

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB, INC.

North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library
208 Keller Avenue
North Judson, IN

October 26, 2016

ATTENDEES

Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Kathleen Lucas
Steve Lucas
Sharon Smead
Greg Wittig
Karen Wittig

GUESTS

Rick Anderson
Bing
Cory Bennett
Shari Bennett
Warren Burke

Call to Order

Bruce Fingerhut, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club (the "PTC") at 6:32 p.m., CDT (7:32 p.m., EDT) on October 26, 2016 at the North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library.

Approval of Minutes

Bruce presented for approval the draft minutes of the September 28, 2016. Kathy Lucas moved to approve the minutes without amendment. Greg Witting seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Update on Chamber of Commerce Inquiry Regarding USBR 35

Kathy provided an update on discussions with Deb Mix of the Starke County Chamber of Commerce regarding the US Bicycle Route 35 Pilot Project. In cooperation with the Hoosier Rails to Trails Council and the Indiana Office of Tourism Development, the project facilitates use of USBR 35 by the 15 Indiana counties through which USBR 35 passes. The PTC agreed during its August meeting to assist the Chamber with the project. Mix indicated on September 21 that Starke County made a commitment of \$250 to the Indiana Office of Tourism Development which is coordinating an application for grant money.

The Chamber sought donations to meet the commitment. Mix recently informed Kathy that Sandy Kersting donated \$100. Kathy informed the PTC that she and Steve Lucas pledged an additional \$100 to the Chamber for the project.

Karen Witting asked why funds were needed. Steve responded that county participants

are seeking a grant which itself requires a commitment of resources. The project would include formation of a statewide website to encourage public use of USBR 35. Services and attractions near the route would be identified.

Bruce reflected an example of a service would be the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. He and HVRM President, Cory Bennett, recalled the HVRM endorsed use of the trail for USBR 35 several years ago. Bruce added that the North Judson Town Council sought a modification to the proposed routing of USBR 35 so that it would pass through town. The modification was later approved and is part of the current bike route configuration.

Update on Executive Document Summary for PTC Goals

Steve said at the last meeting the members reviewed and made several modifications or clarifications to an executive document summary of PTC Goals. The summary is a kind of “wish list” for extension of the trail and improved connectivity with other trails and bike routes. During the September meeting the members endorsed having the summary, as amended, posted on the PTC’s website. He said the summary was posted earlier in the week. The site for the summary may be accessed by going to the website homepage at prairietrailsclub.org, clicking on the tab “About”, and then following the dropdown to “Future Vision”.

Report on October 1 Workday and Bicentennial Parade

A priority for the October 1 workday was to help “spiff up” the rest park in anticipation of the Bicentennial Parade. A second priority was to conduct vegetation control in the vicinity of Bogus Run.

About a dozen PTC members and supporters appeared at the rest park for the workday. Coincidentally, volunteers for the HVRM were performing maintenance along the SR 10 railroad crossing at the same time. The PTC removed trash from the park and west of the park along the trail to North Judson. Weeds and loose stone were removed from along or on the paved trail at the SR 10 crossing.

The sky was cloudy and intermittent rain fell the night before the workday. After completion of efforts at the rest park, Paul Byer identified more rain on his cellphone both east and west of the rest park. As Karen described during the meeting, “A storm was coming in.” The workday was terminated before beginning vegetation control at Bogus Run.

Discussion of First Draft Language for Agreement with HVRM

Bruce reminded the members that during the September 28 PTC meeting Linda Byer reported on discussions she had with HVRM at its September 17 meeting. Interest was expressed in the development of a working agreement between the two volunteer organizations. The HVRM was working with its attorney, Todd Wallsmith, to develop a draft agreement. The PTC had asked Steve to begin a draft to share with the HVRM.

Cory Bennett said he recently had discussions with Todd Wallsmith about development of an agreement, but he did not yet have a written proposal. He hoped to have a document to share by the next PTC meeting. He said a problem was that the PTC was a group of interested citizens but not a not-for-profit corporation.

Kathy responded that “Prairie Trails Club Inc.” is not a corporation with Federal 501(c)(3)

status but is a non-profit domestic corporation registered with the Indiana Secretary of State as “active”. Cory replied this information should be helpful to his attorney.

Steve said he understood the HVRM suggested to Linda at its September 17 meeting that it would be helpful if the PTC identified a liaison to the HVRM. With this understanding he said the PTC appointed Linda its liaison on September 28. Steve said he drafted a proposal for a basic working agreement between the PTC and the HVRM and recently circulated the draft to PTC members. Included in the draft was that the HVRM would appoint a liaison to the PTC.

Cory Bennett said members of the HVRM expressed concerns about liability and exposure to lawsuits. One proposal that has been floated between the HVRM attorney and the County Attorney would be for jurisdiction over the trail to be placed in the Starke County Park Board.

Members of the PTC suggested Steve and Kathy communicate directly with Todd Wallsmith as the HVRM attorney. Cory Bennett indicated he also agreed to this approach.

Warren Burke said he has spent a lot of time and effort sweeping the paved trail. He said people on horseback are directed by signage to use the sandy horse path but often use the paved portion. He is weary of removing manure from the paved portion of the trail and suggested “we shut down” horseback riding on the trail.

Steve responded that we are appreciative of the efforts Warren makes for making the trail usable for our citizens. He understands the frustration. But he believes the commitment when obtaining Federal money was to include an equestrian trail from CR 100 W to US 35. That was part of what the money was intended to accomplish. In Steve’s perspective shutting down the trail to horseback riding was probably not a lawful option. Also, while subject to the terms of Federal law for rail banking, the owner is the HVRM and not the PTC.

Sharon Smead said a problem for horseback riding is that there is not a trailhead suitable between CR 100 W and US 35 to park vehicles and deliver horses. Paul and Linda noted that most of the equestrian trail east of CR 200 E was overgrown with vegetation so that horseback riding would have to occur on the paved portion of the trail, if it occurred at all. Shari Bennett spoke of possible dangers posed by riding horses on a paved surface. The consensus was that maintenance, and perhaps some redesign or land acquisition, was needed to have the equestrian trail usable and safe.

Scheduling Future Meeting or Meetings

The members agreed to hold the next meeting at the North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library on November 14, 2016 at 6:30 p.m., CST (7:30 p.m., EST). Whether additional meetings would take place in 2016 would be then determined.

Scheduling of Additional Fall Work Date

The members agreed to schedule a final fall work date for November 19, 2016 at 9:00 a.m., CST (10:00 a.m., EST) in the rest park at the intersection of SR 10 and CR 250 W.

Adjournment

By consensus the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m., CDT (9:05 p.m., EDT).