

## LaPorte County Park Board Meeting

### December 3, 2024 Minutes

CALL TO ORDER: Meeting called to order by Ron.

ROLL CALL:

- Present: Mike King, Nick Landers, Jim Holifield, Ron Knickrehm, Mary Komenas
- ZOOM: Amanda Nebelung, Mary Nell Murphy
- Guests: Valerie Wallace, David Sinn + 2 friends, ALCO TV
- Jeremy Sobecki, Cathy Fuller

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

- Mike made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Mary.
- Motion carried 7-0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

- Jim made a motion to approve the minutes as written; seconded by Mike.
- Motion carried 7-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Valerie Wallace, Poet Laureate for La Porte County, gave a presentation on the Barbara Friedman Poet Laureate Project which has as an overall goal to make poetry more accessible to the public. She proposes having QR codes posted on various benches in the parks by which people can access a specific poem, audio or written. This was then discussed among the board members, all of which agreed that this was in line with current park efforts of connecting people with nature and promoting a means of achieving peace and tranquility. Mary made a motion to allow Jeremy to write a letter of support for this project, seconded by Mary Nell. Motion carried 7-0.
- David Sinn of the Starke County Park Board gave a presentation seeking a partner effort between theirs and our park departments to install a kayak launch point at Davis on the Kankakee River along the adjoining county lines. It was suggested by Ron that the Planning Committee look into this and gather more information; and then we can revisit this at a future meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORTS:

- Jeremy mentioned that he has requested a transfer of \$2000 from the Park Board account to the Seasonals account to cover payroll until the end of the year. This is something that *is allowed and has been done in the past* so as to avoid requesting additional funds from the County Council.
- Mary made a motion to approve the financial reports; seconded by Mike.
- Motion carried 7-0.

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

### 1. Administrative Report

- Bluhm expansion project update: We are now owners of the 43 acres! Planning stage is now underway. Jeremy is asking them to make a presentation at a public Park Board meeting. Target date for completion has not yet been determined.
- Rolling Prairie property update: Roof replacement on small building has been completed by Freese Roofing. Proposals are being reviewed for the Master Plan.
- Trails Master Plan update: There will be a public meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024 at Red Mill to discuss accessibility, connectivity, safety, and future development of trails and shared roadways throughout the county.
- Electric vehicle grant update: The process is moving along. Jeremy anticipates a spring delivery of the Ford Lightning electric pickup truck.
- Solar panel grant for Canada Lodge roof: It is looking highly likely that we will be approved for a grant of up to \$74,000 for solar panels to be mounted to the new steel roof on the Canada Lodge building. Jeremy has gone before the Council to get approval to pursue this, as it will require *prepayment*, but then we will receive 100% reimbursement,
- Jeremy also talked about a future program at Sebert Woods—"Beech Day in February"-- to remove beech trees that will otherwise take over the park and crowd out its unique boreal forest foliage. This program will utilize volunteers as well as park staff to clear an abundance of beech saplings from the Sebert Woods.

### 2. Maintenance & Construction Report

- Ron commented on how great of a maintenance crew we have and how many projects they have completed.

### 3. Programs Report

- Jeremy highlighted the "Local Flavors Dinner" program which was a great success.
- The Halloween themed Night Hike was also a huge success with over 500 in attendance!

### 4. Park Counts

- Numbers continue to grow!
- A new counter has been purchased for Sebert Woods so that we can track how many people make use of that park.

## REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

1. Executive Committee: Ron and Jim—no report
2. Budget Committee: Erin and Mary—no report
3. Personnel Committee: Erin and Mary
  - Superintendent evaluation has been emailed to all board members and staff.
  - Election of officers—if anyone is interested in changing committees, let Mary or Nick know.
  - Ron and Amanda are up for renewal in 2025.

- Boyd has announced his retirement for January 2, 2025, so we will be looking for a maintenance tech to replace him, which will not be an easy task!
- 4. Property Committee: Mike and Mary Nell—no report
- 5. Planning Committee: Amanda and Mary Nell
  - Future of Health Cabin at Red Mill—this is still undecided
- 6. Rules Committee: Amanda and Mike
  - 2025 user fee discussion
    - Caretaker position will have to be eliminated fairly soon. In order to cover the extra cost for having a part-time employee work weekends, Jeremy is thinking that it is time to raise the rental charges across the board.
    - Comparisons to La Porte City Parks shows that we are definitely behind them in cost, with a better facility.
    - Jeremy has figured an approximate 10% price increase, which will increase annual revenue by \$7,700.00.
    - After discussion, it was agreed upon by the board that these are very modest reasonable price increases.
    - Dog Park fees were discussed and it was decided that they should remain the same.
    - Jeremy concluded the discussion by stating that most of the programs will remain free or very small fees to cover any supplies.

OLD BUSINESS—no old business to discuss

#### NEW BUSINESS

1. Proposed meeting dates/locations for 2025.
  - Mary made a motion to approve the meeting dates as proposed for 2025; seconded by Nick.
  - Motion carried 7-0.
2. Proposed use fee pricing for 2025.
  - Nick made a motion to approve the recommended price increases; seconded by Mike.
  - Motion passed 7-0.

#### BOARD & STAFF COMMENTS

- Jeremy invited everyone to the staff/Park Board/Park Foundation Christmas party on Dec. 12 at 11:00 am.
- Mary Nell informed everyone that the migration of sandhill cranes is at its peak right now, and they congregate in large numbers at Jasper/Pulaski County. The DNR has estimated that there are 20,000 sandhill cranes there.

#### ADJOURNMENT

- Mike made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Jim.
- Motion carried 7-0.