

FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES
JUNE 14, 2022

PRESENT: Committee members - K. Swanson, E. Sowards, D. Cremeens, J. Woods, L. Moreno(via phone).

ABSENT: A. Normoyle, R. Simmer.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeff Craver, District Director; Jay Verstraete, Golf Course Superintendent; Todd Collins, Club House Manager; Lee Jackson, Niabi Zoo Director; April Palmer, Auditor; Louisa Ewert, Treasurer; Miles Brainard, City of Rock Island Director of Rock Island Community & Economic Development; Todd Thompson, City of Rock Island Manager.

President Swanson called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 3:35 PM on Tuesday, June 14, 2022, in the Club House at the Indian Bluff Golf Course in Milan, Illinois.

D. Cremeens, K. Swanson, E. Sowards, J. Woods. [L. Moreno called in at 3:37pm]

TOTAL PRESENT 5

A. Normoyle, R. Simmer.

TOTAL ABSENT 2

President Swanson called for a motion approving the May Committee meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Cremeens moved to approve the May Committee meeting minutes. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson stated that in regards to naming the new East Moline preserve, the District has been looking at some of the suggestions that included the Sauk language. Have been speaking with the Director of Language of the Sauk Nation, which is based out of Oklahoma. After much deliberation we are putting forth for consideration Amôwa, which means “the bees.” As the District is here for conservation, and pollinators are integral to those efforts, the name seems very fitting. Is the Committee ready to pass this on to the Commission for consideration?

MOTION: Ms. Sowards moved to place the proposed name for approval on the June Commission agenda. Mr. Cremeens seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$716,253.24.

MOTION: Mr. Cremeens moved to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$716,253.24. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the transfers of appropriation in District funds.

MOTION: Ms. Sowards moved to approve the transfers of appropriation in District funds. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

There were no requests for public comment.

President Swanson called into discussion the land acquisition partnership with City of Rock Island – Miles Brainard, City of Rock Island Community & Economic Development.

Mr. Brainard handed out a copy of the presentation that was made to the City of Rock Island, and stated that an exciting opportunity has been given to the City of Rock Island, and we're here today to discuss the possibility of partnering with the District and extending that opportunity to the District. There are 23 parcels of land in the southwest area of Rock Island, approximately 530 acres, that The RiverStone Group is proposing to donate for one dollar. They have already extracted all the stone out of it that they're going to get, and don't think they would get much more utility out of the properties. It is a liability that RiverStone Group would like to off load, and have been very up front about wanting the tax write-off. RiverStone came to the City and proposed that Rock Island take it because it was a large wetland. The parcels hold no potential development possibilities, with only a couple possible exceptions. This area would make a great forested wetland conservation area, and the District does not currently have a forested wetland preserve. That is why we are here to ask if the District is interested enough in that possibility to start a conversation about acquiring these parcels. There are other forested wetland preserves around the country that service as water quality management, preservation of different types of endangered species, and an important amenity for recreation. Some wetlands provide space to kayak and canoe, and there are even some with elevated walking paths.

President Swanson stated that the District would need to do a land assessment before fully committing.

Mr. Craver asked if the City had spoken with the Fish & Wildlife Service.

Mr. Brainard stated that he had. Fish & Wildlife have a real estate team. The response was that they would be willing to have a conversation, but they do not make

commitments without a lot more work. There are things to be said about the approach that Fish & Wildlife would take compared to the approach the District would take, and the sort of scope they would have. Personal preference is to have a local entity be the conservator of a property like this. A lot of this land can't be developed, shouldn't be developed, and should be held by the public. That way it can give back to the community that holds it.

President Swanson stated that the land would likely sit as is for some time, but there would be opportunities for grants for more public use.

Mr. Brainard stated that there is definitely a desire by the City to have more amenities available for its citizens.

Mr. Craver asked if there was a timeframe expectation for that usability by the public. The area is also flooded, and the river has consistently risen throughout the years. The reason that I haven't had the opportunity to get out to those properties to take a closer look is that they are under water, and access is difficult. Also, is there information on what the land was used for during the previous 75 years besides RiverStone Group's use?

Mr. Brainard stated that while there is an expectation of public use, the City did not have a timeframe in mind for that. What is known so far regarding prior use is that in the 1930's it was farm fields and wetlands. That's all that's known at the moment. Not sure if the lands were naturally drier, or if the land was tiled in order to dry it out. There has been talk of an environmental site assessment.

Mr. Craver stated that it wasn't likely that much would be left along those lines from the 1930's. Aquatic eco-systems are currently outside of the District's expertise, but it does appear that there are many trees dying due to the flooding. There are trees that can handle the constant flooding, but it doesn't appear that any of them are currently out in the wetland.

President Swanson stated that it's important to keep in mind that connected wild spaces are most desirable. Does anyone have any questions beyond, is this in the District's mission?

No one had any questions.

Mr. Craver stated that it was indeed within the District's mission statement. The District may look into hunting in that area. Water fowl hunting can be popular. Would the City oppose hunting in those wetlands should the District acquire the lands?

Mr. Brainard stated that it shouldn't be a problem to have water fowl hunting on those parcels.

President Swanson asked what would be the preferred timeline for getting an answer from the board.

Mr. Brainard stated that what the City was looking for right now was to gauge the interest of the District in acquiring the lands. What needs to be brought back to the City Council is whether or not the District is interested in starting the conversation about getting the land, and possibly starting the conversation on preliminary negotiations.

The Committee came to consensus, and expressed interest in starting the conversation on acquiring the land.

President Swanson called on Mr. Verstraete for an update on the golf course.

Mr. Verstraete stated that there was not anything of particular note in the report this month. It's been hot, and staff is keeping up with the maintenance demands of the course.

President Swanson called on Mr. Collins for an update on the club house.

Mr. Collins stated that business has been good. The recent severe heat has affected business a bit.

Mr. Craver stated that shelter rental will be a discussion that needs to happen in the future. The shelters don't see a lot of use. The maintenance costs of the shelters far outweigh the revenue that is brought in. There are other parks that see much more action on their shelters.

President Swanson stated that he would be happy to hear what alternative use for the space the staff could come up with.

Mr. Craver stated that he would get back to the Committee with ideas.

President Swanson asked Ms. Palmer if there was anything she'd like to lift up from her report.

Ms. Palmer stated that some of the grant funds are coming in, and that is reflected on the reports. Most funds are coming in under budget, and the T.A.W. have been paid back.

President Swanson asked Ms. Ewert if there was anything she'd like to lift up from the Treasurer's report.

Ms. Ewert stated that there was not, but she was happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.

The Committee did not have any questions.

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

Mr. Jackson stated that the Amur Leopards have been out and about on display. They are very popular. The Prairie Dog Exhibit is anticipated to be ready for the public by the time Niabi opens for its 2023 season. The Painted Dog exhibit is awaiting receipt of the grant funds in order to get started.

Ms. Palmer stated that she and her family took a tour of Niabi recently, and it was an amazing experience. The Education staff is great, and the programs are very enjoyable.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the routine reports of the District Department heads.

MOTION: Mr. Cremeens moved to approve the routine reports of the District Department heads. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called the meeting adjourned at 4:31 PM.

Submitted by:
Cassie Sullivan
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant