

**FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES
JULY 14, 2026**

PRESENT: Committee members– C. Layer, D. Mielke, R. Simmer, J. Woods

ABSENT: L. Moreno, E. Sowards, K. Swanson.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeff Craver, District Director; Lee Jackson, Niabi Zoo Director; April Palmer, Auditor; Nick Camlin, Treasurer.

Dr. Simmer called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 9:31 AM on Tuesday, July 14, 2026, in the second floor conference room in the County Building at 1504 3rd Ave, Rock Island, Illinois.

C. Layer, D. Mielke, R. Simmer, J. Woods

TOTAL PRESENT 4

L. Moreno, E. Sowards, K. Swanson.

TOTAL ABSENT 3

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to approve the June Committee minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Layer moved to approve the June Committee meeting minutes. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to approve the old year and new year claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$467,161.58.

MOTION: Mr. Woods moved to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$467,161.58. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer asked if the member of the public would like to make comment.

There was no request for public comment.

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

MOTION: Mr. Mielke moved to approve the transfers of appropriation. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to approve the resolutions regarding the semi-annual review of closed session minutes, FY 2026 Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations for Giraffe Deck Roof Repair & Fiber Optic Project, FY 2026 DFCI EV Charging Station Grant Improvements, FY 2026 DFCI Fund Zoo Open Space Land Acquisition & Development Grant Program.

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the resolutions regarding semi-annual review of closed session minutes, FY 2026 Niabi Zoo Fund Appropriations for Giraffe Deck Roof Repair & Fiber Optic Project, FY 2026 DFCI EV Charging Station Grant Improvements, FY 2026 DFCI Fund Zoo Open Space Land Acquisition & Development Grant Program. Mr. Layer seconded the motion.

Mr. Layer asked how the EV project was progressing. Is that getting turned around; have they gotten started?

Mr. Craver stated that there have been delays to the project. Still waiting on MidAmerican Energy to do some work at Loud Thunder, and Illiniwek. The units were supposed to be delivered last week. Tried to reach out yesterday to the engineer with a couple questions, but they were on vacation until the 16th. Unfortunately, everything went to a standstill. Had some issues getting MidAmerican to put in the service orders because they want payment in full before they'll even schedule the work. The grant administrator tried to use the contacts that she had to get MidAmerican to push things along. However, even if things were to get pushed along, Rock River Electric didn't have the units scheduled to be shipped out until the week of July 7th. So it didn't even matter if MidAmerican wasn't able to get work done. There were some issues with the first round of chargers that Rock River submitted. That didn't meet the "Build American, Buy American" requirement of the grant.

Dr. Simmer called on Mr. Mielke.

Mr. Mielke asked, the closed session minutes review, when was that? Did you do that? How is that being done?

Mr. Craver stated that if anyone wants to come and review any of the closed session minutes. They're there at the office. My recommendation has always been to keep them closed. There's a reason why they're closed, so they're kept closed.

Mr. Mielke stated that he had concerns that keeping them all closed would be a compliance issue for the District. I know at the County, Johnnie and I took hours, and I believe this was because the County was outside compliance with the review, so we had to go back to the nineties and review each of the minutes. Personnel are the hardest to open, of course, because they may still be alive or, if not, their family still be alive. Looking through the District's list, the land acquisitions from several years ago, might be able to be opened. Just want to make sure that the District is in compliance. Has the District opened any minutes in a while?

Mr. Craver stated that the District had not. The District has very few closed sessions to begin with. Most closed sessions are done here at Executive Committee. There have only been two closed sessions at full Commission meetings. Can bring the topic up next month. For many

years now, the District has been complying with the semi-annual review resolution requirement. It's done in January and July each year. Will double check to make sure the District is in compliance.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to approve the purchase of a Ford Maverick AWD from Morrow Brothers in the amount of \$35,655.00.

MOTION: Mr. Layer moved to approve the purchase of a Ford Maverick AWD from Morrow Brothers in the amount of \$35,655.00. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to approve the IMEG Lake George Dam Maintenance proposal in the amount of \$80,812.80.

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the IMEG Lake George Dam Maintenance proposal in the amount of \$80,812.80. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

Mr. Craver stated that in the packet is the concept proposal. Some of the joints on the dam are cracked and in need of repair or replacement. The big problem is in the winter time, if there is water in those joints, then with the freeze and thaw, the joints develop and expand cracks. That weakens the dam. It isn't budgeted, but there are funds remaining from the bonds that were originally gotten for the purpose of repairing the dam. The spillway will always have ongoing maintenance. It is staff's recommendation to use the bonds funds to address this issue before it becomes worse, and therefore more expensive to fix. Also, while the pedestrian bridge is not a part of the inspection or requirements, it is getting quite old and is deteriorating. The whole treated lumber top needs to be replaced. According to the engineer, the bridge is in a poor location. Staff is recommending a different location for the bridge further down the creek away from the base of the spillway. It is also recommended that it be built so that staff can get equipment over it in order to better maintain those hiking trails. There is also money in the Marvin Martin Fund to use for these repairs and improvements.

Dr. Simmer asked if Mr. Craver had the funding all figured out.

Mr. Craver stated that he did. There will be additional expenses for the bid documents and overseeing that process. I will bring that proposal back to the Committee for review and approval once it's received.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer asked if anyone had anything they'd like to lift up from their reports.

Ms. Palmer stated that the District has reached the end of its fiscal year. Staff has met with the external auditors. There was an update to the trial balance report from what was in the packet. Niabi has a positive fund balance this year.

Mr. Craver stated that the heat has slowed things down at all the preserves. Numbers are looking solid, but this heatwave needs to end. Looking into improvements to the Lake George access. Hopefully, there will be grants, but it would be a very expensive project. Several projects are going out to bid in the next, so there will be several bids review at next month's meeting.

Mr. Layer asked if there was honey for sale yet.

Mr. Craver stated that there was not. A couple hives were lost, and are trying to keep the third going. The surviving hive was in danger of getting honey locked, so there are a few frames of honey that will be processed as soon as I can get to it.

Mr. Mielke stated that he was looking at Niabi Zoo's events, and thought they were great getting the zoo to be more accessible to people. I did have a question about the Pride Night. I saw that there were 200 participants, which is really outstanding.

Mr. Jackson stated that it was over 300 actually.

Mr. Mielke stated that that was a pretty good sized event then.

Mr. Jackson stated that that was the second evening the zoo was open. There were a lot of families out there.

Mr. Mielke stated that the trial evening hours is good to see, and he'd been in favor of evening hours for a while. I personally invited 10-15 people that I know attended the Pride Night. But as I dug deeper, I talked to Jeff, I had questions about the family suitability. Not of the Pride Night, I don't have a problem with that at all, but I drilled deeper, and unbeknownst to some of us, maybe all of us, there was a drag queen story hour. That makes me concerned. I want to make sure we keep the brand of the zoo kid friendly, family friendly. Jeff and I talked about this on the phone. I'm nervous, questioning about that we ... I totally support the inclusivity of the event. I also want people, not only residence of the county but residence of the community, to know that everyone is welcome at the zoo. I demonstrated that by inviting people from the community and allies of the gay community to attend this event, so I'm not against this event. But I am a substitute teacher now. Not only is it my mission to educate children, but it is also to protect children. Also, as being on this Committee, I want to protect the brand of the zoo. I know there's a diversity of opinion on Pride Night in general. I do think that we need to be ... not this time, but maybe next time ... My personal opinion is that I don't think the drag queen story hour is beneficial to the brand of the zoo, or in keeping with family, kid friendly part of the zoo, so that's my personal opinion. I wanted to voice that because I've not heard any negatives from this occurrence.

Ms. Woods stated that these kids are so much further than we were. I don't have a problem with it. It's just a different world than what we came from.

Mr. Mielke stated that it was, but I just want to ...

Ms. Woods stated to make sure. I get it.

Mr. Mielke stated that yes, to make sure. Because there's a diversity of families. If this had been an adult only event, I'd be totally fine with that.

Ms. Woods asked what does the drag queen story hour consist of?

Mr. Mielke stated that he didn't know.

Mr. Jackson stated that it was a drag queen reading a book.

Ms. Woods asked, that's all it was?

Mr. Jackson answered that that's all it was.

Ms. Woods stated that shouldn't be a problem.

Mr. Mielke stated that he just wanted to make sure. Are we putting ourselves out there for criticism?

Mr. Jackson stated that no matter what we do, we will be criticized. The people that seem to have the biggest problem with everything that we do, are the people who don't support us anyway. That's my feeling on it. I think we needed more drag queens that night. It was pretty clear what the event was going to be, and if you didn't want to be a part of that, then you wouldn't come out.

Mr. Mielke stated that it was a valid point.

Dr. Simmer stated that inclusivity doesn't mean distancing people either. Try to bring everybody in.

Mr. Jackson pointed out that we have done nothing that other zoos who have these events have done. It's very basic.

Mr. Mielke stated that he wasn't familiar with what other zoos have done. What I'm harkening back to is that seven or eight years ago Moline had a pride festival. I did attend, and it was supposed to be family friendly, and it was not. It was very adult humor, and so as long as that didn't occur, that's good. I wasn't there, so I don't know what occurred.

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

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

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to enter closed session as per ILCS 120/2 (c) (11) – Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular public body has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the public body finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the minutes of the closed meeting; Kilgore v. RICFPD; Case No. 4:24-cv-04145-SLD-RLH, United States District Court Central District of Illinois Rock Island Division.

MOTION: Mr. Layer moved to enter closed session. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken.

D. Mielke, C. Layer, J. Woods, R. Simmer.

TOTAL YES 4

TOTAL NO 0

Motion carried.

Closed session began 10:15 AM

Closed session ended 10:23 AM

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to return to open session.

MOTION: Mr. Mielke moved to return to open session. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called for a motion to move forward as discussed in closed session.

MOTION: Mr. Mielke moved to move forward as discussed in closed session. Ms. Woods seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Dr. Simmer called the meeting adjourned at 10:24 AM.

Submitted by: Cassie Sullivan
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant