

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on February 27th, 2023

Committee Members Present:

Charlene Rountree (Secretary)
Amy Gillan
Allison Pudlo
Andy Schnabel
Andrew Tucker

Others Present:

Garry Harrington — VPA, Rum Village Park Property Manager
Matthew Moyers – VPA, Partnerships, Community and Standards Coordinator
Brent Thompson — City Forester, VPA
John Martinez – VPA, Director of Facilities and Grounds
Hannah Teshka – VPA, Pinhook Center Manager

I. Call to Order – Charlene Rountree 8:34 am

II. Approval of Minutes

Amy Gillan moved to approve the minutes of the January 9th, 2022 meeting. Andy Schnabel seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

A. 35th Street Wetland Cleanup

Garry Harrington provided updates on the beautification project occurring on April 1st. He and Andrew Tucker will be participating and encourage more to join to ensure this area remains cleared of debris. Some University of Notre Dame students will be joining as well.

Further discussions about the feral cat situation continued with suggesting it to be an addition to the Wildlife Coexistence Plan. To prepare, Charlene Rountree asked Andrew Tucker to resend to the entire committee his cat management material. This will be a main topic in the next EAC meeting.

B. MLK Dream Center and Kennedy Park Project Updates

Matthew Moyers updated on how the project updates are looking favorable. One of the main priorities is to ensure more naturalized areas of campus. There will most likely be opportunities for the EAC to provide oversight and advice as the construction continues. One of the biggest features they are looking into is the installation of a water feature. Much of this will be shared on the VPA's website.

IV. New Business

A. Plantings by the Zoo Entrance

Garry Harrington provided some information on the changing of plantings in front of the Potawatomi Zoo. He thinks it is most likely a bioswale in that location. Since the location will be retaining water, Garry coordinated with Andrew Tucker and Andy Force, the horticulturalist, on putting together a list of plants that would be suitable in such a microcosm.

B. Funding for Rum Village Nature Center

Garry Harrington was happy to report that \$65,000 has been allocated as funds for Rum Village Nature Center. All involved are quite happy about this. These funds will most likely be used for improvements in general. This is above average in funding for this locale.

C. Discussion of the EAC Chairperson Position

Since Steve Sass was not present at this meeting, this discussion was primarily to go over the committee members who were present's thoughts on what the chair's role should be and responsibilities of the chair in comparison to the committee overall. Andy Schnabel expressed how he wanted this to be added to the agenda for this meeting just to review the chair and secretary position descriptions. After reviewing, it was discussed in regards to the chair's interactions with the Park Board and provision of regular reports, that the EAC members could be more democratic in the representation of it by being more aware of these Park Board meetings, possibly attending some, and know what the reports are before they are sent. This can be added as an additional agenda item for this next meeting in April so that all committee members can be aware of how regular meetings can be orientated, agenda and notes sectioned to include Park Board communication, and EAC awareness of Park Board meetings. A defining of EAC elected position and member position roles.

D. Areas of Focus for 2023

As mentioned in previous meetings, the EAC should probably not take on any more major projects this year until the major projects of last year are finally implemented by the South Bend Common Council and VPA. However, addressing the feral cat issue as another species addition to the Wildlife Coexistence Plan should be one to take on for 2023.

V. VPA and City Updates

John Martinez updated the EAC on the mowing schedule that had been arranged previously, especially for low mow and no mow areas. They will be starting in mid-March through April as planned. Since last year, the VPA was asked not to mow the area near the river for IUSB, they will not do so again this year unless instructed differently.

Charlene Rountree stated that it was probably good to leave that grass barrier like planned; however, Garry Harrington expressed concern about certain plants taking root in that grass area that is not getting mowed last year and then potentially this year as well. Andy Schnabel reminded that it was ok to mow that area once a year in the spring to ensure woody invasive plants do not begin to take root, but it would not be advisable to treat it as a no mow area indefinitely. Perhaps, there was some misunderstanding on this suggestion. John Martinez

stated that he and his team would mow this area once then in spring and include it on their schedule.

John Martinez also discussed last August, AEP had approached the VPA on work being done in Ponader Park. EAC was instrumental in advising on a proper approach with this easement. This area of land ended up being disputed over ownership. John did not want any further confusion on what the continued discussions of this property entailed and wanted the committee to be aware of what was currently being addressed for any further changes to easement work with consideration to the ecology of that area. It is worth to note that Juday creek is considered protected. Matt Moyers suggested the EAC could recommend John Martinez to negotiate with the Board of Park Commissioners on this.

VI. Miscellaneous

Andrew Tucker brought up questions on EnFocus/JoinTrees efforts to increase tree canopy in South Bend. Both EnFocus and JoinTrees came to Kern Road Mennonite Church on 2/12 to discuss their efforts to increase tree canopy in South Bend to meet a 40% canopy goal (up from current 26% cover). Discussion as to whether VPA or Forestry Division is involved and whether the EAC should be participating or contribute in any way occurred.

Action Items

- Andrew Tucker to re-send the link to the feral cat discussion material in preparation for adding feral cats as the next species to be addressed in the Wildlife Coexistence Plan.
- Charlene Rountree will coordinate with Steve Sass on preparing for amphibian and bird field research data collection for 2023.
- Garry Harrington to send email on details for 35th Street Wetland cleanup for whole committee to see who would be available to join and how to come prepared.
- Committee members can prepare for discussion on defining EAC participation as members and elected position roles on matters such as report preparation to the Park Board and awareness on communication with the Park Board.

Next meeting: April 3rd, 2023 at 8:30am still by Teams.

Meeting adjourned at 9:27am.

Minutes approved 4/3/2023

APPROVED