

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

Videoconference

February 11, 2021

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Bruce Fingerhut
Joan Hardesty
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Kirt Verhagen
Rick Vlaming
Larry Wickert

GUESTS

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

Call to Order by President

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at 5:34 pm, CST (6:34 pm, EST) by videoconference on February 11, 2021.

Review and Approval of January 11, 2021 Minutes

Brian McMillin moved to approve, as written, the draft January 11, 2021 meeting minutes. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Report of Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup

On February 1, Lisa Herber, DNR contact for the southeast extension emailed Jonathon Geels of the Troyer Group, our consultant, to inform us that our construction plans were approved. She reflected also to Jonathon that she would "look for a copy of the revised full plan set and then the bid tabs after they are in."

On February 5, Jonathon informed us four companies bid on the project. One at \$341,850 and one at \$332,500. He said these are in the ballpark with our DNR grant, but with no room for error, and "there's work yet to be done." The other two bids were over \$400,000 and would exceed our contract for the grant. At DNR's request, the bids were to provide 3" of asphalt, but the PTC has not committed to 3" and has expressed to the

agency a belief that for the site of the extension, 2” would achieve AASHTO standards and should suffice. The original three miles of the Erie Trail east from North Judson has 2”. Several members noted that the most serious problems with failures are on trail segments with 3” of asphalt, including where the PTC spent \$7,000 in 2018 for repairs. Jonathon indicated companies were asked to provide alternative bids for a thickness of two inches. The resulting bids demonstrated we would save about \$30,000 by placing 2” of asphalt instead 3”.

Bruce Fingerhut expressed the perspective that the most important factor for stability was not the thickness of the asphalt but the effectiveness of the 4” inches of aggregate beneath the asphalt. John Bawcum said the Panhandle has a 2 1/2” asphalt surface, and his organization’s experience is that the most important factor for surface stability was dependent upon the control of tree roots adjacent to the trail, particularly from willows and cottonwoods. Larry Wickert said he believed 3” might be preferable to 2” because the trail occasionally carries heavy vehicles, but the possible advantage was not worthy if a consequence is the trail cannot be completed. Steve Lucas urged the PTC to explore with DNR the possibility of providing a 2” or 2 1/2” inch base. John said the Panhandle Pathway used virgin and recycled asphalt on different sections and had no apparent loss of quality with the recycled asphalt. Recycled is less expensive. Carolla reflected the PTC has not yet received a detailed analysis from Jonathon, which he has said he will provide, and after that occurs the workgroup should communicate further with the DNR.

Report of North Judson Railroad Sale and Northwest Trail Extension

The *Leader* newspaper and WKVI radio reported that on January 18, the North Judson Redevelopment Commission accepted the Midwest & Bluegrass Rail bid to purchase the entirety of the 33 mile rail line going northwest from North Judson. Purchase was made conditional on the PTC, together with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy which manages the Great American Rail-Trail, having “an easement to develop a trail on the Starke County portion of the rail line.” These media reports also referenced conditions meant to support the viability of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. Steve said he wrote to Justin Schramm, attorney for the Redevelopment Commission, with a copy to North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, seeking to support development of an easement in a way likely to meet DNR grant requirements. Yesterday, Andrew acknowledged receipt of the letter and indicated he shared it with members of the Redevelopment Commission.

WKVI radio reported yesterday that LaCrosse Town Council President, Justin Kiel, last week asked if the easement could be extended on from English Lake to LaCrosse. WKVI stated “North Judson officials said it’s likely too late to add that condition to the sale, but they noted that the railroad company seems to be willing to work with anybody, as long as safety can be maintained.”

On February 2, DNR sent Steve an Indiana Trails Program (ITP) manual describing a grant opportunity similar to a Next Level Trails grant but on a smaller scale. An application would need to be completed before March 1. He shared the manual with members of our Northwest Extension workgroup. There were several good and quick responses but not a consensus. The concept of a short extension through North Judson is attractive, but “meeting the timing would be a heavy lift.” Also, because of the status of our southeast

extension, the applicant would need to be someone other than the PTC—perhaps the Town, its Park Board, or the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”).

Bruce said he discussed the concept of an ITP grant with Bob Barcus, HVRM Secretary, but neither sought to move forward. Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, sought to participate in the videoconference but was frustrated by technical difficulties. In an aside with Carolla, which she passed along to the members, he confirmed the HVRM expected the rail line would be sold to M&B and that HVRM anticipated continuing operations at least to English Lake and perhaps later to LaCrosse.

Kirt Verhagen asked whether the PTC plan was to seek a northwest extension beyond North Judson using land east of English Lake Road adjacent to the active rail line or west of English Lake Road along the former Pennsylvania Railroad. Steve responded that the effort was to avoid having options foreclosed. There were challenges with the potential routes both east and west of English Lake Road, and one, the other, or a combination of the two might be what proves feasible.

Report of Great American Rail-Trail Indiana Stakeholders Meeting

On February 3, Eric Oberg, Midwest Regional Director of the Rails to Trails Conservancy, chaired a virtual meeting of Indiana Stakeholders for the Great American Rail-Trail. The stakeholders are representatives of governmental and not-for-profit organizations that are dedicated to completing the GART in Indiana. Steve represents the Erie Trail and Starke County in the stakeholders group. Numerous topics were addressed. Highlights were a new Trails Towns initiative being considered at the State level through tourism and the DNR; sporadic but potentially significant possibilities through the Rails to Trails Conservancy for grant assistance; and Conservancy interest in attending and providing materials a ribbon cutting when we open of the southeast extension of the Erie Trail. Steve said he believes the Rails to Trails Conservancy has an engaged and informed staff, one of whom spoke with the North Judson Town attorney prior to the vote by the Redevelopment Commission to include a trail easement in the railway sale.

Consideration of Whether to Host the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run-Walk

Carolla reminded the membership that the PTC considered sponsoring last year’s Bass Lake Festival 5K Run-Walk, but most volunteer workers declined participation when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Later the pandemic caused cancellation of the entire 2020 Festival, but it is expected to be held again this year on the weekend of July 24 and 25.

Carolla said she has been contacted by Festival organizers to gauge whether the PTC may be interested in sponsoring the 5K event this year. She estimated that from six to ten workers would be needed to help in what typically would require our participation for from four to six hours—presumably on the morning of July 24. Members questioned how the event would be managed, particularly for whatever social distancing is needed. With the hope that the impact of the pandemic may be lessened by July, as well as with the understanding details needed to be clarified for how the event would be managed, several members said they would be willing to volunteer. Carolla asked if the consensus was that “we’re interested but we need more details?” Members responded affirmatively.

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 expressed her appreciation for the generous continuing financial support by Jennifer and Jim Kane upon the fourth \$2,000 donation from their foundation. She said Jennifer was a retired paralegal who worked for years with Steve at the Indiana Natural Resources Commission. Jennifer and Jim are avid bicyclists, having recently ridden a portion of the Cardinal Greenway, which, like the Erie Trail is an element of the Great American Rail-Trail. Kathy also expressed her thanks for two generous donations made to honor the memory of Dale Grube. These were by Wesley and Nancy Nancy Chinworth and by Richard and Carol Bell. Wes was a former North Judson cross-country coach who built and placed wooden benches along the Erie Trail.



**Treasurer’s Report
February 11, 2021**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 1/11/21	\$52,314.10
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INCOME

1/12/21 Mitchel-Kane Donation	2,000.00	
2/5/21 Chinworth Donation in honor of Dale Grube	500.00	
2/5/21 Bell Donation “ “ “ “ “	50.00	
Total Income	2,550.00	2,550.00

EXPENSES

-0-		
Total Expenses		(-0-)

Ending FFBT balance as of 2/11/21

\$54,864.10

/s/Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

There were no expenses paid since the January 11 meeting.

Kathy then outlined the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. She said the report included a technical correction that did not adjust overall funds but it did result in a drawdown to the Hardesty Memorial Grant that is directed to signage with an equivalent increase in available unrestricted funding.

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
Luminous Fund Grant 4 (2020)	Northwest extension	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Hist. ET Signage	6,911.50 (568.75 to Unrestricted)
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Matching NLT Grant	1,740.44
PTC account commitment	Matching NLT Grant	1,738.43
Marshall County Horse Ass'n	Bench (NLT Grant-Location TBD)	350.00
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	1,379.44
Lucas lakehouse guests	Future Vision/website update	700.00
Next Level Trails Grant (NLT-1-07)	1st Installment for trail extension.	16,592.00
Mitchel-Kane	Northwest extension	4,000.00 (2,000 donation)
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	46,937.19

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS

	TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
	\$54,864.10	\$46,937.19	\$7,926.91

As of February 11, 2021

/s/ Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer

Bruce moved to approve without amendment the Treasurer's Report with the PTC Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Diane seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Consider Developing a Fundraising and Grand Opening Strategy for the Trail Extension

Kathy said she hopes there will be a grand opening ceremony on completion of the southeast extension of the Erie Trail. The extension should have positive ramifications for the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail, and US Bike Route 35. Webmaster Stephen Antisdell suggested that our online presence, including freshening the current website and Facebook pages, offers sales opportunities that could help with trail maintenance and advancement. The black and gold Erie Trail design advanced by Yancy Lucas has been used on T-shirts and could be promoted. Also, the Rails-to-Trails people have been supportive of our use of its green logo, and we have in the past used ADT and US BR35 logos with permission. Some combination of these might help raise the profile of our trail and assist financially.

Diane and Russ indicated they would help with a workgroup dedicated to fundraising done in association with a grand opening of the trail extension. Bruce added that he has learned there are now services that produce and mail promotional materials on a request basis so as to obviate the need for inventories and for organizations to perform their own distribution services. He said he would explore such options and communicate to Kathy.

Paul Byer reminded the members he and Linda Buyer are storing T-shirts and powder that might be used in a celebration. These might be made to work as part of a grand opening strategy.

Update on In-Scale Model of Our Solar System Initiative

On January 21, Jessica Martinović of the Starke County Community Foundation chaired the third meeting of the In-Scale Model of Our Solar System workgroup. Steve reflected during the meeting that PTC members had expressed interest in the possibility of the Sun exhibit being placed west rather than east of Main Street in North Judson. In the Our Solar System workgroup meeting, Bob Aloï, engineer for the project, said he would ask HVRM President Todd Flanigan whether his organization would entertain the possibility of placing the Sun exhibit on HVRM property. Bob Albert conveyed through Carolla that the Starke County Community Foundation and the HVRM have since begun discussions about this possibility.

During the January 21 workgroup meeting, Bob Aloï also described hopeful discussions with OTES in North Judson regarding the possibility of the local company constructing and placing the site exhibits along the Erie Trail. The next meeting of the workgroup is scheduled for February 25.

Consideration of Approval of Restructured Mission Statement with Goals and Objectives

During the March 19, 2020 meeting of the Board of Directions, "interim language" was approved for a PTC mission statement "which could be relied upon by a member as our current mission statement". The Board was then acting on the mistaken belief the PTC did not already have a mission statement. At the Board's direction, the interim language

was circulated to the membership for input. Both Kathy Carrier on April 15 and later Bruce expressed concerns with the thought the language was too detailed and should be a brief philosophical statement that could be augmented through goals and objectives.

On October 15, 2020 the Board revisited the subject of drafting a mission statement. Carolla urged the development of a new draft applying the structure suggested by Kathy Carrier and Bruce, with the inclusion of a short mission statement augmented by goals and objectives. She, Bruce, Kathy Carrier, Kathy Lucas and Steve exchanged a series of emails to this end. They developed a consensus document among them which was then shared with the membership in the Agenda notice circulated on February 5:

MISSION STATEMENT WITH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The mission of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. is to advance, promote, and maintain greenways and blueways in northern Indiana.

Goals and objectives to implement our mission are as follows:

- 1 To assist with management and maintenance of the existing Erie Trail and Connectors to the Erie Trail approved by a governmental unit with jurisdiction in Starke County or Pulaski County.**
- 2 To share in the missions of the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail (Northern Branch), US Bike Route 35, and the Panhandle Pathway in Starke County and adjacent Counties.**
- 3 To encourage biking, hiking, kayaking, horseback riding, and similar activities that support public health and recreation.**
- 4 To foster education, events, and activities that provide healthy outdoor recreation and advance the quality of life in our community.**

Following membership discussion in which no dissenting opinions were expressed, Rhonda Milner moved to recommend approval of the proposed new Mission Statement and Goals and Objectives by the Board of Directors. Larry Wickert seconded the motion.

Report of Starke County Park Board Yellow River Kayak Access Workgroup

During the January 11 meeting, Kathy Norem reviewed a grant submission by the Starke County Park Board, to the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (the IDDC), in support of developing five kayak and canoe access sites on the Yellow River. The next day the Park Board contracted with Territorial Engineering to seek environmental permits for the project. Park Board member, Rik Ritzler, stated that doing so would keep the project on schedule if the grant is approved. If not approved, he hoped that Territorial Engineering could proceed with a scaled-back project using other local funding. The Park Board expects to hear from the IDDC on February 15 whether it has qualified as a grant finalist.

Possible September Bass Lake Century Bike Ride

Russ reported that during the most recent BLPOA meeting, Thomas I. Jones said he was considering the development of a Century Bike Ride. Twelve laps around Bass Lake on SR 10 and Starke CR 210 would result in what would be an approximately 100-mile event.

Bruce fielded an inquiry online from Dr. Jones regarding the same event. Dr. Jones wrote, “I am exploring a century around Bass Lake this September. I am asking if your club has any interest in getting involved. As much as I would like to include the Erie trail, I am not sure how to do it.”

A February 8 response was sent on behalf of the PTC to Dr. Jones. A map on our website was linked along with a narrative for how cyclists could use connectors S-13 and S-15 to incorporate SR 10 and CR 210 with the nonmotorized Erie Trail. Dr. Jones did continue his inquiry.

Friends of Panhandle Pathway Share Perspectives and Experiences for Repairing and Preventing Asphalt Cracks

John Bawcum provided informative perspectives for how the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway have addressed successfully cracks in the asphalt surface of that route using hot tar patch and sealing equipment. After the meeting he followed up with an email and attached photos of the Panhandle “maintenance team hard at it last fall. The box on this equipment holds a 2-foot cube/50-pound block of solid tar. The block is dropped into the holding box and heated to 400 degrees with the LP gas heater. A squeeze of the trigger starts the flow of this liquid tar into the trail crack. Your cost includes the blocks of tar and a tank of LP gas....”



During the meeting, John also discussed techniques to suppress tree roots, particularly from willows and cottonwoods, that can cause asphalt to buckle.

Next Membership Meeting

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

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m., CDT (7:53 p.m., EDT).