

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on April 3rd, 2023

Committee Members Present:

Steve Sass
Charlene Rountree
Amy Gillan
Andy Schnabel
Andrew Tucker

Others Present:

Garry Harrington — VPA, Rum Village Park Property Manager
Matthew Moyers – VPA, Partnerships, Community and Standards Coordinator
John Martinez – VPA, Director of Facilities and Grounds

I. Call to Order – Steve Sass 8:32 am

II. Approval of Minutes

Andy Schnabel wanted the prior meeting minutes to be amended in Section 4D. Amy Gillan moved to approve the minutes of the February 27th, 2023 meeting. Charlene Rountree seconded. The motion passed unanimously with Andy Schnabel's comments included in the amended minutes.

III. Old Business

A. Annual Wildflower Mowing

John Martinez informed the EAC that the mowing schedule has been adjusted due to wet weather conditions. The completion date for low mow areas has now been moved to April 14th. John is wanting to make the committee aware of this change especially since the grounds crew is trying to ensure less potential ecological damage.

Steve Sass asked for committee input on any concerns here. Charlene Rountree and Garry Harrington commented that due to the extended cold and rainy weather, that extending the mowing to the second week of April is most likely fine. It is a balancing act as they both know. The preference is the sooner the completion the better in order to prevent potential casualties of amphibians and reptiles. Garry Harrington gave the go ahead for Rum Village to be mowed. John Martinez did mention a couple of parks that would be left without mowing as well. Andrew Tucker and Steve Sass also brought up concerns about nesting birds as well. In conclusion, everyone decided that the best recommendation is for John and his ground crew to complete the mowing as quickly as possible.

B. Disc Golf Tee-Pad Improvement at Rum Village and Boland Park Disc Golf

John Martinez wanted to inform the committee on the improvement of the currently existing golf pads at Rum Village. There would be approximately 5-8 concrete pads replaced. This is purely a renovation project.

For Boland Park, John wanted to bring up possible strategies on changes to clearings of

this area to accommodate a disc golf section. The wooded area was originally cleared due to “unsavory activity” at the park in the past. Andrew Tucker expressed no major concerns for this project. He advised to simply be mindful of the placement of lanes for this outdoor recreational option to avoid impacts to existing vegetation.

C. AEP Easement at Potawatomi Park

John Martinez wanted to present the changing of electrical supply placement to Potawatomi Park from single to multiple sources, mainly for zoo animal safety concerns. He wanted to make the committee aware of what construction was discussed involving this change. He overviewed these placements with a map. From his understanding, no trees will be removed as part of this easement project. Steve Sass commented that no obvious ecological concerns appear at this point in the construction plans.

D. Ravina Park Debris Trap

John Martinez explained the concerns about NIPSCO’s desire to have a debris trap over Bowman creek running through their corporate campus. The City of South Bend is looking to the EAC for advice on the ecological concerns regarding the grating of this creek. After much discussion among EAC members, John, Garry, and Matt, that since no one has heard from the Indiana DNR yet and it involves a sensitive property, the committee can help the city provide a staff recommendation for NIPSCO. The EAC’s conclusion on grating Bowman creek on NIPSCO’s property is not recommended due to concerns over ecological health and consistency of debris cleanup from the grate as well. EAC recommends “daylighting” the culverted section of Bowman Creek on NIPSCO property. Charlene Rountree will write the formal EAC recommendation to be reviewed by the entire committee and sent to John afterwards.

IV. New Business

A. Back the Bend Cleanup at the 35th Street Wetland

Andrew Tucker and Garry Harrington updated the committee on the event. It was considered potentially called off due to the cold weather. Apparently, it still occurred although many volunteers may have been redirected to other projects that day due to the weather. Andrew and Garry walked the property and picked up some of the trash.

Matt Moyers noted that the expanded footprint at MLK center (initially created with funding from federal land & water conservation fund) means that the city will lose 8000 sqft of park space. In order for VPA to remain eligible for future LWCF funding, the lost park space needs to be added somewhere else in the park system. VPA has suggested transferring some of the northside lots (at 35th st) to VPA and have those carry the recreation rider for outdoor recreation (that were held under the MLK property).

B. Oak Savanna Areas in our Parks

Garry Harrington discussed how we have lost large portions of a historic type of ecosystem for the Midwest known as oak savanna. Apparently, St. Joseph County may have been nearly 1/3 oak savanna in the past. There are a few parks left that have these, but it would be wonderful to restore more parks to have major portions that are

oak savanna ecosystems. Garry is not sure if this is likely to be accomplished, but he did wish to bring this up as a discussion topic.

Steve Sass commented on how this has been of interest to him as well. John Martinez would have to be involved. This would be a discussion point at the next meeting to see what any projects on this would look like.

V. VPA and City Updates

Most updates already discussed at the beginning of this meeting.

VI. Miscellaneous

Garry Harrington informed the EAC that Allison Pudlo has resigned from the committee for no adverse reasons.

Steve Sass updated on the discussions and recommendation letter the EAC can put together to address the SB 414 legislation in progress in Indiana regarding wetland classification.

Action Items

- Steve Sass to write EAC recommendation regarding the wetland legislative ruling for SB 414 in Indiana.
- Charlene Rountree to write EAC recommendation for NIPSCO's desire to grate Bowman creek.
- Charlene to provide oak savanna ecosystem restoration resource.
- Garry Harrington to ensure the next EAC meeting covers potential oak savanna ecosystem restoration projects.

Next meeting: May 15th, 2023 at 8:30am still by Teams.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10am.

Minutes approved May 15, 2023

APPROVED