

FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES
APRIL 13, 2021

PRESENT: Committee members - K. Swanson, D. Cremeens(via teleconference), A. Normoyle, K. Maranda, L. Moreno, E. Sowards, R. Simmer(via teleconference).

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Jeff Craver, District Director; Mike Petersen, Illiniwek Ranger; Todd Collins, Club House Manager; Kurt Davis, IT; April Palmer, Auditor; Louisa Ewert, Treasurer.

President Swanson called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 9:40 AM on Tuesday, April 13, 2021, in the Rock Island County Building in the third floor chambers, Rock Island, Illinois.

A. Normoyle, K. Maranda, D. Cremeens, K. Swanson, E. Sowards, R. Simmer, L. Moreno.

TOTAL YES 7

TOTAL NO 0

President Swanson called for a motion approving the March Committee minutes.

MOTION: Dr. Moreno moved to approve the March Committee minutes. Ms. Normoyle seconded the motion.

MOTION: Mr. Maranda moved to adopt the previous roll call. Ms. Sowards seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$292,850.27, the transfers of appropriation in the General Fund and Niabi Zoo Fund, the resolution regarding the Moline Foundation Grant monies in the Niabi Zoo Fund, and the resolution regarding the Woodard Community Grant monies in the General Fund and Niabi Zoo Fund.

MOTION: Mr. Maranda moved to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$292,850.27, the transfers of appropriation in the General Fund and Niabi Zoo Fund, the resolution regarding the Moline Foundation Grant monies in the Niabi Zoo Fund, and the resolution regarding the Woodard Community Grant monies in the General Fund and Niabi Zoo Fund. Ms. Sowards seconded the motion.

MOTION: Dr. Moreno moved to adopt the previous roll call. Mr. Maranda seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 IMRF Retirement Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding additional funds for FY21 Liability Fund, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Liability Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 FISSA Fund Appropriations, and the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Development of Forests & Construction of Improvement Fund.

MOTION: Mr. Maranda moved to approve the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 IMRF Retirement Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding additional funds for FY21 Liability Fund, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Liability Fund Appropriations, the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 FISSA Fund Appropriations, and the resolution regarding an Amendment to FY21 Development of Forests & Construction of Improvement Fund. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

MOTION: Ms. Sowards moved to adopt the previous roll call. Dr. Simmer seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson made three calls to the public for public comment.

There were no requests for public comment.

President Swanson called for a motion to call into discussion available land purchases near Illiniwek Forest Preserve. Mr. Petersen is here to present.

MOTION: Mr. Maranda moved to approve calling into discussion available land purchases near Illiniwek Forest Preserve. Ms. Normoyle seconded the motion.

Mr. Petersen stated that, to give some context, this is something that I've been working on for the last year or so. A conservation corridor between Illiniwek and Interstate 80. Right now there's a lot going on in this area, and we've found five endangered and threatened species just at Illiniwek, so the area is rich with conservation opportunities. These two properties fit into the corridor area. One is two and a half miles down the road from Illiniwek, and the other is about three miles from Illiniwek. They're very similar to Illiniwek in terrain and forest structure. A lot of ravines, waterways, short, steep hillsides. The over story is dominated by oak. There are other trees present which are common to this area. In terms of conservation, they'd be an asset to the District. One property is about eighty-nine acres, and the other is eighty-two acres.

President Swanson asked if the properties were adjacent to each other.

Mr. Petersen stated that they were not, but are very close. There is less than an eighth of a mile between them.

President Swanson asked if there was any evidence of, or space to put in, a hill prairie.

Mr. Petersen stated that he had not walked the entire properties, but a hill prairie could be put in at either location.

Mr. Cremeens asked where these properties were at in relation to Interstate 80.

Mr. Petersen stated that the properties are on the Northwest portion of where Interstate 80 and Interstate 88 intersect.

President Swanson asked where the funds for these acquisitions would come from.

Mr. Petersen stated that there are a number of foundations out there that help out with acquiring lands, and those would be the primary source for funding.

President Swanson asked Mr. Craver how this purchase would fit into the strategic mission of the District.

Mr. Craver stated that it had been a while since the District had acquired land. Illinois is ranked one of the bottom most states as far as public land. As the District has gotten its infrastructure updated for the revenue generating aspects of its facilities, staff feel that it is time to get back to the mission of acquiring lands for conservation as is stated in the District's mission statement. These properties are idle for acquisition because the properties have been in the banks' possession for some time, and the banks will likely be patient with the process.

Mr. Petersen added that the properties were both supposed to be developed, but the developers have since gone bankrupt.

Mr. Craver stated that staff would need to work with the Civil Division as the properties were both within East Moline city limits.

President Swanson stated that it sounded like this was well within the District's mission and in keeping with its goals for conservation.

Ms. Normoyle stated that she was glad to hear that outside funding was possible, and it will be important to develop a narrative for the benefits of conservation on this land.

Mr. Petersen stated that the addition of a conservation corridor in this area would be very important. Being so near the Mississippi River, this is a major flyway for water fowl and other migratory birds, and of course the monarch butterflies migrate through this area. These are extremely important properties for conservation.

Dr. Simmer asked if the property that lay between the two that were being discussed was privately owned. What are the chances that the District would be able to acquire that land in the future?

Mr. Petersen stated that there is one individual that owns eighty-seven acres that make up that area in between, and it's a very similar property. The potential may be there, but no one has approached that landowner.

President Swanson asked what staff needed from the Committee for this matter.

Mr. Craver stated that staff is simply looking for a signal to proceed to look into this acquisition in earnest, and bring a plan back to the board.

There was consensus from the Committee for staff to proceed.

MOTION: Mr. Maranda moved to adopt the previous roll call. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called on Mr. Craver for the discussion on the Niabi Zoo and Forest Preserves of Rock Island County Foundation Reimbursements.

Mr. Craver stated that he was looking for direction regarding the reimbursements from the Foundation for the Rhino Exhibit. The funds for this project came from both the Niabi Zoo Fund and the Development of Forests and Construction of Improvements Fund. Over the next few months reimbursements totaling between \$90,000.00 and \$100,000.00 will be coming into the District for the Rhino Exhibit. Given the hard hit that Niabi took during the pandemic, the District could deposit those funds wholly into the Niabi Zoo Fund. However, the reimbursements could also be split as the expenses were split between the two funds.

There was consensus from the Committee that the reimbursement for the exhibit be wholly deposited into the Niabi Zoo Fund.

President Swanson asked if Ms. Ewert had anything she would like to bring to the Committee's attention.

Ms. Ewert stated that the tax warrants for Niabi Zoo Fund were activated on April first. The maximum allowed was \$750,000.00. Only \$500,000.00 was taken to get the zoo through to the tax distribution that will come hopefully near the end of June.

President Swanson asked Ms. Palmer if there was anything from the Auditor's reports that she would like to bring attention to.

Ms. Palmer stated that there was nothing of note on the Trial Balance Report. On the Fund Balance Report, it is of note that Niabi Zoo Fund shows a negative fund balance. Revenues were hit very hard last year because of the pandemic. Even though expenses were decreased a significant degree during that time, the fund balance dwindled. The fact that they were able to make it as long as they did is a testament to how drastically they were able to cut expenses to mitigate the lost revenue. The cash balance for Niabi also dipped into the negative, which is

why the tax anticipation warrants were activated. That is not reflected on March's report because the activation took place on April first.

President Swanson asked Mr. Petersen if there was anything from his report that he would like to bring attention to.

Mr. Petersen stated that the weather for the opening weekend was cold and rainy. There were a few diehard campers that came for the weekend. In May staff would like to get a volunteer Garlic Mustard pull organized. Illiniwek will be hosting a Bio-Blitz on June twenty-fourth through twenty-fifth. A Bio-Blitz is a period of twenty-four hours where individuals from every discipline from Reptiles to birds to plants come out and survey all the species that they can find.

President Swanson asked Mr. Jackson if there was anything from his report that he would like to bring attention to.

Mr. Jackson stated that Niabi received a \$15,000.00 gift for the education aspect of the new Rhino Exhibit, which exceeds the goal set for this project. There is also a local car wash chain that will be taking donations for the exhibit for the next two months.

President Swanson asked which car wash.

Mr. Jackson stated that it was ProClean.

Ms. Normoyle congratulated Mr. Jackson on the success of the fund raising campaign. Then asked what the ongoing cost of caring for the Rhinos would be, and the benefit that came from the exhibit. Have received several questions from the community. It would be useful for Commissioners to have some talking points and answers for these questions, and really be able to sell the zoo.

President Swanson stated that it would also be great if Mr. Jackson could address the Commission with an update and refresher on the master plan for Niabi.

President Swanson asked Mr. Craver if there was anything from his report that he would like to bring attention to.

Mr. Craver stated that on April first every year IMRF provides a preliminary rate notice to employers, and the District's rate has decreased, hence lowering costs. Staff and officials have been looking at the E-suit for New World Systems. Will be looking at a demo soon. It is not in the budgeted items for this fiscal year, but there should be sufficient reserves, and should provide cost savings.

Dr. Moreno asked about the vandalism that has been occurring at Loud Thunder. Has there been consideration of putting up trail cameras?

Mr. Craver stated that Mr. Mills has been directed to look into that possibility, and to file reports with the Sheriff's Office. Staff believes it is likely kids committing the acts of vandalism, but

staff has not been able to catch them in the act yet. With the park opening up, staff is patrolling the park more often, and there are more people out at the park. That increase in activity and eyes at the park should help in keeping the vandalism down.

Ms. Normoyle asked about the mention of road conditions at Loud Thunder.

Mr. Craver stated that the majority of the roads at Loud Thunder are chip and seal. They are not built to take hard use during the time of year when the ground is particularly soggy and malleable. The gates are kept closed during that time of year because of the damage that would be inflicted by vehicles, and especially by large utility vehicles. Unfortunately, there are instances where large utility vehicles need to use them, like for clearing tree branches from the power lines, which is what happened in this case. It may be time to look into redoing the roads. There are areas to patch each year, which are done by staff, but focusing on improving infrastructure would be good to look into. Staff can work with the County Highway Department. Recently staff has been looking at focusing on improvements to amenities at revenue generating facilities.

Ms. Sowards asked Mr. Jackson how the turn out for the opening weekend for Niabi went with the bad weather.

Mr. Jackson stated that while there were many tickets reserved for visits, there wasn't really anyone who came out to the zoo. The first week of this season was free.

Ms. Normoyle stated that she had mentioned last year about bait containers, and had done some research on some containers that are compostable. Wondering if this is something that would be possible to instate at the parks.

Mr. Craver stated that he would be happy to look at the supplier and the information Ms. Normoyle had compiled. Will pass the information onto Mr. Mills and Mr. Petersen to look into the possibility and if it is logistically and ecology feasible.

President Swanson stated that he believed the Committee was in a position where the Committee could start to rotate the meetings between the parks as has happened in pre-pandemic years. If staff could look into that, and put together a schedule for those meetings, that would be great.

Mr. Craver stated that he would put together a schedule and present it to the Committee. Perhaps starting in late summer/early fall would be the best option, considering that outside would be best.

Adjourned the meeting at 10:29 AM.

Submitted by:
Cassie Sullivan, Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant