

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on January 11, 2021

Committee Members Present:

Emily Alderton
Charlene Allison Rountree
Lindsay Chadderton
Steve Sass
Andy Schnabel
Andrew Tucker
Amelia Weller

Others Present:

Garry Harrington – VPA, Rum Village Park Property Manager
Matthew Moyers - VPA, Partnerships, Community and Standards Coordinator
Hannah Teshka – VPA, Pinhook Center Manager
Brent Thompson – City of South Bend, Forester

I. Call to order – Steve Sass at 8:32 am.

II. Approval of minutes

Vote to approve the minutes from the December 7, 2020, EAC meeting.

Motion by Andy Schnabel, seconded by Andrew Tucker.

Minutes will be submitted to VPA secretary and then will appear on the city's website as official minutes. A reminder, EAC is required to conform to Indiana open door laws. Public is allowed to attend. EAC can't meet out of scheduled meetings to discuss business. If quorum and talking about business, then can't do that.

III. Old business – Beaver at Leeper Park & Nuisance Wildlife Management Policy (Garry Harrington & Steve Sass) - discussion broken down into four topics for purposes of the committee minutes

A. Beaver at Leeper Park

- Background by Garry Harrington
 - In December, John Martinez (VPA Director of Facilities and Grounds) -called about complaint by Mr. Larry Clifford of beaver at Leeper Park East doing damage to trees around the rose garden
 - Beaver has been eating willows along the banks and some of the trees that Mr. Clifford purchased and planted near the rose garden;
 - Garry followed up by contacting Mr. Clifford, listening more to his concerns, and explaining why VPA is generally opposed to removing beavers from St. Joseph River in areas near parks, as these are native wildlife that are making a recent comeback after many decades of absence.
 - John Martinez is also not in favor of removing beavers
- Comments from Brent Thompson
 - Forestry is aware of beaver activity along the river, especially in the past 7 years, and potential damage to trees; few complaints from the public have been received.
 - Practice is to focus on protecting especially cottonwoods and trees that might fall into the right-of-way along sidewalks or streets.

- Protection practice is to wrap trunks in chicken wire and to paint exposed roots and old stumps with paint that has sand in it to discourage gnawing.
- Mr. Clifford did not have permission to plant willows around the rose garden.
- Related questions and comments from committee members:
 - Were the willows planted by Mr. Clifford native species?
 - Does Mr. Clifford have authorization to plant trees at Leeper Park? Brent noted that there currently is no permitting process for citizens to plant trees on VPA properties. Steve Sass suggested that this might be a useful action item for EAC in 2021.
 - Would beaver removal even work? Emily Alderton and Charlene Allison Rountree both noted territorial behavior of beavers means that no one area of the river would see a large increase in number of beavers and that removal of one beaver would mean that another would probably move in to take its place.
- Committee discussed the possible need for a statement from EAC about this specific issue or about nuisance wildlife more generally. Matt Moyers suggested composing a 1-2 paragraph statement of guiding principles on nuisance wildlife to submit to Board of Park Commissioner.
 - Statement would not be specific to the beaver issue, but could include a couple sentences at the end directed to this particular incident or question; would serve as a stop-gap measure while EAC works on more comprehensive nuisance wildlife policy
 - Plan would be to get the statement to EAC for review at least 7 days before Feb 15 meeting; discuss/amend/approve at Feb 15 meeting; send to Park Board of Commissioners for final approval.
 - Volunteers to draft statement of principles: Charlene, Amelia, and Emily in consultation with Garry.
- B. Nuisance Wildlife Management Policy
 - Follows from request by Aaron Perri (Executive Director, VPA) and is one of the action items in 2020 NRMP 2020
 - Overview from Matt Moyers
 - In South Bend, VPA is spearhead for decisions about nuisance wildlife on public property.
 - South Bend currently has a no-kill policy for wildlife (eg, geese and ducks) but no comprehensive policy about wildlife on VPA properties.
 - Request to EAC to lead development of a more comprehensive policy that could be finalized in partnership with Mishawaka Parks and St. Joseph County Parks; a policy that would apply to all three municipal operations.
 - Would be more successful if EAC presents Mishawaka and St. Joseph County with a 65-80%-completed document.
 - Policy document would not need to be very long, but would need to be well researched and thoughtfully constructed.
 - Questions and comments from the committee
 - Would need to look at what other communities around the state and country are doing.
 - Would we form a new subcommittee for this or make use of existing wildlife subcommittee? Subsequent discussion was in favor of dissolving the old committee and forming a new one for 2021.

- How broad would the policy be? Would it include only native wildlife? How would a nuisance species be defined?
- Initial volunteers for this subcommittee: Charlene, Emily, Amelia, and Lindsay
- C. Subcommittees for 2021
 - Steve Sass noted that 2020 subcommittees were created for purposes of writing 2020 NRMP; five subcommittees were in place last year (not counting 35th St. wetlands subcommittee); question is to continue those or remove and re-form new subcommittees or task forces
 - Action item for Feb 15 committee meeting: dig into NRMP and think about prioritizing action items for the year; this will perhaps drive subcommittee formation.

D. Mud Lake preservation task force - Steve Sass and Andrew Tucker currently serve on this task force, which is no longer formally associated with EAC; they will report back in February about recent activities.

IV. New business - Welcome new EAC members and election of 2021 committee chair and secretary

- A. New members for this year are Emily Alderton, Charlene Allison Rountree, and Amelia Weller. Welcome and thanks very much for volunteering for this important work.
- B. Election of chair for 2021 - Steve Sass approved to continue as chair
- C. Election of secretary for 2021 - a new position for EAC - Andy Schnabel approved to serve as secretary

V. VPA & city updates - From Matt Moyers: In spite of COVID challenges, Howard Park is open; measures taken to restrict capacity and enforce masking and distancing laws; Seitz Park is still under development; Pinhook Park renovations are largely completed, but grand opening is not yet scheduled; Pinhook Park tree trail is still under development, and EAC played an important role in that development

VI. Plantings at the Howard Park bioswales

- Andy Schnabel suggested that he work with students from IU South Bend to germinate and grow native plants for later transplant into the Howard Park Bioswales. Two benefits were offered:
 - Opportunity for students to learn more about native plants and to get more involved with their community
 - Increased plant diversity at Howard Park
- Comments from committee
 - Generally in favor of the idea, with Steve Sass, Garry Harrington, Emily Alderton, Amelia Weller, and John DiTillo (not present, but interest expressed via prior emails) voicing interest in working on this project with Andy Schnabel and his students.
 - Matt Moyers noted that the idea meshes well with VPA educational goals for Howard Park bioswales. Matt will check with John Martinez and Howard Park staff about permissions and any questions or concerns they may have.
 - Steve Sass noted that 2020 NRMP also has related educational goals.
 - Garry Harrington suggested also the idea of clearing some patches and planting seeds into those in early spring 2021.
- Suggestions for places to get local seed

- BLM Seeds of Success program
(<https://www.blm.gov/programs/natural-resources/native-plant-communities/native-plant-and-seed-material-development/collection>)
- Cardno Native Plant Nursery
- Local TNC wetland preserves
- Ponader Park
- Prairie Winds Nature Farm
- Eugene Matzat, Purdue University Extension (10 acres of mature prairie developed from Cardno seed)
- Andy will report back to committee in February on project progress

VII. Next meeting: Monday, February 15, 2021, 8:30 am

- Action item for whole committee: Review NRMP action items and come to EAC meeting ready to discuss committee structure and action item priorities for 2021
- Also to include on Feb 15 agenda:
 - Wildlife nuisance statement of principles (Charlene, Emily, and Amelia)
 - Report on Howard Park bioswales (Andy Schnabel)
 - Report on Mud Lake task force

Meeting was adjourned at 10:18 am by Steve Sass.

Minutes submitted by Andy Schnabel, EAC Secretary 2021

APPROVED

Minutes approved 2/15/21