

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

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

May 23, 2019

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Carolla Heilstedt
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Arlene Noble
Richard Stalbrink
Peggy Stalbrink
Larry Wickert

GUESTS

Bob Albert, HVRM
Bob Aloï,
Bill Bope, Freedom Ride
S. Rik Ritzler, Starke Hwy. Superintendent

Call to Order by President

Carolla Heilstedt, President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at 6:14 pm, CDT (7:14 pm, EDT) on May 23, 2019 in the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, Bass Lake, Indiana. Introductions were made around the table.

Review and Approval of April 24, 2019 Minutes

Rhonda Milner moved to approve the draft minutes as written as the final minutes of the April 24, 2019 meeting. Linda Byer seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

Kathy circulated copies of the Treasurer's Report for the period that followed the April meeting. The report provided in substantive parts:

I) First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)

Balance forward from 3/14/19		\$ 29,760.50
<u>INCOME</u>		
05/22/19 Transfer from PayPal <i>Sharon Foust: NEW membership</i>	23.97	
05/22/19 Transfer from PayPal <i>Susan Goble: NEW membership</i>	23.97	
05/22/19 Transfer from PayPal <i>Bruce McDonald & Suzanne Morrow: NEW members</i>	48.25	
05/19 Automatic Deposit <i>Amazon SMILE percentage reward</i>	5.00	
Total Income	101.19	
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
04/09/19 Check #1038 <i>OTES: Bass Lake, Lena Park historic signs</i>	-220.00	
05/20/19 Check #1039 <i>P. Byer reimbursement—cement, etc. for signs</i>	162.83	
Total Expenses	-382.83	
Total Transactions		-281.64
Ending FFBT balance as of 04/24/19		\$ 29,478.86

II) Northern Indiana Community Foundation (NICF)

NICF balance as of 3/31/19		<u>3,932.27</u>
Total of 2 accounts:		\$33,411.13

Kathy distributed a written breakdown of restricted and unrestricted funding. Because two benches were completed, \$700 held for them as “restricted” was reassigned to the “unrestricted” category. The substance of the distribution is set forth below:

RESTRICTED GRANTS/DONATIONS

Luminous Fund 1 (2017)	Signage for Bass Lake Spur	\$222.29	(110 OTES, 54.28 mat.)
Luminous Fund 2 (2018)	Signage for Bass Lake General	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund 3 (2019)	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Interpretive Signs	8,283.72	(110 OTES, 108.56 mat.)
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2019)	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00	
PTC Commitment	Match NLT Grant	5,000.00	
Arlene Noble	Bench at 300 East	0.00	(bench done)
Peggy & Rich Stalbrink	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00	
Steve & Kathy Lucas	Bench at Lena Park	0.00	(bench done)
Virgil Noble	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00	
Marshall County Horse Association	Bench (Location TBD)	350.00	
	TOTAL	\$29,556.01	

SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS	TOTAL	RESTRICTED	UNRESTRICTED
First Farmers Bank & Trust	\$29,478.86	\$26,556.01	\$2,922.85
Northern Indiana Community Foundation	3,932.27	3,000.00	932.27
BREAKDOWN	\$33,411.13	\$29,556.01	\$3,855.12

Diane Blais moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report including the update of Restricted and Unrestricted funds. Rhonda Milner seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Report of and Workgroup for First Round Next Level Trails Grant Award

Carolla reported the PTC’s grant application for the First Round of Gov. Eric Holcomb’s Next Level Trails was approved in full. The grant amount was \$390,750 with an estimated project cost of \$490,885. Our bid was one of only 17 successful applicants among 82 in the First Round with a minimum local match of 20%. The project would extend the Erie Trail from its current terminus at US Highway 35 by 2.1 miles toward Ora. The project will include both an asphalt multi-use trail and a natural-surface equestrian trail. The project helps develop two national trail systems, the American Discovery Trail and the Great American Rail-Trail, and is slated to augment US Bike Route 35. She said the project also helps close gaps to the existing Panhandle Pathway to the south and Nickel Plate Trail to the east—like the Erie Trail the DNR has designated these as “Visionary Trails”.

Carolla added that to our northwest, Veterans Memorial Parkway Trail, which is designed to connect Hebron to Crown Point, is also part of the American Discovery Trail and the Great American Rail-Trail. Veterans Memorial Parkway Trail was one of the other trails receiving a grant at the same time we did for the Erie Trail. Both the Panhandle and the Nickel Plate are pursuing efforts to come our direction as well.

Key partners for the PTC project included the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, the Greenways Foundation, the Starke County Community Foundation, the Starke County Highway Department, the Luminous Fund, the Hardesty Foundation and the Mitchel-Kane

Charitable Fund. With support from our members and friends, the PTC also contributed funding directly to the required 20% local match.

Carolla said members of the PTC application workgroup were Larry Wickert, Kathy Carrier, Bruce Fingerhut, Russell Blais, Kathleen, Steve Lucas and she. The workgroup will continue as we move forward with architectural and engineering plan approval and later construction. Other PTC members are welcome to join the workgroup “if you’ll let me know.” Carolla added that as Treasurer, Kathleen will serve as signatory for financial matters pertaining to grant implementation. There was membership consensus for this approach and that Carolla, as President, should sign the grant agreement with the State of Indiana.

Carolla invited Bob Aloï of Territorial Engineering, LLC to offer his perspectives. Bob has a significant history with the Erie Trail, providing professional direction for its first phase from North Judson to CR 100 West and its second phase from CR 100 West to US 35, though in somewhat differing capacities. Bob suggested the PTC would need to develop an SOQ for the project and recommended that the workgroup communicate as soon as practicable with DNR or INDOT to move the process forward. Carolla said the workgroup would do so. She and Kathy outlined email communications with DNR’s Lisa Herber who has been assigned as grant coordinator for the Erie Trail project.

Several PTC members got together for an informal celebration on May 9 at 10-56 Brewing in Knox. Pictured from the grant application workgroup are Larry Wickert, Kathy Lucas, Carolla Heilstedt, Steve Lucas, Bruce Fingerhut and Russell Blais. PTC members bought their own refreshments and workgroup members donated the cake.



Update on Signage

Steve said Rick Vlaming, Paul Byer, Russ and he placed foundations for four of seven you-are-here signs. He made a particular expression of gratitude to Rick for his efforts in designing and executing framing for the signs. Final touches are yet to be made but the signs that have been placed are at the Main Street trailhead in North Judson, Starke County Road 250 West just east of the rest park, Lena Park and CR 125 East in Aldine. A fifth is ready for placement at CR 800 South. Because of construction activities that are anticipated for the Erie Trail extension beginning at Bass Station, placement of this sign has been put on hold. The seventh sign would be placed at CR 450 East and CR 210 on the south end of Bass Lake, but it awaits further consultation with the Starke County Highway Department and potentially the Starke County Commissioners. Sign placement occurred in stages on several days in May, including as part of the May 15 workday.

Update on Lids-to-Benches Initiative

Bruce finalized the placement of two green benches. These are now located east of CR 100 West at Lena Park and at CR 300 East. The benches were underwritten at Lena Park by Kathy and Steve and at CR 300 East by Arlene and Al Noble. In the latter instance, Bruce added gravel following placement of the bench to improve accessibility.

Update on Spring and Summer Group Bike Rides

Diane reported a bicycle ride is scheduled for July 20, 2019 to begin at 8:00 a.m., CDT (9:00 a.m., EDT) outside the BLPOA Community Center. The ride is identified on the BLPOA's website. After discussion PTC membership agreed not to pursue group bike rides this summer, between the BLPOA and the PTC, other than on July 20.

Carolla said Bruce had asked her about PTC participation in a bicycle ride during the North Judson Mint Festival on Sunday, June 16. She asked for membership input. Members recalled that during the March meeting, Bruce agreed to lead a group that would develop a ride to highlight PTC activities as part of the parade. No one present during the meeting had contacted the Mint Festival promoters about the concept. Carolla said she would inform Bruce of the status.

Discussion of Color Fun Walk at Monterey Days Festival

During the meeting, Carolla received a return call on her cell phone from a representative of the Monterey Days Festival. She said the representative seemed "very interested" in having the PTC hold a color fun walk aimed in large measure at children, but with adult participation as well. Particularly with approval of the Next Level Trails Grant taking the Erie Trail two miles nearer to Monterey, an informational element for local residents was also timely. The Monterey Days Festival is set for Labor Day weekend (August 31 and September 1).

Rhonda said in early stages of Erie Trail development, Monterey had played a bigger role. As most of the membership is aware, a roughly half-mile segment was built and passes through the town.

Anita McMillin asked if more size small shirts might need to be ordered. Linda then reported the number of available shirts in different sizes, and additional size small shirts seemed a likely need. She reminded the group that Paul and she would not be available on Labor Day weekend. Carolla asked for membership perspectives on the appropriate amounts for entry fees. Several general thoughts were offered but no one suggested a particular fee schedule. Steve said he hoped the emphasis would be on education and encouraging interest at Monterey in extending the Erie Trail and the Nickel Plate Trail, but he agreed a modest entry fee was warranted. "From my personal perspective, I don't see this project as being primarily a money-maker."

Carolla then formed a workgroup to advance the PTC's participation in the Monterey Days Festival. Workgroup members included Brian McMillin, Anita, Diane, Russ, Kathy, Steve and her. Any other member would be welcome to join the committee. Carolla said she would also follow up with Festival promoters.

Report of May 15 Workday

Bruce and Steve sealed the deck of Bogus Run bridge on May 14. On the scheduled May 15 workday, Bruce finished sealing the Bogus Run bridge and completed sealing of the Fell Ditch bridge with the able assistance of Sharon Smead, Deb Mix and Kathy. Signage efforts on the May 15 workday were outlined previously in these minutes in Update on Signage.

Report from Constellation of Starke

Larry Wickert, speaking in his capacity as the Starke County Economic Development Foundation Executive Director, outlined a planning session hosted by Ball State and the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) "earlier today" at the Nancy Dembowski Community Center in Knox. About 100 people from the county attended in support for Constellation of Starke. The meeting provided information about Constellation of Starke and its hope to be designated a "Stellar Community" through OCRA's multi-year, multi-million dollar investment program. The Stellar Communities Program Manager listed the agencies that contribute funding to the program, shared a program timeline and provided a general process overview. Constellation of Starke team members shared why they feel the community is well-suited for designation in the Stellar program. Among these team members is Starke County Highway Superintendent, S. Rik Ritzler, also in attendance at the PTC meeting. A video by Mirth and Whimsy from northeastern Starke County showed why the community is ideal for the Stellar designation. Starke County Attorney Marty Lucas made a presentation with statistics highlighting both Starke County's challenges and its growth potentials.

Larry said several PTC members participated in the day's session at the Dembowski Community Center. He urged other members who might be interested to get involved. The goal is to address community needs and desires in a comprehensive regional plan that will be submitted to OCRA this September.

Report of May 18 BLPOA Table

Diane and Kathy reviewed a table set up at the Bass Lake Property Owners registration event on May 18. They answered questions from attendees about the lids-to-benches project, the planned extension based on the Next Level Trails grant and provided other information about PTC activities and membership.

Report of May 20 Starke County Commissioners Meeting

Steve said during its May 20 public meeting he and Kathy updated the Starke County Commissioners on the Next Level Trails grant and the anticipated 2.1 mile extension of the Erie Trail southeast of US 35. One aspect was discussion of a proposed resolution to help encourage further advancement of the trails system in Starke County, as well as connectivity southeasterly to the Panhandle Pathway and the Nickel Plate Trail and northwesterly to trail systems in Porter County. The proposed resolution was as follows:

The Starke County Commissioners authorize the Starke County Highway Superintendent to consult with representatives of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (the PTC) for these purposes:

(1) In cooperation with the Northern Indiana Coordinator of the American Discovery Trail (the ADT), to modify the route of the ADT in Starke County in a manner that is supportive of public safety and economic efficiency, including minimizing bicycle and pedestrian usage of US 421 and US 35. To the extent feasible, the modification is encouraged to use the same corridor as US Bike Route 35 (USBR 35) and the Great American Rail-Trail (the GART).

(2) To develop a proposal for share-the-road signage within Starke County that would update and augment reasonable connectors to the Erie Trail, including temporary or permanent routes of the ADT, USBR 35 and the GART, as well as consideration of the feasibility of a new connector to better serve Knox and Hamlet.

(3) To suggest a design for a small trailhead at the intersection of CR 450 East and CR 210 on the south end of Bass Lake.

The Starke County Highway Superintendent and the PTC are urged to report on the results of this consultation as soon as practicable.

The Starke County Commissioners approved the resolution during the May 20 meeting. Steve said he had spoken generally with Rik Ritzler about resolution concepts but not the specifics and understood there might be elements that would prove unacceptable to the Starke County Highway Department or ultimately to the Commissioners. Rik said the Commissioners were supportive and he was on board but would want to be sure before going forward that all activities were lawful. He said typically the Starke County Highway Department could not operate outside of county highway rights-of-way. Steve said the PTC did not wish to pursue any activity that was outside county highway jurisdiction and nothing envisioned in the resolution would be done except on approval by the Starke County Highway Superintendent, and, as needed, by the Starke County Commissioners.

Announcement of Great American Rail-Trail Initiative

On May 8, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy announced a “reveal” for the Great American Rail-Trail. As described by the Conservancy the “preferred route” for the GART connects 125+ existing rail-trails, greenways and other multi-use paths spanning more than 3,700 miles from Washington DC to the Pacific Coast in the state of Washington. The vision is for a trail system using exclusively non-motorized routes, with “more than 52%...already on the ground.” The official logo is set forth below:



The Conservancy reported that “A dozen trails will host the preferred route of the Great American Rail-Trail in Indiana—which will take a diagonal trajectory across the state from Richmond to the Chicago metropolitan area.” The trajectory would include the Erie Trail. A route assessment by the Conservancy provided in part:

RAIL GAP 20 – ROCHESTER TO MONTEREY

Nickel Plate Trail Inc. is actively working to connect the Nickel Plate Trail to downtown Rochester by extending the trail from its current terminus just south of Rochester to Rochester’s city center.

The remaining 21.1-mile gap from downtown Rochester west to Monterey has not been discussed in depth. There is an abandoned rail corridor that begins north of Rochester and travels south of Leiters Ford that could form a potential route. More research needs to be done to develop a viable gap-filling strategy for Trail Gap 20.

MONTEREY ERIE TRAIL

The 0.6-mile Monterey Erie Trail occupies the same railbanked corridor as the North Judson Erie Trail to its west, and the two rail-trails are planned to be linked in the future. The towns of Monterey and North Judson once saw frequent freight service between the two communities, first by the Erie Lackawanna Railway and, later, by the Erie Western Railway, Tippecanoe Railroad and JK Lines. The 16-mile corridor was put up for abandonment in 2003, and the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum stepped in to preserve the corridor for public use.

TRAIL GAP 21 – MONTEREY TO BASS STATION

There is an approximately 8.1-mile gap between the western terminus of the Monterey Erie Trail in Monterey and the eastern terminus of the North Judson Erie Trail in the unincorporated community of Bass Station. The Prairie Trails Club Inc., a volunteer group that oversees the North Judson Erie Trail, mentioned filling the gap in its 2016 Future Vision Phase Plan.

NORTH JUDSON ERIE TRAIL

The North Judson Erie Trail is a multiuse path that travels 9 miles from Bass Station to North Judson. The trail occupies the railbanked right-of-way of the former JK Line. With much of the North Judson Erie Trail elevated, it offers an excellent view of the Kankakee Sands prairie and wetland preserve. The North Judson Erie Trail is maintained and supported by the Prairie Trails Club Inc. and the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum.

TRAIL GAP 22 – NORTH JUDSON TO HEBRON

There are two known options to connect the western endpoint of the North Judson Erie Trail in North Judson northwest to the town of Hebron.

Option 1 – The first option is to develop a trail along the Kankakee River. While this potential route is not mentioned in any formal plans, discussions with the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission indicate that a trail connection along the banks of the Kankakee River is viable in the long term and would offer trail users a scenic ride through northwest Indiana.

Option 2 – The second option is to develop a trail along an abandoned rail corridor connecting northwest from North Judson to La Crosse, Indiana, then west to Hebron. This option is discussed in several local and regional plans, including LaPorte County's 2008 Countywide Land Development Plan. More research needs to be completed to identify the best option for connecting North Judson and Hebron via trail.

Special Thanks to Paul and Linda Byer

During the 24-hour period prior to the PTC meeting, storms across Starke County caused power outages, school delays, and trees and other debris to litter the Erie Trail. Two large trees obstructed travel near Fell Ditch. Paul and Linda Byer took their tractor to the site and removed the trees before the meeting started. This occasion was by no means the first time Paul and Linda have responded quickly to problems on the trail. The PTC recognized their special efforts with many “thanks” and a round of applause.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana on Wednesday, June 26, 2019 at 6:00 pm, CDT (7:00 pm, EDT).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 pm, CDT (8:42 pm, EDT).