

Minutes of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) Meeting on September 13th, 2022

Committee Members Present:

Charlene Rountree
Steve Sass
Andy Schnabel
Amy Gillan
Andrew Tucker
Allison Pudlo

Others Present:

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

I. Call to Order - Steve Sass 8:37 am

II. Approval of Minutes

Amy Gillan moved to approve the minutes of the August 22, 2022 meeting. Andrew Schnabel seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Old Business

A. Pinhook Native Tree Trail

Hannah Teshka updated on the addition of 5 to 6 new trees to Pinhook Park. They are trying to acquire more donations for more trees and signs for the park's native tree trail's expansion. Emily Simms is now the new Chief Development Officer, and Matt Moyers is helping to introduce her to the various people she will be coordinating with in her new role.

Garry Harrington brought up a discussion of the EAC making it a priority to have 100 new trees representing all the native trees of Indiana. Was this truly the committee's priority and if so is this relevant to helping connect our community memorably with nature? Steve Sass brought up how this is not just about education, but also about preservation in a similar model to an arboretum.

Charlene Rountree suggested that although the number of tree species to plant is being discussed, keeping numbers as low as ten native species may be too low to accomplish the goal of relevancy in representing a native ecosystem.

Hannah Teshka reminded that there are currently about 40 native tree species at Pinhook. Andy Schnabel brought up his perspective on how a native tree trail with more obscure native species would be both a draw for park visitors as well as fulfill a preservation purpose.

Matt Moyers will introduce Emily Simms to this new topic for the native tree trail and to the EAC as well.

B. Howard Park Bioswale

Matt Moyers updated based on John Martinez's notes. There has been a formal map change in the maintenance crew. There are low mow and no mow areas that have been reminded to ensure the crew is mowing according to map layouts. There was an area that was planted twice, both in August 2021 and October 2021. However, that information did not make it to the ground crew that kept mowing it over repeatedly. This has been addressed to prevent further unnecessary mowing.

C. MLK Center Upgrades

Matt Moyers updated on how the MLK Center upgrades include structural, ecological, and positioning goals and designs. The property has currently enough of a structural design phase completed to begin moving forward with its funding and outlining. Of the amenities the center hopes to provide, the EAC will be asked to be involved in advising on a nature center area that will be focused on being a pollinator respite.

The VPA's default stance is to use native plants wherever possible. This applies to the MLK Center. The green roof is not a guarantee yet, but it is still in discussion along with water retention and solar panels. Still consideration for bird friendly glass to the building's structure.

Steve Sass brought up concerns about how to prevent this center from turning into another Howard Park where unrealistic management plans and budget resulted in many ecological goals being unmet or left in disrepair.

Current groundbreaking date is spring of 2023 for the MLK Center, but this is very much in flux.

D. Invasive Plant Ordinance

Charlene Rountree informed on her findings that the plant suppliers to the major retailers of the South Bend area are nationwide suppliers. Thus, they are not responsive to any requests to accommodate local South Bend legislation on invasive species. Without actual city authority to enforce this ruling, these plant suppliers will probably not heed any discussion from the EAC or anyone else on their failure to follow local laws on what plants they supply to major retail stores.

Steve Sass commented that this appears to be the inevitable obstacle that this project has run into. Matt Moyers brought up that the next best action is for the City of South Bend to write a letter regarding this ordinance not being followed.

E. River Vista Program

Matt Moyers reporting on what information he knows from John Martinez. As of now, there were no updates on implementation. If additional funds are approved for riparian projects, than the EAC will be the main advisory source for how to address use of these funds and direction of the project. This is in perspective of how city crews have reduced vegetation at places such as Plaza Park.

IV. New Business

A. Insecticide Use at Parks

Matt Moyers updated on the robust discussion of how pesticide was being used. He reiterated the VPA's policy regarding pesticide use, and informed how pesticide has been removed from park storages and will only be used by the safety manager with the proper license and specifically on wasps. This way indiscriminate spraying of non-harmful insects by untrained personal will not occur.

B. Rum Village Upgrades

Garry Harrington updated on how there may be \$50,000-70,000 of budget availability on upgrades to Rum Village. Garry is unclear on what they have in mind. The scheduled timeframe for these upgrades is roughly 2023.

C. St. Joseph Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Matt Moyers brought up the main goals of the land use plan. His and John Martinez's expectation is that there would be minimal if not positive impacts to any land use projects.

Steve Sass commented that he among others are on the taskforce for ensuring these plans go accordingly. Evelyn Bauman also brought up her own involvement with the economic pillar similarly.

V. VPA and City Updates

A. 2023 Tree Planting Plan

Brent Thompson updated that about roughly 223 trees are being planted mostly on the west side of South Bend in effort to increase the canopy of lower income neighborhoods. This plan is dependent on the budget as well, mainly in support from the Wilson fund. Roughly in October is when this plan would be implemented.

Andrew Tucker wanted to inquire as to where the city acquires most of its tree supply from, and how regularly the city is supplied.

B. Sustainability Department Bonus Grant

Additional matching grant funds are being developed for sustainability initiatives among businesses in the South Bend area. Evelyn Bauman would very much like the EAC's advice in this as this grant program developments.

C. Pinhook Park updates

Hannah Teshka brought up the experiences of finding many native fish species at Pinhook Park, but also finding many large carp as well. She is working together with the DNR on seeing what best solutions there are to reduce invasive carp numbers. She will be working with a kid's fishing organization to help reduce carp numbers.

VI. Miscellaneous

Matt Moyers brought up needs for tracking EAC committee member volunteer time. Garry Harrington is the point person for finding a good method for tracking this.

Emily Simms, the new Chief Development Officer, will join on the next EAC meeting.

EAC 2023 membership will be compiled to be renewed and approved shortly.

Next meeting: October 24th, 2022 at 8:30am still by Teams.

Action items for follow-up:

- Matt Moyers to update and introduce Chief Development Officer Emily Simms to the new discussions of the native tree trail and to the EAC.
- New business for next meeting, Garry Harrington to figure out how to track EAC committee member volunteer hours.
- Matt Moyers would like to have a plan of implementation from the City of South Bend in enforcing the invasive species ordinance.
- Gain more information on the St. Joseph Land Use Plan.
- 2023 EAC membership compilation and renewal, as well as recruitment.

Meeting adjourned at 10:05am.

Minutes approved 10/24/2022

APPROVED