

Friends of the St. Joseph River
Board meeting, February 23, 2023
Via zoom
Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Grace

Meeting Called to Order by Matt Meersman at 1:01 pm

Board Present: Matt Meersman, Chris Temple, Carolyn Grace, Ron Niezgodski, Grant Poole, Jeff Reece, Annie Klehfoth, Carol Higgins, Jordan Shedd and Danielle Meersman

Visitors Present: Shaun Grace, Jan McGowan, Jennifer Kanine, Becky Shank, Aimee Wentworth, Bill Teft, Kristi Todd, Matt Diana, Terry Loomis, Bill Courliss

Minutes: Carol Higgins motioned to accept the January board meeting minutes, Jeff Reece seconded. Motion passed.

Treasurer Report: Kim Sinclair was unable to be present or provide a Treasurer's Report, but Matt gave a few updates including membership renewals and a \$50 donation from his mom. Jeff Reece motioned to table the Treasurer's Report, Jordan Shedd seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business

Action taken via email

There was no action taken via email since the last meeting.

Collaborative Watershed Event scheduled for Friday May 12, 2023

The annual Watershed Celebration will be held in combination with the St. Joseph River Basin Commission's Annual Symposium at the Pinhook Park Community Center in South Bend. Matt reported that Oak + Ash will handle catering, beer will be provided by FotSJR member River St. Joe, and wine will be available from Ironhand. Grant asked about needing a license or permit for the beer/wine. Matt said that he had someone volunteer from his office who is a licensed bar tender.

Matt thanked Daragh and Annie for their help with event planning. Some details still need to be worked out, but a keynote speaker has been secured for the Celebration. Author Aaron Helman will speak about the significance of Pinhook and the historic portage located there. The Symposium portion of the event will be from approximately 1-4:30pm and then open the bar, Symposium attendees can leave or stay for happy hour. The Celebration will start around 5:30pm with a welcome message, then the award presentation followed by dinner and the keynote presentation.

Matt reported that there will be a registration fee for the Celebration to cover the cost of dinner, but the Symposium portion will likely be free. He said he would send out registration information as soon as it is available. Grant asked if members should be trying to secure items for the silent auction. Matt said he wasn't willing to manage it this year, but if someone else wants to lead it could be a good addition.

Watershed Stewardship Award

Matt reported that he has received two nominations for the Stewardship Award. He said we like to keep the winner a secret, so the board will be sent a ballot to vote for the winner next month. Matt said he would get the award updated with the winners name after the votes have been cast.

New Business

Annual Membership Meeting

The meeting must be held each year to elect new Directors. It is typically held in March. Chris Temple recommended that the annual membership meeting should be held virtually on our normal 4th Thursday schedule, which would be March 23, 2023. Matt said he would work to ensure we had the technology to vote for board members electronically. Jeff said he would update the website accordingly.

New Director Nominations

Jeff Reece reported that all of the people who have terms expiring have agreed to stay, however, if there are new people who want to serve they may be willing to step down from the board. Carolyn Grace recommended Doug McLaughlin, and Shaun Grace said he would like to serve on the board.

Items from the floor

NACD Stewardship Week is something Carol Higgins would like to see the FotSJR more involved in events related to this and the NACDs “One Water” theme this year. She said she is serving on the education committee and she’s brainstorming ways to get us more involved. It could even be something like a paddling relay down the river from county to county.

Letter of Support: Grace asked for a letter of support for a grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. The grant would fund a road/stream crossing inventory. Matt drafted a letter and shared it with the board. Reece motioned to send the letter and Temple supported. Motion passed.

Announcements:

Jordan Beehler shared a personal announcement that she is pregnant with her first child. She is very excited and looking forward to attending more meetings. There was much rejoicing amongst the group.

Grant Poole and Matt Diana spoke about the water withdrawal assessment tool and the temperature status of the Prairie River. It was proposed to change the designation from a warm to a cold water stream. However, the MDNR has put it on hold due to data issues. They will continue to monitor and possibly make decision in 2024. If the temperature status is changed, existing wells would be grandfathered in, but it could reduce the number of new wells allowed by the assessment tool.

Becky Shank reported that Constantine would like to move its sewage treatment from Three Rivers and produce a plant of their own that would discharge right across the river from some newly permitted development right on the river. She also reported that the Sue Silliman House Museum will have some new historical documents from around the area this spring.

Kristi Todd announced the Lower Elkhart Watershed Plan has been started the Upper Elkhart will be completed by end of 2023. If you would like to apply for an implementation grant be sure to connect with her for more information.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Jordan Shedd. Motion passed and the **meeting adjourned at 2:17pm**. The next meeting will be via zoom on March 23rd at 1pm.