Representative Carey Hamilton was an award recipient for her work with the Greenways Foundation in forming the bipartisan Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus. Rep. Hamilton spoke following receipt of the award and reported that 25 State Legislators have now joined the caucus.

Kathy urged PTC members to consider the purchase of a Greenways Foundation plate that proclaims "I Support Trails!". BMV forwards \$25 of the cost of the specialty plate to the Greenways Foundation to support activities such as the \$5,000 match the PTC received as match for the two-mile extension southeast of US 35. In addition, purchase of the plate shows public commitment to the Indiana Legislature and the Governor for trail expansion.

Panhandle Pathway Update

John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, said his organization plans to extend the Panhandle Pathway to the northwest in Pulaski County and southeast in Cass County. With the COVID-19 pandemic, funding was frozen and later canceled. "We are waiting on Next Level Trails money" to be reinstated or replaced in another program.

Board of Directors Meeting Scheduled for October 15

The next meeting of the Board of Directors was scheduled for a videoconference on Thursday, October 15, 2020 at 5:30 p.m, CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT).

Facebook and Website Workgroup Scheduled for October 15

The inaugural meeting of the Facebook and Website Workgroup was scheduled for a videoconference on Thursday, October 15, 2020 at 6:30 p.m., CDT (7:30 p.m., EDT).

Membership Meeting Scheduled for October 29

The next meeting of the Membership was scheduled for Thursday, October 29, 2020 at 6:00 p.m., CDT (7:00 p.m., EDT) in the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, 6996 South Indiana Highway 10, Knox.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m., CDT (7:35 p.m., EDT).