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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
July 26, 2016**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday July 26, 2016 at 6:00 pm in the Gathertorium of the County Administration Building. In attendance were committee members: Mrs. Turner, Ms. Polanco, Mr. Brown, Ms. Haji-Sheikh, Mr. Bagby, Mr. Emerson and Superintendent Hannan. Mr. Metzger was absent. Guests included Board Chair Mark Pietrowski, Ryan Hannan, Mary Kay Knudsen, Peggy Doty of the NREC, Lea Pennington and the G2K group from Genoa Schools.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mrs. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2016 meeting. Mr. Bagby moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Polanco and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

G2K PRESENTATION

Mr. Hannan began the presentation by noting that there have been a number of trail proposals and projects throughout the county over the past several years. One of these, the Genoa to Kingston trail, now has a new group of supporters. He then introduced Lea Pennington, teacher at Genoa High School and sponsor of the G2K team who wish to be advocates/sponsors in establishing the trail.

The group, also known as CMPS (Community Minded Problem Solving), comes tonight to the Committee to discuss the trail/pedway. The group engages in active problem solving activities and decided they wanted to do some community problem solving.

The group expressed the concerns they have about safety as well as activities they would like to have available to the community. Problem areas included the need for safe passages between the town and the high school, long distance running options and safe dog walking areas. They identified three criteria that would be needed to solve the problem: Safety, Sufficient Funding, and Successful Connection between the critical areas.

The group has noted that there is a need for a path between Genoa and Kingston that would allow passage without the need for a car, walking on the public roadways or the railroad tracks.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked how the group works. Do they meet during class time or outside class as well?

Ms. Pennington explained that the group meets outside of standard class time as they are from various schools in the area. She noted that this group is involved in active, future problem solving and many have competed at the national and international level. This is the group's first effort at local community problem solving. They have been meeting since last October to discuss various problems in their community. After a lot of discussion and deliberation, the need for a safe path was the winner.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked what other areas they have competed in. Ms. Pennington explained that the group engages in a 6 step problem solving process. The team will research an issue and then have a 2 hour timeframe to complete a packet of problem identification and solutions. They then hone down to the best solution and then either present a skit on the best option or they can write an essay or perform a scenario as a story telling process.

All of the students presenting tonight have competed at the State level and 4 of the sophomores won last year and advanced to Internationals. Others have received wins in scenarios and essay writing.

Students can begin participation in these activities starting in 5th grade. Mrs. Turner asked where they have traveled to compete. Student Lily noted that they had most recently competed at Iowa State University. Mrs. Turner then asked what they had learned from the experience. The students responded unanimously that they felt that had acquired much stronger problem solving capabilities from the techniques they were learning.

Ms. Polanco asked what their next steps would be with this project. Ms. Pennington noted that they were already reaching out to the community to open conversations on needed trail easements.

Mr. Hannan noted that they had spoken that morning to the Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary, who had been active partners with the Forest preserve on many other projects. He noted that the Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary has committed to raising funds for the G2K trail.

Mr. Hannan also asked the group to discuss their recent meeting with Michael Haines who wishes to be one of the first private fund donors to the project. They have also met with Rich Gentile, the Director of Public Works for Genoa regarding the cities involvement in the trail creation. The group has also walked the proposed trail and received some helpful pointers from Mr. Haines about contacting landowners along the planned trail route.

Mr. Hannan noted that there were some land owners who were concerned about issues of liability related to the trail, but that he will talk with the Forest Preserves risk management insurer, PDRMA who can provide information in that area as PDRMA insures all forest preserve properties and liability.

At this time, they are looking at a 20 foot easement (flexible) with a gravel / limestone surface. The cost for this should be roughly \$50,000.00 per mile for a gravel and asphalt surface. There may be some savings to be found if the County, City of Genoa, or Kingston Township offers assistance with the gravel hauling, grading and earthwork.

Ms. Pennington noted that she must submit the project to the State by next Spring. The scope of this would focus on the completion of the last mile to mile and a half of the trail easement west of Pleasant Hill Rd. and a connecting link to GK High School. Ms. Pennington then showed a proposed trail map from Genoa to Kingston.

Mr. Hannan commented that when the subdivision was put in around Russell Woods, there was a 50 foot area set aside along the east boundary of Russell Woods for a future trail easement between the subdivision and the High School.

Mr. Brown asked if there were any other connections anticipated at this time. Mr. Hannan replied that there were none currently. Mr. Hannan went on to say that the Committee has been very supportive of this project in years past. Ms. Knudsen asked how often the students find they must actually walk on Route 72 now. The group replied that students often have to use that option.

Mr. Ryan Hannan asked if the 5 foot buffers for the trail would be mowed or have a natural prairie landscape. Ms. Pennington noted that though the group has traveled to the Farm Bureau section of the trail to observe natural prairie landscapes, which could be an option.

Mr. Hannan commented that the group will be active in assisting with fundraising for the project. One of the students noted that they are working on a website to act as a central information point for the project as well. They hope to use this as a way to connect to Social Media sites to expand the conversation.

Ms. Pennington noted that at this time they are waiting for responses from the property owners they have reached out to. Mr. Hannan commented that some are supportive and others are not.

Ms. Doty commented that the NREC might be a good site for a fundraising activity or a meeting site for the group.

Mrs. Turner noted that the group might also wish to come to the full County Board meeting in the Fall to make this presentation. Ms. Pennington replied that would be doable.

Mrs. Turner asked if they would be doing a skit about the project or taking another direction. Ms. Pennington replied that they would be doing a 3D model which they would also use a fundraising tool.

Mrs. Turner thanked the group for their presentation as well as for taking on such a great project for their community. Mr. Hannan commented that it really was inspiring to see such enthusiasm from the students.

MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Mr. Hannan began by presenting an engineering drawing of the Sycamore Forest Preserve. He noted that the road will need to be widened to meet code for 2 way traffic and parking. 3” of new asphalt will be placed on roads and parking He also noted a paved trail will be part of the work connecting to the Stone Prairie section and the Great Western Trail and that there will be changes to the entrance and exit locations for safe entering and exiting on to Rt. 64. Bids will be let on August 17th. At the DeKalb County Highway Dept. The estimated costs are approximately \$330,000.00. The District has received a \$100,000.00 anonymous donation and forest preserve funds available for this project. There are no costs associated with land acquisition as the land was purchased as part of the County FEMA grant.

He noted that they continue to hope that the new forest preserve could open by the end October. The District is currently waiting on the receipt of FEMA permits, but will bid letting to stay ahead of the process.

He also provided some photos showing the connecting path from Sycamore Forest Preserve to Stone Prairie and on to the Great Western Trail and noted that large boulders have been placed in the roads and parking area to try to prevent any further off road vehicle vandalism.

Mr. Hannan reported that he had received a very complimentary letter from PDRMA regarding the District’s commitment to safety and staff training. He noted that in the July Natural Resources Report, at the new Prairie Oaks Addition it is noted that rare native plants that had not previously been recorded in DeKalb County are on site and that 2 otters have been sighted as well in Haines Creek.

On August 2, 2016 the annual Sycamore Cross Country Alumni race will be held at the Afton Preserve and on August 30, 2016 they will hold a Conference Invitational there as well. Mr. Hannan reported that the Sycamore coach noted that several competing teams have commented on how nice the Afton Preserve is and how lucky Sycamore is to have Afton and the Great Western Trail it to practice on regularly.

Mr. Hannan then reported that both MacQueen and Russell Woods have both passed their annual Illinois Public Health campground inspections for the year and both received excellent maintenance reviews.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Mrs. Turner asked if there were any Committee Member comments. Hearing none, the Committee proceeded to Executive Session.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Turner then asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to take the Committee into Executive Session, seconded by Ms. Polanco. A roll call vote was held with 6 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and 1 absent.

Following the Executive Session, Ms. Polanco moved to return the Committee to public session, seconded by Mr. Emerson. A roll call vote was held with 6 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and 1 absent.

After returning to public session, Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to approve a 16 acre land sale adjacent to Prairie Oaks Addition Forest Preserve to the Forest Preserve District, and to meet with Mr. Nelson to see if he would consider giving the District first right of refusal on the remaining 40 + acres, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Emerson moved to also explore whether the district would want to bid on the 2 acre Ballou property taxes, under the condition that Mr. Nelson must first agree to the first right of refusal for his 40+ acres parcel, seconded by Ms. Haji Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Polanco moved to proceed to enter into a 10 year contract with Michael Haines to acquire a 60 acre parcel of land he has offered to the District, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously. These land preservations would be part of the planned Haines Creek Conservation Corridor which includes the Nelson property, Prairie Oaks Forest Preserve and the Prairie Oaks Addition.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved the Committee's agreement to support the continuation of the Somonauk to Sannauk Trail discussions now that the owner of the property critical to the trail completion have expressed interest in moving forward again with the trail project, seconded by Mr. Bagby and the motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Emerson moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Polanco. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Anita Turner, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
AT:kjr