

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room
300 Keller Avenue
North Judson, Indiana

June 27, 2024

MEMBERS

Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Rhonda Milner
Brian McMillin
Lisa Misch
Peg Stalbrink
Kirt Verhagen

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Frank Stalbaum, Hebron Veterans Memorial Trail

Call to Order by President

On June 27, 2024, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, at 5:38 pm, CDT (6:38 pm, EDT). The meeting is the PTC's first in this wonderful new room. Rhonda noted that the facility would accommodate a ZOOM or similar meeting and would be a particularly good location as the PTC's northwest trail extension advances through North Judson. She thanked the Starke County Community Foundation, an affiliate of the Northern Indiana Community Foundation, for allowing us to use the facility.

Review and Approval of Minutes of May 23, 2024

Peg Stalbrink moved to approve the minutes of May 23, 2024 without amendments. Russ Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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

Kathy Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Her report follows:



**Treasurer's Report
June 27, 2024**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance on April 18, 2024 **\$104,597.80**

INCOME

05/28/24	RunSignup Payout #6	335.00
05/31/24	Robert Palmer donation	25.00
05/31/24	Lisa Misch (NEW MEMBER)	25.00
05/31/24	Joan Hardesty (Dues + Donation)	50.00
05/31/24	"Day of" sales during 5k/3k	161.00
05/31/24	Cash box withdrawal returned to account	300.00
06/03/24	North Judson Ace Hardware ("Round Up" donation)	240.00
<u>06/03/24</u>	<u>Luminous Fund Donation</u>	<u>8,000.00</u>

Total Income **\$9,156.00**

EXPENSES

05/24/24	Withdrawal for cash box	300.00
05/28/24	Check #1164 to Knots & Spots (additional T-shirts).	390.00
05/29/24	Check #1163 to Darcy Orzech (refund)	25.00
05/31/24	Check #1165 to T&H Timing (chipped race)	850.00
05/31/24	Check #1166 to TCS aka HighStar Traffic (black and gold Erie signs)	250.00
06/03/24	Check #1167 to LRS (portable toilet for 5k/3k race)	150.00
06/03/24	Check #1168 to Territorial Engineering (Payment #2)	<u>7,521.64</u>

Total Expenses **(\$9,486.64)**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 05/23/24 **\$104,267.16**

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

Blais-Vlaming and McMillin Bench	\$350 each; awaiting placement	\$700.00	\$700.00
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Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	2,948.32	(Reduced by \$250 for Erie signs)
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$4,571.46

Northwest Extension

Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	NW Extension (or operations)	-0-	(Reduced by 6,000 for Ter. Eng.)
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VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	2,492.03	(Reduced by \$1,521.64 for Ter. Eng.)
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	1,200.00	
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	400.00	
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00	
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	7,500.00	

\$47,592.03

DNR Reimbursement ITP 23-03 (Payment #1) 17,589.06 \$17,589.06

Maintenance

Mower Sale & NICF/Verhagen	Maintenance (now Rest Park Mow)	1,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Fund	Trail maintenance	594.00	
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,68.42	
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11	
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	7,269.48	\$13,931.01

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$84,383.56

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$104,267.16
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>84,383.56</u>
	== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$19,883.60

Kathy gave a special thank you to the Luminous Fund for its amazing gift of \$8,000. She said Kathy and Dave Carrier and their family have been huge supporters of the PTC and both the advancement and maintenance of the Erie Trail (and now the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail). At the request of the Carriers, Kathy said she and husband Steve toured key parts of the trail with family members on April 13. The group stopped at the railroad bridge across the Tippecanoe River about 1 1/2 miles southwest of our trailhead at Starke County Road 700 East. The bridge is in Pulaski County, and, through efforts of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, it has been listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. The Carriers' \$8,000 gift is unrestricted, but they were impressed with the bridge and excited by the possibility of extending the trail beyond the bridge. If members are interested, and if the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum would be supportive of a trail grant application with a river crossing on the bridge, PTC expenditures advancing the concept would be well-considered.

Kathy also thanked Robert Palmer for donating. She said he saw Steve brooming the trail and stopped to talk. After Robert learned that volunteers do maintenance without governmental support, he reached into his pocket and passed a cash donation to Steve. The donation was later made the basis on Facebook for a person to join free in the 5k Walk/3k Run. This opportunity raised the profile of the event and drew several positive comments online.

Kathy expressed appreciation to owners of the North Judson Ace Hardware placing the PTC and Erie Trail on its round-up donation cycle. In addition to providing a new funding source, the process puts a light on our organization and the trail.

Kathy thanked Lisa Misch for joining the PTC with her membership. She also thanked Joan Hardesty for joining and including a donation. Joan is a much valued member who contributes her time and expertise to the organization.

Brian McMillin moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Paul Byer seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

Representatives of the four parties to the MOU for the DNR grant to extend the trail through North Judson met as scheduled onsite on June 7. As stated by HVRM Secretary, Bob Barcus, the purpose of the meeting was “to discuss PTC trail options at Mulberry Street.” In particular, concerns had been raised as to the proximity of the trail route to a signal bungalow in what is sometimes referred to as the “triangle”. Bob Aloï, President of Territorial Engineering, the PTC’s consulting engineer, brought plans with a modified location that would relocate the trail route from north of the signal bungalow and next to a railroad to a more southerly route that was also farther from the signal bungalow and would not cross signal bungalow wiring.

Kelle Williams appeared for the Pinsky Railroad Company, owner of the “Chesapeake & Indiana Railroad”, formerly known as the “Gulf & Atlantic Railway” and before that as the “Northern Indiana Railroad”. Williams previously served on behalf of Gulf & Atlantic. The Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum was represented by its Vice President, Fred Haberkamp; Secretary, Bob Barcus; and Board Member and HVRM’s Liaison to the PTC, Bob Albert. Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer, and Joe Leszek, Superintendent, appeared for the Town of North Judson. PTC Board Members Larry Wickert, Kirt Verhagen, and Steve, and Kathy as Treasurer, were present on behalf of the PTC. Following productive discussions, those present expressed support for the modified design as set forth in the Territorial Engineering plans.



Image by K. Lucas

On June 25, Bob Aloï provided an email, to be shared with the DNR, updating the progress of the extension. He wrote:

“During this period, we have continued the Design Plans and Specifications for the Trail Project. After the preliminary trail staking in mid-April and the subsequent approval of our alignment by the PTC on April 18th, we had a minor setback with some disagreement on trail alignment with members of the HVRM. We prepared an alternative route solution which was reviewed and accepted on June 7th.

“We are currently continuing to work on Plan roadway crossing details, signage details, kiosk detail and Main street rail track crossing details, grading plans and SWPPP plans. We are also continuing the detailed Specifications for the construction elements as well as proposed bidding documents and contract preparation. Our current Final Engineering Design is approximately 80% complete. We now anticipate late July for 90-95% completion documents suitable for submission for review. This date is still ahead of the project schedule.

During the PTC meeting, Bob Albert said all parties were satisfied with the modified trail route through North Judson. “Everybody was agreeable.”

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul and Linda Byer have treated with Glyphosate the entire north side of the eleven-mile length of the Erie Trail. This daunting task has had good results. They have also made great progress on the south side, but with the onset of dry and hot weather, during which plants become dormant, Paul and Linda had to pause their efforts.

Following trail work by J & K Excavating between US 35 and Starke County Road 400 East this spring, the PTC was committed to clearing debris from the asphalt trail and to the reduction of debris from the adjacent bridle trail. On June 3 Kathy and Steve cleared to CR 800 South. The following day Michael McGregor, Peg, Kathy and Steve combined to complete the commitment with clearing to CR 400 East.

On June 21, Randy Glass wrote that he ran his “tractor and brush mower down both sides of the trail from... [Main Street to the] rest park and from rest park to the next road. It’s rather large and not easy to maneuver around obstacles. It also doesn’t do a neat job of cutting weeds and grass since it’s designed for brush mainly. We did spray the cracks and along the one side of trail from main to rest park.”

Randy later wrote “The trail from...[Main Street to SR10] is looking good. This fall I want to trim trees that need it...[to the Bogus Run Bridge]. Ran out of time this spring to get it all. The groundhogs seem to like it a lot more. Digging everywhere.” He added “I filled the holes in that stretch of asphalt. Something still is able to dig out.”

Kathy and Steve rode bikes on the western stretch of the trail where Randy and family worked. Steve said with the efforts of the Glass family, the Byers family, and a financial contribution by Kirt Verhagen for mowing, “it looks better there than it has in years.”

Peg donated a mower and a chipper. Paul and Linda will try get them working.

Final Report of May 25 5K Run/3K Walk on the Great American Rail-Trail

Brian McMillin thanked those who helped manage the 5K Run and 3K Walk. He said early expectations were for about 20 participants, but 51 people completed a timed event. A few others signed up. “The event was a success and truly a team effort.” He thanked the Starke County Convention and Visitors Board for its financial support.

Images by K. Lucas



A condition of the grant was that the PTC provide a report to the Board within 30 days of completion of the event. The “Grant Final Report by the Prairie Trails Club Inc. for the Prairie Trails Club 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike on the Great American Rail-Trail/Erie Trail” was submitted by email on June 10. A hard copy of the Grant Final Report was circulated to those in attendance at the PTC meeting and would be shared with anyone on request.

Lisa Misch, local correspondent for the *Regional News* of LaCrosse, and now a member of the PTC, wrote a very positive story about the event. The story was published in the *Regional News* on May 30. Misch’s story was also made part of the report to the CVC Board. Included was an image of PTC workers on the day of the event shown below courtesy of Lisa and the *Regional News*:



Board President, Kathy Norem, wrote on June 10 expressing appreciation for the PTC’s promptness in providing the report. She added that “When we are ready to announce opportunities for 2025 (later this fall), I will be sure to send you the information as well.”

Warrior Expeditions Trekkers on the Great American Rail-Trail Update and Decision Whether to Renew Hosting in 2025

The seven veterans of the Warrior Expeditions cross-country bike trek came through Northwest Indiana between May 25 and May 30. They were already separated into small groups or individuals when they arrived in Starke County. The first was John Wirth who had an accidental meeting and conversation with Russ, Diane, and Peg as they began to set up for the 5K Run/3K Walk. Four of the trekkers—Michael Kohler, Cal Leaver, Suzy Williamson, and KP Haueter—stayed with Kathy and Steve on three consecutive nights. Russ and Diane hosted an evening meal for Suzy and KP that included PTC members Peg, Larry Wickert, Rick Vlaming, Rich Vallicelli, Peg, Kathy and Steve.

Not anticipated was that veterans would need support in Lake County. PTC members Charlotte and Corey Liss stepped up with little notice and hosted Brandon Blankenship, Callie, Suzy and KP for food and lodging at their Crown Point home. The only veteran who did not cross paths with PTC membership was Allen Megginson.

As has been the Warrior Expeditions practice, the PTC was requested to provide a fiscal valuation of services. Valuation included elements for transportation, lodging, and meals as outlined by the IRS. The valuation in Starke County totaled \$709.11. Char and Corey provided another \$250 in services in Lake County. The total valuation for services by PTC members was \$959.11.

Char has committed to our contact at Warrior Expeditions, Sarah Zeller, for services for an anticipated 2025 bike trek on the Great American Rail-Trail. For 2025 Sarah has also requested PTC support in Starke County. Following discussion, the membership agreed to again provide support.

A final report on Warrior Expeditions 2024 trek is expected at the August meeting. The report will include images of the veterans passing through Northwest Indiana.

Establishment of Paving Committee

Kathy suggested a committee be formed to explore the feasibility of contracting for repaving a section or sections of the existing trail. Paul suggested we should not begin with an assumption that all existing asphalt should be removed. Members will begin to gather information from local professionals who have expertise in paving, including county government. Anyone interested in assisting was urged to contact Kathy.

Update on Bass Lake—Erie Trail Signage

Starke County Parks Department Superintendent, Tracy Williams, caused placement of a “You Are Here” sign on the chain link fence near the junction of Indiana SR 10 and Starke County Road 600 East. The sign also identifies SCR 600 E as a direct connector to the Erie Trail.

In furtherance of this project financed by Kathy Carrier, Rick Vlaming prepared posts and framing for reciprocal signs to be placed where SCR 600 E crosses the Erie Trail. Rick erected the signs on the morning of June 27. One faces travelers southeast bound and the other travelers northwest bound on the trail. The two signs are the same except for arrows directed left and right so they both point toward Bass Lake and particularly the Bass Lake Beach and Campground.



Image by K. Lucas

During the meeting, Russ reported he is assembling a listing of services available in the general locale of Bass Lake. When completed the listing will be linked by our webmaster through a QR code on each of the signs. Until the listing is completed, the linkage is to the PTC homepage.

Russ expressed concern that the sign on the chain link fence is not readily visible. Steve responded he believed the sign had good visibility from SCR 600 E and from the west on SR 10 but agreed visibility was less from the east. Russ said he typically rode his bike from the east.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert reported July 6th is the first "Steam Only" Saturday of the year. Three trains will operate on the normal schedule of 11 am, 1 pm, and 3 pm, CT.

Bob said July 20 is Civilians and Soldiers in History Day. Although the concept was at first directed exclusively to the Civil War, the scope of the event has been expanded. For example, this year he anticipates a Revolutionary War re-enactors group.

Bob added that more passenger equipment such as Monon Business Car no. 2, offers new experiences for guests and volunteers. The HVRM is expanding its passenger equipment to handle growing events and numbers of guests. A private event in the works in partnership with Pinsky Railroad Company would carry guests on the Monon Business Car north through LaCrosse and on toward Valparaiso.

Bob said the Monon caboose arrived recently. It was sand-blasted "earlier in the day" and is in pretty good condition.

Saris Bicycle Repair Stand Awarded by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Steve reported the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy awarded the PTC a Saris "Deluxe Public Work Stand". The product features tools attached to retractable cables that minimize the likelihood of tangling. An air pump is included. A condition of the award is that the pump be installed by the end of 2024.

Paul said he has cement available for the installation. Membership agreed the pump should be placed at the trail crossing of US 35, at Starke County Road 600 East, or at Starke County Road 700 East.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, August 22, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m., CDT (8:18 p.m., EDT).