

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on March 29, 2021

Committee Members Present:

Emily Alderton
Lindsay Chadderton
John DiTillo
Ally Pudlo
Charlene Allison Rountree
Steve Sass
Andy Schnabel
Andrew Tucker
Amelia Weller

Others Present:

Garry Harrington – VPA, Rum Village Park Property Manager
John Martinez - VPA, Director of Facilities & Grounds
Matthew Moyers - VPA, Partnerships, Community and Standards Coordinator
Hannah Teshka – VPA, Pinhook Center Manager

I. Call to order – Steve Sass ~8:30 am

II. Approval of minutes

Vote to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2021, EAC meeting. Minutes will be submitted to VPA secretary and then will appear on the city's website as official minutes.

III. Old business

- A. Nuisance Wildlife Management Plan
- Subcommittee submitted a stop-gap letter to VPA with recommendation concerning beaver at Leeper Park and informing VPA that EAC is working on a comprehensive wildlife management plan (WMP).
 - Draft WMP is on GoogleDrive for review by EAC; subcommittee is expecting full draft by May meeting; Matt Moyers indicated hopeful timeline is to have process completed, including work with regional partners, within 6-9 months.
 - Notes on current practices (from John Martinez) - wasps and groundhogs pose the most common and greatest problems; lethal measures are mostly confined to indoor settings (mice, rats, insects), whereas outdoor areas are mostly live-trapping for mammals, with occasional removal of wasp nests; indoor work is contracted with private vendors, but outdoor management is done by personnel from Facilities & Grounds.
 - Current state of regional negotiations: Matt Moyers and Steve Sass have met once with various representatives of Elkhart parks and with the regional biologist from DNR Fish & Wildlife; that meeting was initiated by City of Elkhart.

B. Ponader Park

- Background: City ceded some Ponader Park property to allow St. Joseph County to widen Douglas road; EAC/VPA worked out MOU with contractor about best practices to limit ecological damage to the park during construction.
- Issue for discussion: Observations of extensive clearing of vegetation (including invasives, such as reed canary grass) and trees near Juday Creek without use of any erosion control; questions were subsequently raised by EAC about whether or not the contractor was adhering to measures agreed to in the MOU.
- Discussion: VPA has reached out to contractor and had some response (erosion fencing put in place); several EAC members agreed that erosion control should have been done before work began; John Martinez noted that it is standard policy to include erosion control on all city projects that are 1 acre or larger in scale and that it is not unreasonable to assume a similar practice here, even though this is not a city project.
- Next steps: Matt Moyers will be having a meeting with contractor later in the week of Feb 15; after some discussion, suggestion from EAC was to provide a formal letter of concern (as according to city code?) noting problems with erosion control and reminding contractors of some of the other measures required by the MOU.
- Final comments: It was noted that the contractor has hired Cardno to monitor invasives for one year after project is completed; EAC agreed that it would be a good idea to provide Cardno with a vegetation list and a map of where largest densities of invasives were located prior to construction.

IV. New business - Fredrickson Park

- Background: Woodlot adjacent to SE part of Fredrickson Park has been cleared for construction of housing ("Fredrickson Commons"); developer requested permanent overflow drainage easement onto park property; Park Board asked EAC for advice on environmental implications; EAC met on March 26 with developer and representatives from South Bend engineering to discuss the matter.
- Discussion focused on several questions: Would pond be vegetated? Could the pond be made larger or deeper to reduce chances for overflow? How often would overflow be expected? How would the overflow affect Fredrickson pond and prairie? What information would be needed to make an informed recommendation to VPA? Are current city standards for this and similar projects now antiquated, given climate change projections for South Bend area? What are or should be the operating procedures for communication between VPA and City Engineering for projects that could affect VPA properties?
- Summary comments from Matt Moyers in response to several questions about role of EAC in this process: VPA is looking for advice on what information is needed in this and similar cases, as this would set a precedent for future cases of a similar nature, because this is the first time that a sensitive park property is threatened by standard operating procedures for the city. EAC should use its expertise to provide the best possible recommendations to VPA and that it would be reasonable to recommend that the property owners be required to maintain the pond in the long term and that property owners would be liable for damage to park property. The outcome of those

recommendations, in terms of actions by VPA or the City, should not be the concern of EAC.

- Resulting decision by EAC: Steve will draft a list of EAC concerns on this to circulate to the EAC for comment, with a goal of submitting to VPA one week prior to April 19 Park Board meeting; letter would address EAC concerns about potential impact of current project to Frederickson Park and also the larger picture of how future projects might be dealt with by the City and what information would be needed for such planning.

V. Miscellaneous

- John Martinez report: Mowing on several sensitive areas (eg, Frederickson Park, Howard Park, Rum Village) has been completed; this helps resolve some of the issues raised by EAC in 2020 about the timing of annual mowing; Steve noted the importance of early season, rather than mid or late season mowing for plant, insect, and bird life cycles and reproduction.
- Matt Moyers reported that the Board of Park Commissioners responded positively to the EAC letter concerning wetlands bill SB389 ; the board signed onto Hoosier Environmental Council opposition; it was also noted that Mayor Mueller and VPA Director Perri have each written letters to state representatives opposing this bill.
- Garry Harrington informed the committee that a representative from Cardno will be surveying for snakes (esp. copperbelly water snakes) and Blanding's turtles at Elbel from April - July 2021; this is part of a larger effort in several northern Indiana counties under a contract from IN DNR.

V. Next meeting: Monday, May 10, 2021, 8:30 am

Meeting was adjourned at 10:14 am.

Minutes submitted by Andy Schnabel, EAC Secretary 2021

APPROVED

Minutes approved 5/17/2021