

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

BLPOA Community Center
6996 South SR 10
Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana

April 18, 2024

MEMBERS

John Bulger
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Charlotte Liss
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Rhonda Milner
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Deb Mix
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Robert Aloï, President, Territorial Engineering
Eileen Fenzl Miller

Call to Order by President

On April 18, 2024, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:37 pm, CDT (6:37 pm, EDT).

Engineer's Update on Northwest Trail Extension

Rhonda introduced Robert Aloï of Territorial Engineering, consulting engineer for the DNR grant to extend the trail through North Judson. He said preliminary surveying was completed, as well as about 50% of the design planning. He added that he had spoken with Bob Barcus, HVRM Secretary, and Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC; and with the North Judson Town Manager, John Leszek, and Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, with regard to the need to protect a signal bungalow at the "Triangle". He said he believed a strategy for going forward has been agreed.

Robert Aloï asked the members if they wished to use wooden gates at intersections like those between North Judson and Starke County Road 800 South or metal gates like those between US Highway 35 and Starke County Road 700 East. Paul Byer referenced problems experienced with the wooden gates, including termite damage. Several other members expressed a preference for metal gates. No one spoke in favor of the wooden gates. Robert said he would complete the designs to provide for metal gates. He said he was also working with the Town of North Judson to develop street markings that would help motorists recognize trail crossings.

Robert said he planned to use asphalt for the trail crossing of the railroads adjacent to Main Street similar to what is on Main Street. This approach would provide consistency

and be less costly than materials used on some rail crossings. He said he would use bollards where the trail parallels Main Street to create a visual barrier and to support safety.

Robert observed that east of the “Triangle” there is an area with “quite a bit of right-of-way” in what is now mostly a residential corridor. A small but interesting marker shows an historic railroad right-of-way. He said this site might offer a shaded area for a small bench.

Members thanked Robert for attending and for answering questions.

Review and Approval of Minutes of March 21, 2024

John Bulger moved to approve the minutes of March 21, 2024 without amendments. Peg Stalbrink 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 as follows:



**Treasurer’s Report
April 18, 2024**

<u>FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)</u>		
Balance on March 21, 2024		\$113,406.37
 <u>INCOME</u>		
03/26/24	Dues (Sharon Smead for 2023)	25.00
04/02/24	RunSignup	25.00
04//04/24	Naylor Pipe donation	400.00
04/15/24	NICF donation for mowing (Verhagen Family Fund)	<u>1,100.00</u>
	Total Income	\$1,550.00
 <u>EXPENSES</u>		
04/02/24	Check #1151 to OTES (5 magnetic Maintenance Volunteer signs)	\$85.00

Total Expenses \$85.00

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 03/21/24 \$114,871.37

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

TOTAL AMOUNTS PER CATEGORY

Benches

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

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018) Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here) 960.64
Hardesty Memorial Grant Wayfinding or historic signage 3,198.32
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations Future Vision/Website 662.50
\$4,821.46

Northwest Extension

Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020) NW Extension (or operations) 5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021) NW Extension (or operations) 5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #6 (2022) NW Extension (or operations) 10,000.00
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund NW Extension (or operations) 6,000.00
VFW Grant For "trail improvements" 5,000.00
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
\$75,700.00

Maintenance

Mower Sale Fund+Verhagen Fund Maintenance 2,468.42
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan) Trail maintenance 1,668.52
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline) Trail maintenance 2,368.42
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations Maintenance or Most Needed 2,699.11
Doral Solar Contribution Bridge/Trailside Clearing 7,269.48
CVC Grant for 5K3K trail event Featured Event 2,000.00
\$17,373.95

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$99,695.41

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST

TOTAL IN BANK \$114,871.37
-- RESTRICTED FUNDS \$99,695.41
== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS \$15,175.96

Kathy thanked Russ Blais for again obtaining a donation from Naylor Pipe. He sits on the Board for that organization, and through Russ's initiative, Naylor Pipe has been a great repeating donor.

Kathy expressed appreciation for the \$1,100 donation from the Verhagen Family Fund and Kirt Verhagen, through the Northern Indiana Community Foundation, in support of a contract for eleven mowings plus trash pickup at the former Rest Park at the junction of

the Erie Trail and Indiana Highway 10. The generous grant pairs beautifully with recent work by the Glass family to remove brush and suppress invasive plants along the trail southeast of the Main Street trailhead.

Kathy thanked longtime member, Sharon Smead, for updating her dues. She also made reference to the RunSignup receipt for the 5K Run/3K Walk.

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

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul reported that J&K Excavating has completed clearing the equestrian trail between US 35 and Starke County Road East using a side-mount mower. Steve Lucas said he and Kathy have begun clean-up resulting from the clearing project. He added he believed that J&K did a nice job. This perspective was also shared with him by John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, who observed the work on one of his trips on US Highway 35.

Rich Vallicelli said he observed the project while on a bike ride when clearing equipment was still onsite. He agreed that J&K Excavating did a thorough job but said there was debris left on the trail, and he suffered a flat tire. Paul added that J&K Excavating bid \$2,000 for the project with the understanding there would need to be clean-up afterwards. Paul said he received several bids for the project. J&K Excavating provided the lowest bid, with the next lowest bid being \$15,000. Rhonda asked about the use of a blower to remove debris left following the project. Linda Byer responded that a blower might help with small sticks and leaves, but larger wood pieces would need more. Kathy said she and Steve would return to the site and continue with cleanup, and she suggested it might also be a good project for the "Celebrate Trails Day 2024" event on April 27.



Erie Trail northwest of US 35
following brush clearing

Image by Kathy Lucas

Paul reported J&K Excavating has also completed placement of limestone to improve the parking area for the trailhead on the east side of Starke County Road 700 East. As the PTC approved during the March 21 meeting, Paul was authorized to expend between \$3,500 and \$4,000 for the project, “depending on the amount required for finishing.” But as a courtesy to Paul and the PTC, J&K Excavating reduced its fee to \$3,000. Members expressed great appreciation for Paul’s efforts in completing this improvement and for obtaining the substantial cost savings.



New limestone parking area
at trailhead east of
SCR 700 East

Image by K. Lucas

Reminder of April 25 Greenways Foundation Trails Celebration Luncheon

Kathy reminded members the Greenways Foundation of Indiana scheduled its Annual Luncheon for Thursday, April 25, at 10:00 a.m., CDT. This year the event will be held in the Heirloom at N.K. Hurst, 230 West McCarty Street, Indianapolis. Kathy said she, Steve, Kirt and Russ plan to attend. She believes we may be seated at a table with members of the Jasper County Trails Club.

Prepare for April 27 “Celebrate Trails Day 2024” Event

During the March meeting, the PTC agreed to hold an event for “Celebrate Trails Day 2024” at the trailhead on Starke County Road 700 East. The event was set to begin at 9:00 a.m., CDT (10:00 a.m., EDT) and include preparations for the “May 25 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike Ride on the Great American Rail Trail”.

A railroad tie post is located in the northeast quarter of the new limestone parking area shown above on this page. The post was in place prior to placement of the limestone and includes information from both the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum and the PTC. During the meeting, Bob Albert, Liaison from the HVRM, said the HVRM did not object to the PTC relocating the railroad tie to the southeast edge of the parking area. Doing so reduces the likelihood of a vehicle running into it and make the parking area more viable. Also, the sign warns persons not to trespass on HVRM’s rail-banked property extending southeast to Monterey. Steve said he had spoken with trail users (prior to placement of the limestone) who were uncertain as to whether they could lawfully park vehicles in this area or whether it would be considered a trespass. By placing the sign southeast of the improved parking area, the ambiguity is clarified. One of the efforts on Celebrate Trails Day 2024 will be to relocate the railroad tie post.

Another project that can be addressed during the “Celebrate Trails Day 2024” event is marking on the asphalt the start/finish line, the 3K Walk turnaround, and the 5K Run turnaround for the May 25 event. Most of the route for the “May 25 5K Run/3K Walk and

Bike Ride on the Great American Rail Trail” has been recently broomed, but gravel and sticks continually fall on the asphalt. This effort can be revisited.

Rhonda said she would take the lead on providing food for a cookout, including frozen hotdogs that she has from a prior event. Paul offered to bring a grill. Other members or friends of the PTC were encouraged to contact Rhonda with assistance they are able to provide.

Report of Workgroup for May 25 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike Ride on the Great American Rail Trail

Brian and Anita are chairing a workgroup to help prepare for the 5K Run/3K Walk. Brian re-emphasized during the meeting that volunteers are needed to work on the day of the event.

Russ and Brian developed medals for the event, and the medals have been prepared.



Brian referenced several publications in which he caused the placement of notices for the 5K Run/3K Walk. These included the *Leader* and the *Culver Citizen*. He said he has also asked the Starke County Chamber of Commerce to include a notice.

Charlotte Liss said information should also be targeted for farther northwest in Indiana. She reflected that the event is set for Memorial Day Weekend, beginning the summer season, and a lot of the people with vacation homes on Bass Lake would be arriving then. She also offered to work on raising the event’s profile on our Facebook page.

Brian added that he has tendered an event notice to WKVI for its local activities webpage. He requested that a PTC member volunteer for an interview by WKVI for a story about the event to be broadcast by radio and streaming. He understood there would be a modest fee for the opportunity. Deb Mix volunteered and said her experience was the fee for an activity of this type would not exceed \$100. Char suggested that the PTC approve Deb’s participation in a fee interview with the condition the cost not exceed \$100. Members approved this approach by consensus.

Brian asked Kathy if she was willing to contract to secure a portable toilet for the day of the event. She responded that she was.

Trail Counters Report

Joan Hardesty provided an updated trail counters report and circulated printed graphics. She said she was uncertain whether the two counters distinguish bicycle and pedestrian use. But Joan recently determined how to identify counter numbers on a daily basis, and not only on a weekly or monthly basis as previously. This new ability allowed her to compare the ground-truthing she and Kathy did last year.

Joan reflected that data collected thus far was compromised by previous concerns that mid-winter conditions would damage the equipment or make monitoring unfeasible. The counters were removed in the winter of 2022-2023. But throughout this winter she was able to keep the counters onsite. Human interference also negated data collection on two other occasions. The only months that can be compared directly so far are March, October and November. But she expects more comparisons will be possible moving forward.

Joan and others expressed continued enthusiasm for obtaining a third counter to collect data from the western end of the trail. The general expectation is that use there is more frequent.

Formation of Equestrian Trail Workgroup

Char has agreed to Chair an informal workgroup to explore opportunities for improving the utility of the equestrian trail. The Erie Trail has pathways that are approved for horseback riding for eight miles from Starke County Road 100 West to Starke County Road 700 East. With the exception of a shared space with walkers and bicyclists east of Starke County Road 600 East and over the Bartee Ditch Bridge, the equestrian element is adjacent to but separate from the asphalt element. The workgroup will meet onsite east of US 35 to identify opportunities that are consistent with DNR grant requirements, the rights of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, and economically feasible. Sharon Smead, Kathy, and Steve have agreed to participate in the workgroup. Larry Wickert and Mary Hollett have been requested to participate. Other PTC members are invited to join the workgroup.

Update on Panhandle Pathway Extension

Steve reported that John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, informed him the “Phase 1” 0.6 mile extension of the Panhandle north through Winamac is planned for this summer. The extension would become an important element toward connection with the Erie Trail, possibly in the vicinity of Bass Station.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert reported the May 30 Easter Trains were sold out. He said the Easter Train events “went pretty smooth this year.”

Bob added that training classes for the volunteers who manage excursions are currently underway.

Next Two Membership Meetings

The next Membership Meeting was scheduled for Thursday, May 23, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

The following Membership Meeting was scheduled for Thursday, June 27, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson.

Adjournment

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