

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on June 27, 2022

Committee Members Present:

Charlene Rountree
Steve Sass
Andy Schnabel
Andrew Tucker
Lindsay Chadderton

Others Present:

Garry Harrington – VPA, Rum Village Park Property Manager
Brent Thompson — City Forester, VPA
Hannah Teshka – VPA, Pinhook Center Manager
Patrick Sherman — Project Engineer, VPA

I. Call to Order - Steve Sass 8:34am

II. Approval of Minutes

Andy Schnabel moved to approve the minutes of the May 9th, 2022 meeting. Charlene Rountree seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

A. Invasive Plants Sales and Brochures in South Bend

Steve began the discussion by stating that all four of the box stores in South Bend (Lowe's, Menards, Meijer and Walmart) are continuing to sell plants that are prohibited in South Bend. Charlene commented that while dispersing invasive plant brochures that the box store employees told her that they have no control over the plant species. Patrick Sherman commented from past job experience managing Home Depot stores that plant species sold by box stores are selected by independent plant suppliers. Charlene volunteered to identify and contact those plant vendors. Steve commented that it is unfair to ask the small businesses to comply while the chain stores do not.

B. Municipal Code 19 Changes

Andy Schnabel began the discussion by stating that Steve provided most of the comments on the draft ordinance changes. Most of the comments revolved around wording that would be the responsibility of the city's legal counsel. However, the remaining comments revolved around the specific role of the citizen's tree board and whether or not the board's role would provide oversight or be strictly advisory. Steve provided examples of other Indiana city's tree board definitions. Brent suggested that because the EAC is defined by park board resolution as an advisory entity that granting oversight could be a violation or conflict with the resolution. The EAC resolved to defer to VPA, the City, and the city's legal counsel for clarification. In the meantime, EAC members should read through the document on the Google Drive that contains examples of other city's ordinances.

IV. New Business

A. Seitz Park Visit and Long-Term Plan for River Windows

Garry Harrington began the discussion by summarizing a recent site visit to Plaza Park and areas of the East Race Trail attended by several members of the EAC and VPA staff. The purpose of the meeting was to assess and make recommendations

on the removal of vegetation along those areas in order to improve river views. The consensus from the EAC was that due to existing erosion and slope of the banks that invasive honeysuckle could be cut back, but not removed or treated with herbicide. EAC questioned the importance of creating river vistas along these delicate areas.

Steve pointed out that the river's riparian area is important wildlife habitat and corridor as evidenced by the snapping turtle and eastern cottontail observed on the visit, and stands of native sumac near Pinhook Park, and suggested that the city should cease using "brush hogs" along the river entirely. However, committee members were also sympathetic to the staff's mandated timelines and suggested that staff could mark native vegetation and survey for fauna before the commencement of work.

B. 35th Street Wetland and the Meow Mission

Garry Harrington commented that while conducting a Back the Bend project at 35th Street Wetlands, he noticed large amounts of trash have flowed in through the storm drains. He also noticed numerous cat houses maintained by Meow Mission.

He subsequently contacted Meow Mission who admitted to placing and maintaining the cat houses, and mentioned that people continue to abandon cats at the site. Steve reported that the Meow Mission's cat houses also remain at Riverside Park and that he had observed an individual feeding the cats. Garry is to reach out to the Humane Society and to South Bend Animal Control for additional guidance.

V. VPA and City Updates

Hannah Teshka reported that Wild Ones wants to additional native plants at Pinhook Park and that a local fisherman is recommending a carp-reduction event. The EAC took no issue with either request, but Lindsay suggested contacted Eric Fisher from IDNR for guidance on the carp reduction.

VI. Miscellaneous

Next meeting: August 1st, 2022 at 8:30am still by Teams.

Action items for follow-up:

- VPA to solicit advice from city legal counsel on direction of tree advisory committee
- Charlene Rountree to find the names and potentially contact information for the plant suppliers for the major plant retailers in South Bend.
- Garry to contact South Bend Animal Control for guidance on feral cat communities on city property.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10am.

Minutes approved August 22, 2022

APPROVED