

South Bend Venues Parks and Art's Ecological Advocacy Committee

Triannual Report

**For the Period Covering:
March 12 to July 15, 2020**

Submitted by

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2020 Chair

Additional 2020 committee members:

Jo Borer
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Summary

The period of March to July 2020 has been a busy time for the Ecological Advocacy Committee. Work taken on by the committee includes continuing to revise and expand the Natural Resource Management Plan, advising on the loss of parkland and ecological implications at Ponader Park, advising VPA staff and other city departments, working with students and interns, and addressing the environmental concerns and proposals of area residents.

Introduction

This document is the second of three 2020 scheduled reports by the Ecological Advocacy Committee to the South Bend Park Board of Commissioners and the PARC Committee of the South Bend Common Council. The committee submitted the first report on March 11 and will present the third before the December 14 park board meeting.

Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP)

The primary 2020 focus of the EAC is the revision of the Natural Resource Management Plan. Since March, the committee has been working in groups with VPA staff and with other local and regional resources to formulate the 2021 NRMP. The 2021 document is a graphically-rich, ambitious effort that significantly expands upon the prior versions. The timeline remains in place to have the NRMP draft completed, vetted by stakeholders, and presented to the Board of Park Commissioners at the November or December meeting.

Ponader Park Rights of Way

On July 7, VPA Partnerships, Community and Standards Coordinator Matthew Moyers notified the EAC that St. Joseph County is requesting permanent and temporary rights of way within Ponader Park, a park identified by the EAC as being ecologically sensitive. On July 14, the EAC held a special meeting. In attendance were several VPA employees, legal counsel for VPA and St. Joseph County, and representatives from the consulting firm DLZ. On July 16, the EAC submitted a detailed report of our conclusions and recommendations to the Board of Park Commissioners.

South Bend Code of Ordinance Chapter 19

Due to COVID-19, the PARC Committee of the South Bend Common Council postponed our March 23 presentation indefinitely. Both the EAC and VPA staff remain committed to updating Chapter 19, and we await guidance from the PARC Committee.

35th Street Wetlands

With guidance from several EAC members, the University of Notre Dame students completed and presented their study and design plans for the 35th Street Wetlands property. EAC member Alicia Czarnecki has requested copies of their designs to share with the committee and with VPA.

Elbel/Mud Lake Proposal

As detailed in the EAC's March report, the committee reviewed a document submitted by members of the community entitled, "Proposal for the City of South Bend Venues Parks & Arts Department to commit to pursuing protection for Mud Lake as a state-dedicated nature preserve." The EAC's newly created Mud Lake subcommittee felt that the goal of the proposal was too narrow. Subsequently, the EAC resolved to send the document back to its authors with the recommendation to expand the methods of protection to include additional options.

Prior to the EAC's June 22 meeting, Mud Lake subcommittee lead Andrew Tucker received a revised version of the document, which the subcommittee is currently reviewing. The EAC has also reached out to VPA for clarification of the committee's purview on the proposal.

Interdepartmental Communication

March 30 Meeting

- Patrick Sherman of VPA Facilities and Grounds presented park capital improvement updates to the EAC.
- South Bend 5th District Councilman Jake Teshka joined the EAC to discuss the merits and complications of limiting the release of balloons within the city.

May 11 Meeting

- Becca Plantz, a project engineer from the City of South Bend Public Works, presented a new Landscaping Standards document to the EAC for feedback. The EAC provided suggestions and invited Ms. Plantz to return to the EAC at the June 22 meeting.

June 22 Meeting

- VPA/EAC liaison Garry Harrington updated the EAC on trail improvements at Elbel Park.

City Forester Brent Thompson and South Bend Director of Sustainability Therese Dorau were both in attendance at two of these three meetings.

Community Outreach and Interaction

- Committee chair Sass was contacted by a member of the community concerned over illegal dumping of yard waste onto conservative wetland plants at Fredrickson Prairie. Sass removed the grass clipping from the prairie, referred the matter to John Martinez, Director of Facilities and Grounds, and also reached out to the LaSalle Council of Boy Scouts for help in stopping the dumping.
- Indiana University South Bend Sustainability student Elizabeth Simeri reached out to the EAC and to liaison Harrington about the idea of partnering with VPA to present programs on wildlife gardening to the public. The committee resolved to ask Ms. Simeri to submit a formal proposal for consideration.
- IUSB Sustainability Fellow Avanti Lalwani contacted EAC Chair Sass for advice on maintaining a no-mow, privately-owned parcel to benefit pollinating insects. This 9-acre parcel, located within city limits, is subject to South Bend city code on the height of vegetation. Sass advised that there can be exceptions for certain types of native plantings, such as rain gardens, swales, and vegetation buffers. However, allowing a field to go fallow was not an advisable strategy.
- On July 13, Adam Gorrell, an intern working for South Bend Department of Public Works through enFocus Inc., contacted EAC members, Alicia Czarnecki and Steve Sass. Along with other interns, Mr. Gorrell has been studying ecologically responsible outdoor lighting within the City of South Bend. On July 15, Sass attended a virtual meeting with Mr. Gorrell and Maria Armes, another intern. The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the EAC's work with local resources and on the Natural Resource Management Plan.

Personnel

The 2020 EAC has lost two members. Presumably, due to reasons of technology, committee member Josephine Borrer has not participated in the committee since the onset of COVID-19. Student member Amy Kryston, who asked to return in 2020 for her second year of service, has not attended any meetings or replied to any attempts at communication.

Conclusions

Although 2020 has been an unusual and challenging year for everyone, for the most part, even with the addition and acclimation of four new members, the business of the EAC has remained productive and on-track. Thanks to the ambitious goal of expanding the Natural Resource Management Plan, and the sudden developments impacting Ponader Park, the EAC has not been idle.

Recommendations

- The EAC would like to move forward with amending Chapter 19 of the South Bend Code of Ordinances. To facilitate this, the EAC requests further guidance from the VPA and the PARC Committee.
- Abandoned positions can potentially impact the committee's ability to form a quorum. Moving forward, the commissioners could consider adding a provision to provide a means for removing inactive committee members.