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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
April 25, 2017**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday April 25, 2017 at 6:00 pm in the Gathertorium of the Legislative Center. In attendance were committee members: Mr. Brown, Ms. Little, Mr. Roman, Ms. Haji-Sheikh, new member Mr. Hughes and Superintendent Hannan. Mr. Porterfield and Mr. Bagby arrived after roll call. Guests included Richard Stewart of the Indiana, Iowa, Illinois Foundation for Fair Contracting IIIFFC, Scott Brown from Wendler Engineering, Ryan Hannan, Peggy Doty, Director of the Natural Resources Education Center (NREC) and Al Roloff, District Natural Resource Manager.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Brown called for a motion to approve the March 28, 2017 minutes. Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted a spelling error on page 7 of the March minutes. Mr. Roman called for a motion to approve the amended minutes, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Brown called for a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Roman and the motion passed unanimously.
Mr. Porterfield arrived.

**BID OPENING – AFTON WETLAND BANK WATER CONTROL
STRUCTURES REPLACEMENT**

Mr. Hannan noted that they would now have the bids opened for (2) water control structures at the Afton wetland bank. He noted these structures are approximately 20 years old and have been damaged over the years by wear and 2 flood events. He then introduced Mr. Scott Brown from Wendler Engineering who did the engineering plans and review for the project and Mr. Stewart from the IIIFFC. Mr. Hannan noted that after the opening, they would award the work to the lowest bidder who meets the specs of the project as stated in the project engineering documents and will then forward that recommendation to the Forest Preserve Commissioners for consideration at their May or June meeting. He noted that the bids were closed at 4:30 today and that 5 bids had been submitted. Mr. Scott Brown will review each bid after opening to assure all criteria and bid specs are being met. Mr. Hannan commented that this project will be paid for by non - tax wetland bank revenue set aside for maintenance/management of the wetland bank.

The (5) bids received and their totals are:

Martin and Company from Oregon, Illinois - bid of \$199,880.00

Civil Constructors of Freeport Illinois – bid of \$346,701.20

Whitaker Construction and Excavating of Earlville Illinois – bid of \$314,240.50

Alliance Contractors of Woodstock Illinois – bid of \$393,086.50

Sjostrom and Sons of Rockford Illinois – bid of \$272,428.94

Mr. Stewart asked if there had been a cost estimate done for the project. Mr. Scott Brown replied that his company had estimated an approximate cost of \$114,209.00. He went on to note that since the received bids came in significantly higher – he would thoroughly review the estimate and the received bids for any variances. Mr. Hannan noted that this review should be done prior to making a final award, but that a general motion could be made to allow the award after review.

Mr. Hannan noted that the bids would also be on file for review or if anyone had any questions.

Mr. Porterfield moved to award the work to the lowest bidder, determined after review and comparison with the initial estimate, and to forward that decision to the Commissioners at their May meeting. Seconded by Ms. Little. Mr. Brown then opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Brown asked if it were normal to have such a wide spread of costs in a bid project. Mr. Scott Brown noted that it can happen. Mr. Porterfield asked for a clarification of what would be reviewed. Mr. Scott Brown responded that they would review the materials needed as well as the service costs. If any variances or errors were found he would notify Mr. Hannan and the Committee immediately.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh clarified that all bids should be for the exact same goods, materials and services. Mr. Scott Brown noted that was correct.

Mr. Bagby arrived.

Mr. Hughes asked if the Committee would hear the results of the review before the May full Board meeting. Mr. Scott Brown responded that he would provide that to Mr. Hannan at his earliest opportunity. Mr. Hannan noted that he would then forward that on to the Committee members.

Mr. Brown asked if the Committee was now ready to vote on the motion. Following a roll call vote with (7) in the affirmative and no negative, the motion passed unanimously.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW BOARD MEMBER

Mr. Brown then noted that he had been so eager to get to the bid opening, he had neglected to introduce the newest Committee member, Mr. Hughes. He then asked Mr. Hughes if he wanted to tell the Committee about himself.

Mr. Hughes began by telling the Committee that he had started (5) businesses in his lifetime with only one failure. He commented that the failure of that was caused by the lack of a business plan and that had taught him the importance of always having a good plan. He noted that he had also recently sold off (2) businesses to free up time to assist his parents through recent illnesses.

He commented that he hoped he would be bringing business acumen and organizational skills to the Board. He noted that he was especially interested in upcoming wind and solar energy projects that would be coming before the Board and that he would have prior knowledge of those industries that may well be of great help.

Mr. Hannan commented that he would get Mr. Hughes all of the orientation and other materials that had been given to the Committee over the past few months.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan began by noting some highlights in the packet of materials for the month. He commented that the District had completed their burn activities thanks to this year's early February start. There were also grassland fire trainings held at Merritt Prairie with local fire departments. He also noted that there are also some new chainsaw sculptures at the Sycamore Preserve.

Mr. Hannan then noted that a copy of the original 1930 news article that began the discussion to form a Forest Preserve District. Forest Preserve monthly reports was also in the packet along with the resource management reports and monthly usage reports.

He commented that Ms. Doty will be speaking about Camp Russell a bit later and will show a brief film on that as well.

Mr. Bagby asked about the chainsaw sculptures and asked how long it takes to complete one. Mr. Hannan noted that it takes the artists approximately 3 to 4 hours per sculpture, but that they do have special tools to accomplish that.

Mr. Hannan noted that the May meeting would be held outdoors and at the site of a possible future land donation. He will send the Committee more on that at a future date.

Mr. Hannan commented that in the Goals document, enhancement to advertising efforts is mentioned. He presented a small calendar with the District logo on it that had been done by Mr. Roloff as a giveaway to groups. Mr. Ryan Hannan also brought some samples of various pins that he had acquired at various County forest preserves and conservation districts.

Mr. Hannan commented that he would be showing a PowerPoint Presentation overview of the District at the May County Board meeting. He then introduced Ms. Doty. She began with a brief film about the Summer River Camp held at the NREC.

Following that film, Ms. Doty presented a PowerPoint overview of the NREC. She noted that the presentation is a sort of visual year in review of the activities of the “education department” of the District.

Ms. Doty then showed a photo of the bridge before the overlook was completed. She noted that she has recently added activities and presentations for homeschooled children. She noted that they also use the Hoppe Heritage / 1835 Miller –Ellwood cabin property for activities and have partnered with Michael Donoho of the Sycamore Historical Society to obtain a grant to show 4th graders the cultural history of the area. For this program the local Ney Grange provided buses to take the students to the historical areas around the county. Kim Hulmes from St. Mary’s school has regularly taken this trip with her 4th graders.

Ms. Doty then told a story about a day when a full bus of first graders arrived unexpectedly at the NREC when they already had a good sized group of homeschoolers there for a presentation as well. She and her staff member were able to jump in and create a second presentation on the spot. They were able to do this without either group knowing the programs had not been fully pre-planned.

She went on to comment that they do some programs at Wilkinson / Renwick Marsh and love the overlook that illustrates a stepped progression of the ecosystem.

She noted that they also utilize the sled hill at Russell Woods for predator/prey simulations and as an area to let the kids work off some energy while still learning.

Ms. Doty then commended the Committee and the District for the improvements and additions they have done to the NREC over the years and noted that since those have occurred – incidents of vandalism have decreased.

She noted that there is an art teacher at Genoa high school next door to Russell who holds an art show at the facility with her kids and they hope there will be more groups utilizing the site as well.

Ms. Doty commented that it is often a challenge to get teachers out for winter nature events. So to make the best use of that time, she and Ms. Handel designed a recycling program that is done over the winter months. This year alone, Ms. Handel did approximately 3000 students visits for the program herself.

She then noted that her office and Ms. Handel’s are both located at the NREC and are now watched over by their new addition, “Forest Stump“ the carved bear.

Ms. Doty then showed images from Winterfest held each January and commented that the activity is to get people out to the preserves at a time they may not think to come out. She noted that the horse and wagon rides are by far one of the most popular activities during the Winterfest.

Ms. Doty showed an image of the NREC and commented on the fact that they do bulletin boards for various projects. She commented on an intern they had for a time who really did an excellent job with the boards.

She noted that this year the usual Maple Syrup event was not done as the weather changes really changed the timing on the maple sap flow. Generally they like to demonstrate how it takes 40 gallons of sap to make 1 gallon of syrup.

Ms. Doty noted that in the Spring and Fall, NIU elementary education students come out to learn appreciation for outdoor education and its value in the classroom as well as the lives of their future students.

She then showed an image of a soil exercise she does with young student groups to show how soil is made. The students get to actually “make” soil and then name it.

She commented that there is an ocean of bluebells around Russell Woods now. She then discussed recent visits by the area Master Naturalists.

She then noted that they often use the Russell Cabins for Pioneer Study where they re-create schoolrooms from the pioneer days for the students. She recalled one student asking why they used beets to make ink for the desk wells – she noted that if they used blackberries – the students might eat the ink!

She then discussed the various bird and field studies done and recalled a story about a recent rather close encounter she had with the facility snake. She then showed the 100 gallon turtle habitat occupied by “Sparky”. Sparky had been donated by a resident in the early 1980’s and was still going strong.

Ms. Doty then showed some of the birds and mussels that are found in and around the NREC. She noted they are coming up on camp season soon and know they will get many repeat visitors.

She then showed an image of “TJ” – 55pounds of non-potty trained large tortoise. She noted that he comes to her home during the summer to feed and graze safely. She noted that they use him to illustrate the potential dangers and commitments of owning an exotic species.

She then told the story of a former student who had been very quiet during the camps and activities, but was later accepted to test at Cambridge University. She contacted Ms. Doty to tell her that some of the test questions she was given were questions that she had

learned during activities at Camp Russell. The student has now gone on to study anthropology at Cambridge.

Ms. Doty commented that they are not trying, with the camps to grow tiny environmentalists. The goal of the camps is to create good citizens with a sense of responsibility for their world and environments.

Ms. Doty then handed out some camp brochures. She commented that she also posts to the Forest Preserve Facebook page on Master Naturalist and other activities. She is hoping that by doing as much outreach as possible, she can bring in new volunteers to help with the camp activities.

Mr. Hannan then introduced Mr. Roloff to discuss the many groups who to the Forest preserve over the year.

Mr. Roloff noted that they work with the NIU biology department on several areas of study. One current activity is a study on rare and common species of snakes. The students are comparing our cooler, wetter areas to others around the state.

He then noted that they will also continue to do mussel studies this year. They will also have biology interns again this year. One woman from University of Illinois is doing bird studies. She is looking into whether birds help with predation of pests in neighboring farm fields.

Mr. Roloff noted that they also do several presentations to area social and senior citizen groups and often have school age visitors from classrooms as far away as Chicago. He noted that some of the students who come have never seen any kind of wooded or natural area. One former student, and now teacher from Chicago, brought a group of junior high school girls.

He noted that Ecological Restoration and Conservation Biology classes often come to see the “living museums” of areas that the District has restored to their original natural state.

Mr. Hughes sked if we charge these groups for any of these activities. Mr. Roloff responded noting that the Forest Preserve does not charge as these activities support he core Forest Preserve mission statement to preserve and restore lands and provide passive recreation and education.

Mr. Bagby asked if we get any resources from NIU to assist with District activities. Mr. Roloff responded that Paul Sorenson from the University was the creator of the first prairie restoration projects that began in 1984. He noted that NIU, The University of Illinois Extension and Kishwaukee College all have very good symbiotic relationships with the District.

Mr. Brown thanked Ms. Doty and Mr. Roloff for their comments.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Haji-Sheikh reported that she spoke recently to Lisa Cummings from the Active Transportation group who will have some interns available to assist with pedal Pal projects.

Mr. Porterfield asked about the Sandhill Cranes and whether any are nesting in the County. Mr. Roloff responded that there are 2 pair that have been at the South Branch Prairie for approximately 6 weeks who may be establishing a nesting site. He noted that the County had a pair about 2 or 3 years ago, but they were chased off by an off-leash dog and did not return.

Mr. Porterfield then asked if the District could rope off areas if there is evidence they are nesting. Mr. Roloff indicated that might be done, but that also might draw more attention to the site than would be good for the birds.

Mr. Roloff then commented that he has seen the very rare Short-eared Owls near Prairie Oaks Preserve.

Mr. Hannan noted that if you go to a site called EBIRDS.COM, Afton forest preserve is identified as a National Birding Hotspot. Ms. Doty commented that sort of exposure brings in visitors who in turn bring in revenue to the County.

Mr. Brown then brought the final Goals document for the Committee to review. He noted that an item 4 had been added to encourage being good stewards of what we have and noting the need to commit to continuing to care and maintain what we have. He commented that he had also sent a thank you note to Ron Peabody, the author of a recent Farm Bureau publication article and a local Master Gardner. He noted that Mr. Peabody was very complimentary to the work and efforts of Mr. Hannan and Mr. Roloff.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Bagby. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Bob Brown, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
BB:kjr