

**FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES
March 19, 2013**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday March 19, 2013 at 6:00 pm at the Somonauk Public Library. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Mr. Cribben, Mr. Jones, Mr. Gudmunson, Mr. Brown and Superintendent Hannan. Ms. DeFauw and Ms. Haji-Sheikh arrived after the call to order. Guests were County Board Chair, Jeff Metzger, Board member John Frieders, Somonauk Mayor Aaron Grandgeorge, Village Trustee Becky Morphey and County Residents Connie Cline, Gordon Schumpert, Lorraine Jackson, Becky Rumney and Barry Smith

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2013 meeting. Mr. Gudmunson moved approval of the minutes, seconded by Mr. Jones and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci asked for an approval of the evening's agenda. Mr. Brown moved to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Mr. Jones and the motion passed unanimously.

SOMONAUK TO SANNAUK TRAIL

Ms. Fauci began by inviting the various guests to introduce themselves and discuss their interest in the Trail discussions.

Following the introductions, Mr. Hannan gave a brief history of how the project began. He commented that the Village had contacted the Forest preserve regarding partnership on a trail that would connect Sannauck Preserve and the Library and town.

Local landowner, Mr. Dewey was also involved and several scenarios regarding trail corridor locations were discussed. Mr. Hannan then passed out a map showing the most current trail corridor proposal. He noted that after the initial discussions, the Forest Preserve waited a year to determine if other land options might become available. When those options did not materialize, the trail planning returned to the original options utilizing the Dewey property. Mr. Hannan commented that the Committee had hoped Mr. Dewey might attend to night's meeting to join in the discussions, but had not received a response from him as to whether he would or would not be coming.

Mr. Hannan then returned to the map of the proposed route and commented that the red outline shows the current plan. He then discussed IDOT requirements that would have come into effect if an alternate route using the Rte 34 right of way had been selected.

Mr. Hannan then passed out photos showing similar, existing trails that may mirror how this trail would look. Mr. Fauci requested that the photos first be given to the visitors as the Committee members have already seen them.

Mr. Hannan noted that the proposed route which avoids the IDOT restrictions would be the most cost effective and provide for the best options for partnership between the landowner, Village and the County.

He then asked Mayor Grandgeorge and Ms. Morphey if there was anything additional they would want to add at this point. They both agreed that Mr. Hannan had thoroughly covered the major issues and discussions.

Mr. Hannan then returned to a discussion of the partnerships forming around the project as well as grants that might be obtained. He noted that the DeKalb County Community Foundation has been contacted and certain local charitable groups have expressed interest in assisting as well.

He then noted that the Forest Preserve currently manages the DeKalb/Sycamore trail that runs parallel to Peace Road between the cities and also manages, in cooperation with Kane County, the Great Western Trail that runs between Sycamore and St. Charles. He commented that there are several other recreational trails in the County that are very well used and locally supported.

Mayor Grandgeorge commented that the Somonauk Police would be assisting with trail patrol and the Somonauk Lion's Club has eagerly offered to supply funds as well for signage or educational materials.

Ms. Morphey commented that she will also be attending a meeting with Valley West and the Somonauk Chamber and those parties are also discussing grant options as well.

Mr. Hannan added that there is a group in Shabbona working on a similar trail proposal to connect the Village of Shabbona to Chief Shabbona Preserve then to Shabbona State Park and then back to the Village and Shabbona Schools.

Ms. Fauci commented that when she and other Board members worked on the 2004 Greenways and Trails plan for the County, one of the primary focuses was to connect towns to forest preserves safely. When the final plan was approved, a trail from the Somonauk community to Sannauk Preserve was a specific goal.

Mr. Hannan noted that there is also a trail in the planning process that will connect Russell Woods Preserve, the Genoa Kingston high school, the town of Genoa and then go on to connect to the town of Kingston (through the new Hoppe land purchase).

Having completed the overview of the trail history and the Preserves expertise with like projects, Ms. Fauci asked the Committee members if they had any comments to add.

Mr. Jones noted that the Committee has had a long time to review and discuss this process and he would prefer to hear from the community members. Ms. Fauci agreed and turned the floor over to the visitors.

Ms. Cline who owns the house that is adjacent to a section of the trail discussed her specific concerns, especially about the potential loss of trees, light posts, fence sections and potential incursions onto her driveway. She also expressed concern about the number of people passing close by her front door. Mr. Schumpert who also lives in the home commented that they would not object to a trail that ran behind the house. Mr. Hannan responded that there would be no problem with moving the trail behind the house. Ms. Fauci commented that the Committee's primary desire is to cooperate with the home and property owners surrounding the project.

Ms. Fauci added that there might be some people who still attempt to cross in front of the house or on the road. Mr. Schumpert commented that given the width and depth of the ditch in the front of the property, it might not be likely that people would choose that route.

Ms. Fauci commented that the Forest preserve would work with the homeowners to create additional barriers in front of the home if they are needed. Following additional discussions, the homeowners indicated that they liked the idea of a curving path around the property rather than 90 degree angles. This also assists with the issue of farmer access to the fields behind the house. Mr. Hannan also commented that there are several places in the County that have farm access across trails. He noted that this is intended to be a limestone trail, not a hard surface, so farm equipment would not cause undue damage. He added that if a 90 degree turn had to be used, there are several areas that have small stop signs to slow bikers.

Ms. Fauci asked the homeowner once more if she was comfortable with the trail passing behind the home. Ms. Cline responded that she knew that there could be problems no matter where the path is finally set, but that she realized that it could also add value to her property.

One of the visitors asked why small stop signs would be used on trails? Mr. Hannan replied that they simply alert the riders or walkers so they are aware of any sharp turns or blind corners. Ms. Fauci noted that some other counties utilize mirrors for corners where corn or other natural obstructions.

Mr. Jones asked if there were any additional considerations or discussions that would have to occur regarding the additional land that would be needed for a curve rather than a sharp turn. No one felt that would be a major problem.

Another visitor then asked if there had ever been any conversations about a path extending from Lake Holiday. Mr. Grandgeorge responded that a path is being started already from Lake Holiday that will end just about at the start of this trail.

Ms. Fauci asked if anyone had any additional comments.

Visitor Barry Smith noted that he is very concerned about the trail being adjacent to his rented farm field. His stated concerns are with visibility of the trail from the road for

safety purposes and well as issues that might arise from the application of aggressive pesticides or other chemicals he may be using on the fields.

Another concern is the potential for vandalism to his property because the trail corridor is not clearly and fully visible from the road. A final item he noted was that there may be costs associated with the heavy flow of water that will flow through the area.

Mr. Hannan noted that the Peace Road trail is actually immediately adjacent to ag land as is the Great Western Trail and there have been no complaints from either trail users or farmers in those instances.

Mr. Smith asked what would happen regarding responsibility if he did use highly aggressive chemicals on his crops. Ms. Fauci noted that there was, if she recalled correctly, a fence/tree line separating the fields from the trail and also wondered about the size of the easement that would also be along the boundary. Mr. Hannan noted that there was an approximately 20 foot wide trail corridor.

Mr. Grandgeorge asked if Mr. Smith's concern was about topical risks or inhalation risks. Mr. Smith replied that his concerns were more for topical contamination, rather than inhalation.

Ms. Fauci noted that the farm lands are actually already adjacent to many residential properties in the area and asked if there had been any issues.

Mr. Gudmunson then interjected that he cannot contract with Del Monte because of their fears regarding liability arising from agricultural spraying.

Ms. Hadji-Sheik asked whether trail signage or closures could be employed around the time of the chemical application to minimize the risks. Mr. Metzger asked Mr. Smith how often annually he applies the chemicals he would be concerned about. Mr. Smith replied that this would be an issue just a couple of times a year.

A visitor asked about reimbursement if crops are damaged by trail users. Ms. Fauci noted that the Forest Preserve District has a long standing policy of reimbursement if these situations should occur. However, she added that there have been no claims of damage or injury against the Preserve to this point.

A visitor asked where Mr. Dewey stands on this currently. Ms. Morpheu noted that in their conversations, the Dewey family is considering either a donation or a lease of the land .

Mr. Fauci added that it was her understanding that Dewey's are considering the possibility of future development and considers the creation of this trail and potential added value to the land value.

Mr. Grandgeorge noted that a developer would likely be required to make the sorts of improvements a trail like this represents should a sale occur, so having the trail already exist does make the property more attractive.

Ms. Hadji-Sheik spoke to the advantages of such trails and their roles in encouraging healthier lifestyle and cycling as well. She noted examples she had seen in Europe of the benefits such trails and structures bring.

Ms. Fauci commented that it should be said that the trail, like other county trails and properties, will be closed at night. Mr. Hannan noted a sunrise to sunset hours.

Ms. Fauci then asked Mr. Grandgeorge to discuss how the trail will be policed. He responded that the path is intended to be wide enough to allow for a car to pass through and they will also have officers on bikes as well. He prefers the biking approach as it places the police out with the citizens. He added that there is currently a partnership with the DeKalb Sheriff's police to patrol Sannauk Preserve, so that will expand to cover the trail as well.

A visitor asked how long the trail was. Mr. Hannan responded that it was approximately a mile and a half in length.

Mr. Gudmunson asked how the Village intended to keep snowmobilers, ATV's and other motorized vehicles off the path.

Mr. Hannan replied that on the Great Western trail and others there are clear postings regarding what is allowed and not allowed and that Preserve staffers, trail users and citizens in general do not hesitate to report offenders to the police. Again, this has not been a problem on the existing trails and preserves.

Mr. Gudmunson noted that he has had several incidents of vandalism on his property and he just hopes everyone understands the struggles that local farmers face from the costs of those sorts of incidents.

Mr. Smith asked why the area immediately adjacent to Rte. 34 isn't being considered for the path location. He inquired whether this was a decision based on nothing but economics or other considerations applied.

Ms. Fauci noted that first and foremost, the landowner did not want to pursue that and that a vital criterion for any land acquisition in the county was the partnership with willing sellers. However, she added that the IDOT requirements that would arise from taking that route would, indeed, greatly increase the trail costs.

A visitor asked if the Forest Preserve wasn't concerned about the area being too isolated. Mr. Hannan responded that several area trails and preserves are actually even more remote –but with the diligence of the Forest preserve staff, the Sheriff's department and the many users –there have been very few incidents.

Ms. Fauci noted that at recent statewide Forest Preserve meetings it is often noted that because of the diligence and care by the users, many trails and preserves are far safer than the populated areas surrounding them.

Ms. Hadji-Sheik added that bikers are often extremely focused on sharing information with their fellow bikers about the terrain or conditions ahead.

Mr. Metzger commented that it seems this would be an advantage to get bikes away from busy roads. Ms. Fauci commented that the Peace Road trail actually runs very close to a very busy road and there have not been any issues with that.

Mr. Gudmunson asked if the trail would be fully fenced on both sides. Mr. Hannan commented that he could not justify the added costs of a full fence along the trail based on his lengthy experience. He commented that he simply has not experienced the sorts of negative experiences being discussed. A visitor asked if the trail was even really long enough to be of any use for adult runners or bikers. Mr. Grandgeorge commented that several people including himself use shorter distances in Sannauk Preserve for exercise and training now.

Mr. Hannan noted that the Sycamore Cross Country teams use several county trails for training. Additionally there are many runners, walkers, bikers, birders, and wheelchair individuals who appreciate having trail access.

A visitor asked if people using the trail could park in the Public Library lot. They asked if the Library would be alright with that and wondered where the trail head would actually begin.

Mr. Grandgeorge noted that the Library lot is public parking and so could easily be used for trail visitors as well.

Ms. Fauci asked if there were any further comments.

Mr. Metzger commented that he was very pleased to see activities like this occurring in the South of the County, and he would be very excited to see this project, some 10 years in the planning, be able to come to a successful conclusion.

Mr. Hannan added that the discussions on this trail project go back to the days of Board member Charlie Marshall when he discussed this trail connection possibility.

Mr. Cribben asked Mr. Hannan to expand on the drainage issue. Mr. Hannan responded that he would be meeting with County Engineer Nathan Schwartz from the Highway Department to discuss the most appropriate way to deal with the trail, waterway and slope engineering. He discussed several areas in forest preserves where there are similar drainages where they have successfully handled the drainage in a variety of ways.

Mr. Jones commented that he felt the Committee had done their due diligence on this matter extremely well. They have hashed out the costs, the safety concerns and landowners wishes extensively. He feels that it is time to make a decision to move ahead.

A visitor asked if someone came off the trail and were injured on a homeowner's property, where would the liability fall. Ms. Fauci noted that this is no different than any individual passing a private home then entering the property and injuring themselves. However, she noted that the District works closely with our insurance and risk management agency PDRMA on questions like these.

A visitor commented that she was extremely happy with how tonight's meeting was run. Everyone had an opportunity to have their say, a very open discussions and good information and for one, she was very excited to see this project go forward. If she had one regret, it is that it wasn't done 10 years ago. She closed by asking how soon the District could move forward on the project.

Mr. Hannan noted that this could still be completed this year if all the pieces of the property transfer and other issues fall into place.

Mr. Smith noted once again that he was just concerned that other alternative routes and options hadn't been fully considered. It was noted again that this project has been in discussions for fully 10 years, and that all possible options have been considered extensively.

Ms. Fauci and Mr. Hannan commented that it would be good if the Committee could come to a consensus on how they would want to proceed, even though Mr. Dewey could not attend the meeting. Ms. Morphey noted again that it was her understanding that Mr. Dewey was anxious to move forward.

Ms. Fauci then asked the Committee if they felt there was consensus.

Mr. Gudmunson continued to insist that that a path parallel to Route 34 would be the better choice as he continues to be concerned about the security of the adjacent farmlands and the potential water issues.

Ms. Fauci responded that the County engineers have very ably met water concerns previously on trail projects and have been exemplary resources.

Mr. Jones commented that while he respected Mr. Gudmunson's concerns, if the landowner isn't agreeable to that route, the Committee cannot force the issue.

Ms. Fauci asked if there would have to be approvals by County engineers or if that had already been done. Mr. Hannan noted that he would alert the Committee when the meetings with the engineers would be taking place.

At this time the Committee agreed to a consensus on the project pending the meeting with the engineers to discuss the potential drainage issues and land transfer options. Ms. Fauci commented that the primary purpose of tonight's meeting was to establish the basic policy issues surrounding the project and to provide an opportunity for the stakeholders to express their concerns, issues or support.

Mr. Grandgeorge noted that Mr. Dewey is a detail oriented individual who had reviewed his options very extensively and feels the current plan is workable despite any drainage concerns.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan noted that there was a very good article in the packet regarding the Maple Syrup Fest recently held at Russell Woods. This helped to produce a very good crowd for the event.

He went on to add that the packet also contains information on the prairie and woodland burns that will be beginning soon, weather permitting.

He noted that he and Mr. Roloff and Julia Fauci have continued to work with the DeKalb Park District and Com Ed on the restoration of the trails along the Com Ed power lines and DeKalb Nature Trail to create a native sustainable landscape for the future.

The Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary will be assisting with planting on the trail along the County Farm Woods forest edge and Com Ed is still discussing reimbursement for the costs. He commented that it is also good that many of the trail neighbors are also involved in the project to create a sustainable, natural environment that will not require future extensive trimming that occurred last year.

He closed by commenting that an intergovernmental agreement with the Park District has been ok'd by the States Attorney that will allow the Forest preserve staff to begin the planting. A list of the native plants and grasses that will be used, along with short trees and short grass prairie plants is included in the monthly packet as well.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Hadji-Sheik noted that she is hearing a lot of interest in what is happening with that trail and is eager to go back and report these developments. She also reminded the Committee of local efforts underway to create community gardens in the area.

Mr. Hannan noted that there will also be a Prairie Garden along with the general community gardens that will highlight the early prairie plants that were used.

Mr. Cribben asked how the detail of the monthly claims in the packet are to be reviewed. In specific he asked about the \$10,000.00 recent payment to the U of I Extension.

Mr. Hannan then detailed the partnership between the U of I Extension and the Forest Preserve to run the Russell Woods outdoor education and school visit activities. He

noted that the Natural Resources Center staff (Peggy and Connie) are actually U of I Extension employees. Revenue to run these programs comes from program fees, forest preserve, U of I Extension, and recycling grants to cover costs.

Mr. Fauci reminded the Committee that educational activities are a mandate in the Forest Preserve charter with the State. This cooperative effort allows the Preserve to meet that mandate.

Mr. Brown noted that at one time there were State matching funds to assist with these sorts of programs and asked if those were still available. Mr. Hannan responded that because of the budget reductions of the past few years, those had been reduced.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
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