

**FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES  
JULY 9, 2024**

**PRESENT:** Committee members –L. Moreno, E. Sowards, R. Simmer, D. Mielke, J. Woods.

**ABSENT:** K. Swanson, C. Layer.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Jeff Craver, District Director; Todd Collins, Clubhouse Manager; April Palmer, Auditor; Jay Verstraete, Golf Course Superintendent.

Dr. Moreno called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 3:28 PM on Tuesday, July 9, 2024, in the Clubhouse at Indian Bluff Golf Course in Milan, Illinois.

L. Moreno, R. Simmer, D. Mielke, E. Sowards, J. Woods.

**TOTAL PRESENT 5**

K. Swanson, C. Layer.

**TOTAL ABSENT 2**

Dr. Moreno called for a motion approving the June Committee meeting and the closed session minutes.

**MOTION:** Dr. Simmer moved to approve the June Committee meeting and the closed session minutes. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Moreno called for a motion to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$1,044,949.30.

**MOTION:** Ms. Woods moved to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$1,044,949.30. Ms. Sowards seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Moreno called for a motion to approve the transfers of appropriation.

**MOTION:** Dr. Simmer moved to approve the transfers of appropriation. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Moreno called for a motion to approve the resolutions regarding FY24 General Fund Appropriation Amendment, FY24 Illiniwek Recreation Trail Grant Appropriations, FY24 Niabi Zoo Prairie Dog & ARPA Grant Appropriations, FY24 Niabi Zoo Improvements ARPA Grant

Appropriations, Receipt of Grant Funds-Woodard Community Grant Fund (WCGF23), Receipt of Grant Funds-Woodard Community Grant Fund (WCGF24), Receipt of Grant Funds-Hubbell-Waterman Foundation Grant, Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations-Zoo Foundation Donation for the Purchase of Signage, Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations-Zoo Foundation for the Classroom Door & Improvements, and Semi-Annual Review of closed session minutes.

**MOTION:** Ms. Woods moved to approve the resolutions regarding FY24 General Fund Appropriation Amendment, FY24 Illiniwek Recreation Trail Grant Appropriations, FY24 Niabi Zoo Prairie Dog & ARPA Grant Appropriations, FY24 Niabi Zoo Improvements ARPA Grant Appropriations, Receipt of Grant Funds-Woodard Community Grant Fund (WCGF23), Receipt of Grant Funds-Woodard Community Grant Fund (WCGF24), Receipt of Grant Funds-Hubbell-Waterman Foundation Grant, Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations-Zoo Foundation Donation for the Purchase of Signage, Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations-Zoo Foundation for the Classroom Door & Improvements, and Semi-Annual Review of closed session minutes. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Moreno made three calls for public comment. There were no requests for public comment.

Dr. Moreno called on Mr. Craver for an update on the funding for storm damage at Niabi Zoo.

Mr. Craver stated that last month a breakdown of projects remaining was provided. There is an estimated \$2,483,388.00 of snow damage repairs identified. The District has not yet put out bids on the biodiversity fencing repair, the carousal top and cover, the red wolf retaining wall and pathway, and perimeter fence. Regarding the perimeter fence. Mr. Jackson estimates that there is around 1,000 linear feet of fencing that needs to be repaired, but the insurance is saying that it's only 160 feet. Then below you can see the Pallas Cat exhibit. It was not up to modern zoo standards, therefore fixing to its original state was not deemed in the District's best interest. Those will need community support or District support elsewhere at another time. The District adopted a lot of this work, and our hand was kind of forced when we initially asked for the ARPA funds. It was to cover the cost overages from the painted dogs, the prairie dogs and with the remaining funds upgrade the cat house exhibits. Staff was estimating based on preliminary estimated that would get maybe two of those exhibits done. Unfortunately, the storm damage came, and Niabi lost all four when they collapsed. That put the District in the situation of only having enough to do two of the upgrades plus the upgrade for the Eagle exhibit, which lead to the question of what was the best way to handle things. In discussions with President Swanson, it was determined to see what the insurance paid out, and in the meantime push ahead. The insurance adjustment was a little disappointing. Currently the insurance has noted \$208,000.00 that is on the sheet that was handed out. Received another revised estimate today that was around \$246,000.00.

Dr. Simmer asked if there was a possibility that staff could go back to the insurance company and get more due to the structures not being up to code.

Mr. Craver that while the exhibits were not up to the modern zoo exhibit standards, the exhibits were up to the building code standards. Obviously, the projects went significantly over what was put on the application for the ARPA funds. Several months ago I looked into bonds, which that information is in the packet. Staff does not recommend doing bonds at this time for this situation. The board has approved \$2,000,000.00 worth of projects through Estes, and the zoo is short on cash. The recommendation right now is to do a Tax Anticipation Warrant for Niabi, and small increase in levy. Have asked the Treasurer to be prepared to put out an RFP for Tax Anticipation Warrant(TAW). There isn't enough money in the General Fund to temporarily loan the zoo what it needs to get through. Can't give an exact amount for those at time, but once those numbers are known, they will be passed on to the Board. More ARPA funds have been requested, but have not heard back. The TAW should go out in the fall. Unless the Board is really excited to go out for more debt, staff is recommending TAW and a levy increase in order to repay the TAW.

Mr. Mielke asked if staff was recommending an increase that would require a referendum.

Mr. Craver stated that the recommended increase would not be that high. It would only require a Truth in Taxation Public Hearing. For a \$200,000.00 house it would raise a tax bill between \$10 - \$12 for the year. The zoo will still have a bit of a cash crunch, but this should help get them through. Some projects will likely still need to be put off until the zoo has the opportunity to recover a bit. If the District puts off about \$400,000.00 worth of work, that still leaves around \$1.6 million. The DFCL fund could be used for some of the repairs and upgrades, but it's important to remember that the other preserves have projects needing to be done as well. Potentially the General Fund could loan the zoo, but definitely not all the remainder. So maybe that means that the amount drops down to \$1,000,000.00. Then with the TAW the zoo can bridge the deficit and get the bills paid. Hopefully, some of the fiscal year 2025 funds can be used to address some of the smaller items.

Dr. Moreno asked what the proposed percentage increase is, and what the maximum that can be levied. It would be better to levy what the zoo needs, then lower the levy back down.

After a brief discussion using the handout as a visual aid, Mr. Craver was directed to get more detailed information on options for levy increases to get the necessary repairs and upgrades done.

Dr. Moreno called on Mr. Craver to speak on the land donation.

Mr. Craver stated that someone recently reached out to the District regarding one of the lots down at Doyle's addition. The District already maintains several of those lots. Those lots are actually County through the flood plain, which the District has a lease agreement for.

Dr. Moreno asked if there were any negatives to accepting the donation.

Mr. Craver answered that there were no negatives to taking the small plot of land.

Dr. Moreno asked if the Committee had any questions regarding the routine reports of the District.

There were no questions.

Dr. Moreno asked Mr. Verstraete if there was anything he would like to bring attention to in his report.

Mr. Verstraete stated that the pond was not looking great, but staff is addressing that situation.

Dr. Moreno asked Mr. Collins if there was anything he would like to bring attention to in his report.

Mr. Collins stated that the numbers for this year have been very similar to last.

Dr. Moreno called for a motion to approve the routine reports of the District.

**MOTION:** Mr. Mielke moved to approved the routine reports of the District. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Moreno called the meeting adjourned at 4:07 PM.

Submitted by:  
Cassie Sullivan  
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant