

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on May 17, 2021

Committee Members Present:

Emily Alderton
Lindsay Chadderton
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
Brent Thompson - VPA, City of South Bend, Forester

I. Call to order – Steve Sass 8:31 am

II. Approval of minutes

The minutes from the March 29, 2021, EAC meeting were approved following some minor amendments. 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
1. Subcommittee completed an initial draft for review by EAC.
 2. Discussion from EAC:
 - Timeline: By middle of August, document should be completed by EAC, then vetted and possibly adjusted by VPA to be ready to share with regional partners; final document would ideally be ready for approval by VPA before the end of the year.
 - Structure and content of document: EAC members raised questions about the aim and goals of the document, the level of specificity to be included in terms of management recommendations (techniques, lines of responsibility), the scope of the document in terms of which wildlife are included or emphasized (primary nuisance wildlife noted by John Martinez are beavers, geese, wasps, and groundhogs). It was suggested that the document might have three areas of wildlife management interest: species that staff are getting complaints about; impacts on park property in terms of ecology and park use by citizens; and impacts on park neighbors.
 - Managing Canada geese populations: Lots of background research done by Emily Alderton and Charlene Allison Rountree; several suggested management practices are in the draft document; John Martinez noted that use of dogs was explored by VPA several years ago, and quoted cost at that time was about \$5K per park per year.

B. Invasive Species Ordinance

1. Ordinance amended Chapter 19, Article 1, Division 2, Section 19-13 of the South Bend municipal code to identify species of vegetation prohibited from sale, planting, or propagating within the city, and amended Section 19-14 to identify species of vegetation prohibited in the tree and lawn areas in the city.
2. Steve Sass noted that the ordinance was passed by the South Bend Common Council and goes into effect Sept 1; includes some notable species, such as burning bush, *Vinca minor/major*, and callery pear; SB is first city to go this far in Indiana.
3. From Matt Moyers: Steps to implement the new ordinance changes:
 - City Licensing is going through the annual business licenses to provide a listing of landscape companies licensed with the City to allow us to do outreach and education with them.
 - The Standards and Specifications document used by the City Engineering Department directly references the change Ordinance so all projects that move through City Engineering will now have to be compliant with the restrictions on invasive species
 - VPA is working with the Zoning Ordinances now. Ideally the Zoning Ordinances will also be adjusted to directly refer to the Tree and Vegetation ordinance and be set up to implement those modifications to all zoning modifications or new constructions in the City. The target for that would be for the September 1st implementation date.
4. Discussion of educational/outreach campaign: Matt Moyers would like the EAC to be involved; education subcommittee is working on ideas - working document available for addition and comment on EAC Google Drive site. Several suggestions:
 - Produce or borrow a list of suitable alternatives for each of the banned species (eg, Midwestern Invasive Plant Network has information about invasives and some alternatives - <https://www.mipn.org/>)
 - Educational videos
 - Adding more information points along the Pinhook Tree Trail to cover native shrubs, grasses, and ground cover species, with focus on species that are suitable alternatives to recently banned invasives, and suggestion to modify website information to include information about suitability of certain natives as alternatives to commonly planted invasives.
 - Small VPA budget might be available for producing outreach materials.

C. Pinhook Tree Trail - Hannah Teshka's assistant is working on expanding and modifying website information (slide show of photos for each tree; working on edits of original information); one teacher has already contacted Hannah about bringing class out to view the trail; need more sponsors for additional trees; Brent Thompson is continuing to add trees, so more educational materials are needed; Arbor Day event will continue at Pinhook for at least a couple of more years; EAC could have a table in future years.

IV. New Business - Native Plant Species Education - discussion was included as part of discussion of new city ordinance on invasive species (see above)

V. VPA and City Updates

John Martinez: Update on 35th Street wetlands; consultant has been selected for design (McCormick Engineering - very experienced with hydrology and drainage work); still in preliminary phase - contract not gone through board of public works, but expect it to be through within a couple of weeks.

John Martinez: Facing a staffing issue at Facilities and Grounds; down 19 part-time positions from last year; has affected service levels (some things are not happening as soon as normal); expecting positions to be filled shortly.

John Martinez: Large number (1300) of native species to be planted at Pinhook Park in five beds. EAC members invited to participate in the planting event.

Questions for John Martinez:

- Cat houses on public park property - is there a solution to this? Houses appear to be placed by trap-neuter-release (TNR) organizations; John and EAC members agree that city should ask the organizations to remove these houses from park properties; Matt Moyers noted that leaving those materials on park properties and public lands is against municipal code, regardless of other concerns.
- Invasive shrubs at Rum Village parking lot - is there anything that EAC could do to facilitate removal? Garry Harrington will contact Andy Force about this.

Matt Moyers: SBVPA has been selected as gold medal finalist from AARPA (American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration) and NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association); selected as top 4 in the country in class 3 category - cities with 75000-150000 population; selection partially based on forward-looking sustainability and ecological principles of SBVPA (see announcement at <https://www.nrpa.org/about-national-recreation-and-park-association/press-room/2021-finalists-announced-for-the-national-gold-medal-awards-in-parks-and-recreation-management/>).

VI. Miscellaneous

Garry Harrington: Elbel herp survey (see March EAC minutes) - lost funding from DNR, so this has been delayed at least until July.

Andrew Tucker & Garry Harrington - 35th Street Wetlands update: Recent observations of zooplankton in water; toads calling, but no sign of frogs this year; question about impact of growing number of feral cats on amphibian population; bats also observed at wetlands.

Next meeting: June 21, 2021; agreed to meet in person

Meeting adjourned at 10:11 am

Minutes submitted by Andy Schnabel, EAC Secretary 2021

APPROVED

Minutes approved 6/21/2021