

**Hendricks County Parks and Recreation/
Parks Foundation of Hendricks County
Joint Board Meeting Minutes**

Friday, February 9, 2018
9:00am

Hendricks County
4-H Fairgrounds
Danville, IN 46122

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order shortly after 9:00am.

Park Board Present: Paul Miner, President
Matt Freije, Vice President
Bill Harrington, Secretary

Park Board Absent: Gary Emsweller
Mike Hayden
Beth Switzer
Doug Moon

HCP&R Staff Present: Jeremy Weber, Superintendent
Eric Ivie, Assistant Superintendent
Linda Brunner, Administrative Assistant

PFOHC Board Present: Brad Eisenhart, President
Katherine Younger, Secretary
Loren Delp
Marvin Blade
Matt Browning

PFOHC Board Absent: Gary Emsweller
Mike Hayden, Vice President
Jeff Banning
Scott Geans

PFOHC Staff Present: Meghan Stritar, Marketing and Events Manager

I. INTRODUCTIONS

Weber began the meeting by asking everyone present to introduce themselves and talk briefly about what drew them to serve on their respective board, their affiliations, why they serve on their respective board, whether they work with anyone else in the room outside of parks, if they have been to all park properties, and, for park board members, who their appointing body is. He spoke to the importance of encouraging relationship-building activities between board members.

II. PARKS FOUNDATION OF HENDRICKS COUNTY UPDATE

Eisenhart explained the make-up of the PFOHC board, including the newly rotated officers (Eisenhart – President, Hayden – Vice President, Younger – Secretary) and introduced new members (Blade and Younger). He stated that the Foundation sees its function as providing funding for big projects. He added that securing donations from corporations and individuals is a new focus for the Foundation this year, and that it has kicked off a new campaign to develop memberships. He explained how the PFOHC is revamping its “Events” strategy, focusing on getting donations, sponsorships or memberships. Planned 2018 events will include the Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser, McCloud 15th Anniversary Celebration, Bee Festival, Summer Fun Run Series, Fall Colors Run, and groundbreaking for W. S. Gibbs Memorial Park.

Browning talked about the need to develop key strategies, and key opportunities to build sustaining partners. He added that the PFOHC is beginning to set goals for what it will be raising funds for going forward. Harrington suggested a capital campaign to capitalize on the wealth in Hendricks County, and brought up the fact that there are many opportunities for development in the areas of estate planning, tax shelters, and such.

Stritar talked about the new energy at the Parks Foundation, the focus on corporate and individual donors and the new marketing strategy. Their individual “membership” program is just rolling out, and will be a presence at events. She shared the new membership form. She is currently attending Chamber meetings to meet and engage with people, and she and Ivie have established a social media partnership between the Foundation and the Parks Department. Her goal is to develop partnerships with others to highlight the benefits of parks and partnerships.

III. HENDRICKS COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION UPDATE

A. Property updates

1. McCloud Nature Park

a. Weber reported that the wetland mitigation project has been completed, and that the maintenance crew has nearly finished building the boardwalks, with the exception of a couple handrails and small railing sections.

b. The arboretum is substantially completed. The interpretive signs are a work in progress and should be completed soon. There are a few trees that need to be replaced. The fountain still needs to be constructed and Weber is contacting a stone mason to begin that process.

c. New Exhibits have been built in the Nature Center, and we have reached out to local artists regarding rotating exhibits.

2. Sodalís Nature Park

Weber reported there is a great deal of uncertainty about what will ultimately happen with Sodalís Park, that the “plans” discussed thus far are more ideas than plans, and that there

has been no communication from the IAA or Plainfield recently, but he believes the closing is scheduled soon. Weber has met with representatives of USF&W, who would like to see continued dialogue between HCPR and Plainfield and feel that there is no reason for Plainfield to not involve HCPR going forward, but they cannot enforce it but will continue to enforce the conservation easement regardless of who manages the property. USF&W encouraged Weber to recommend that the Board not back out of the agreement, and Weber presented the following options:

a. Back out now and negotiate some sort of reimbursement from Plainfield; changing the name of the Park and removing the sign; providing perpetual acknowledgment of the contributions of the Park Board.

b. Finish the term of the Lease, understanding that the leadership may change and a partnership could be a more likely possibility.

c. Begin negotiating a new lease for the entire conservation area. Weber stated Plainfield would not be receptive to increasing the size of the park.

Weber informed the boards that either way, HCPR's involvement this year will be minimal until more details are worked out, and that the community in general will not care which entity is managing the park as long as there is a park there.

3. Russell Property

Weber shared the history of the Park Board's relationship with Beverly Russell and her property. He reported that she is selling the house but is holding on to the woodlands and fields with the hope that the Park Board will one day be in a better position to purchase that part of the property for a park.

Weber stated the discussion of W. S. Gibbs Memorial Park, the Vandalia Trail, and the future of McCloud Nature Park will be discussed later in the meeting with Long-term Planning.

4. Parks Update

Weber discussed HCPR's staffing changes in 2017. Lucas McNabb (PT Maintenance) and Chelsea McGinnis (PT Asst. Naturalist) resigned to pursue other opportunities; Steve Miller (new hire) replaced Lucas; Joe Lembo (formerly seasonal) replaced Chelsea. Three new full-time positions were created in 2017 (for 2018): Assistant Superintendent (Eric Ivie) – absorbed PT Office Admin position; Assistant Naturalist (Joe Lembo) – absorbed a part-time and a seasonal position; Maintenance – completely new position, currently vacant.

B. Program Attendance Analysis

- Ivie reported that what had begun as an exercise to familiarize himself with past programming while transitioning into his new position had turned into a 27-page report, wherein some concerning trends were discovered, such as declining program attendance and numbers of programs, plateaued visitation, and declining hours of operation for the Nature Center at McCloud. Ivie's program attendance analysis surprised us and left a lot of unanswered questions. Up to now we've only had attendance counts – car counters at 2 parks and attendance numbers for most programs.
- The result of his report is that we can see trends in numbers but don't know why they trend the way they do, who is or isn't using our parks or attending programs; where our visitors are

coming from or where we should try to attract additional visitors from; as well as how we need to adapt efforts to better serve visitors. We want to be able to make better management decisions and a stronger, more robust case for support.

C. Marketing

1. Ivie reported on the Ugly Christmas Suit Campaign in December, in which he and Weber had worn hideous Christmas suits for two days in an effort to raise funds for the Foundation. Photos were taken around the community and posted on social media, and the pair received coverage in local newspapers as well. The result was that they raised \$3,221 for the PFOHC in only 6 days.

2. Ivie then focused his presentation on the results of a simple, non-scientific survey he had conducted via Survey Monkey to our Facebook followers, on local chatter groups and Twitter, and by email to our Constant Contact followers in January. The survey consisted of four simple multiple choice questions aimed at determining how respondents now learn of our offerings, their preferred method of learning about local events, what they like to do at our parks, and what days of the week they are most likely to visit our parks. The fifth field on the survey was the zip codes of the respondents, and Ivie presented an analysis of the total responses as well as the Hendricks County responses. He stated that he had been surprised to receive such an overwhelming response (664 respondents) and that, while not statistically valid, he felt it was a good start to getting public input.

Younger volunteered that her company had been involved in some statistically-valid surveys through other parks departments and that she may be able to secure that information from those parks departments. There was a discussion of the legalities regarding cross-marketing of email lists, and Weber and Harrington stated they would research that topic. Younger added that there may be grant money available through the Eppley Institute for survey work.

3. Ivie reported on his efforts to stimulate participation by Scouts and to create new scouting programs. He talked about the information he shared at the Hou Koda District Round Table meeting, and plans to attend the local Girl Scout district meeting as well. He advised that he has created a new Facebook group “Scouting with Hendricks County Parks & Recreation” and reported on the results of a survey he conducted to that Facebook group in January. He added that he forwarded the results of the survey to the naturalists in advance of their deadline for programs for the summer issue of *The Explorer*.

4. Ivie talked about his use of monthly e-newsletters to engage and educate participants, and provided illustrations of some of his engaging and humorous posts on social media. He reported that he is striving to develop public awareness of our parks by developing relationships with local media, local photographers, and by engaging local businesses and organizations. He added that Miner’s columns with local media appear weekly and are very popular.

IV. BREAK

V. Moving Forward

A. A Shared Vision

Weber talked about building support. While real estate professionals, builders, tourism, and economic development community are already onboard, we need to translate that to county level support. The Parks Awareness Campaign and outreach on social media have increased public engagement and we are seeing an uptick in volunteers and donations. Weber stated that we are developing sources of revenue beyond the county budget and grants, both through the Parks Foundation and within the Department. He believes the council would be more likely to support parks if both boards communicated with elected officials. He stressed the importance of park board appointees making an effort to get on the agenda with their appointing bodies. There was discussion of preparing an annual report type of educational piece with “talking points” for face-to-face communication, and that board members need to be familiar with points from our research and metrics as we develop them. Weber also stressed the importance of our officials seeing others making parks a priority, and putting a “face” with parks, both through more inter-board committees and meetings with others from outside, and about the need to create a Legislative Affairs Committee. He also talked about his vision of enhanced partnerships with other parks departments and a partnership with elected officials.

Weber talked about the need for updating old policies and putting new ones in place.

- Land Acquisition – this new policy has recently been approved by the Board
- Special Events – this policy is currently in-process. Not only will it be beneficial in managing special events, but will provide opportunities to raise funds
- Naming Rights – also in-process. Weber mentioned a new idea for naming rights on a case by case basis, through an RFP. He said the committee’s goal is to get this policy finished this quarter.

B. Long-Term Planning

- Weber talked about the current Comprehensive Plan, how it matches up with what we are doing, and how it needs to be tweaked due to recent developments with regard to Sodalis, Gibbs, and the Vandalia Trail. He stated that the top two priorities at this point are The Vandalia Trail and W. S. Gibbs.
- The plans for eastward expansion of Vandalia Trail include working on putting together public and private meetings with landowners and representatives of BFS.
- Weber talked about the funding plan for W. S. Gibbs Memorial Park. Phase I has begun, and Weber reported that he has been meeting with DNR regarding grants, and with the Avon Planning & Building and Public Works Departments. Contacts are currently being made for design work, and donations are already coming in. There was a discussion of how to fund development, and of creating a general improvement fund to help secure specific projects without restrictions.
- McCloud Long-Term Planning was discussed, and Weber stated the park is reaching maturity, but a couple capital projects could still come to fruition, including a woodland staircase, cable bridge, overhaul of the Nature Center,

and renovation of Mill Cottage, to be able to use it as a retreat, for scouting events, and to lease out office space to universities for water study.

- Long-term plans moving forward will include more trails/connections within the county, continuation of parks directors meetings, and interagency partnerships to fill in gaps in service and to help each other with programming. Conservation of natural resources as the population grows will also be a focus of the long-term plans.

The Boards agreed that in the future, they will join together for a combined board meeting every six months, and will share minutes of their meetings.

ADJOURNMENT