

Friends of the St. Joseph River Board Meeting

April 27, 2023

Meeting location: via Zoom

Respectfully submitted by Chris Temple

Meeting was called to order via Zoom by Matt Meersman at 1:01 PM.

Board Members Present: Matt Meersman, Jeff Reece, Chris Temple, Kim Sinclair, Doug McLaughlin, Danielle Meersman, Jordan Shedd, Annie Klehfoth, Shaun Grace, Carolyn Grace

Others Present: Matt Hanauer, Michigan EGLE

A. Introductions – Everyone introduced themselves, and Matt Meersman thanked everyone for attending.

B. Minutes from the March 2023 Board Meeting

Matt shared the minutes from the last meeting on the Zoom screen and asked if there were any questions or corrections. Kim Sinclair moved that the minutes be approved. The motion was seconded by Jeff Reece. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

C. Treasurer's Report

Kim Sinclair emailed the Treasurer's Report to the Board shortly before the Zoom meeting today. Matt shared the report on the Zoom screen with everyone in attendance. Kim explained that the year ends March 31st, and Kim adjusted the financial report to ensure that information does not carry over incorrectly. Danielle Meersman updated the group on recent transactions related to donations from the Evergreen Foundation and from Crowe (Danielle's company). The current Treasurer's Report does not reflect these donations, but the balance indicates that sufficient funds are on hand for the upcoming events. Jeff Reece moved that the Treasurer's Report be accepted as accurate up to the date of March 31st, and Jordan Shedd seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

D. Old Business

1. Board action taken via email since the last meeting – None.

2. Collaborative Watershed Event - Matt recapped the "Watershed Doubleheader" event that is coming up. The double header consists of the St. Joseph River Basin Symposium event followed by the Watershed Celebration on May 12th. Matt expressed a big thank you to Annie Klehfoth and others for all of their help with organizing the event. Matt said that from a financial perspective there have been income and expenses, but the event is not expected to be detrimental to the overall financial status of the Friends account. Matt reminded all Board members to make plans to attend and encouraged other watershed partners to attend.

The biggest event expense is going to be the "cost per plate" for the dinner. Matt also explained that there will be snacks and refreshments in the afternoon, and the dinner is part of the day's second event. Carolyn Grace kindly donated dishes, utensils, and glasses to save on a lot of

expenses. The \$20 charge per plate will not make the event a fundraiser, but it will also not be a big expense to the Friends either. Simply for the sake of bookkeeping, Kim was grateful that the \$20 dinner cost was a different amount than the annual membership renewal cost of \$25. Matt was glad, but this was a fortuitous accident. Matt explained that a down payment on the food has been made, and overall attendance numbers with the caterer can be adjusted up to the week before the event. Matt described the wide array of menu choices including the availability of gluten free options. The caterer will be "Oak + Ash." They will be providing the food and will have two workers on site. The dinner will be served buffet style. The Iron Hand winery is providing the wine and allowing Friends to return unused bottles. The microbrewery River St. Joe is providing the beer, and they will allow us to return any unsold stock. Additional event costs include the mandatory Indiana Alcohol and Tobacco permit fee and the requirement for a bartender license. Table cloths, water pitchers, and cups still need to be purchased or borrowed. Matt also said there would be a small charge for getting the recipient's name engraved on the Watershed Stewardship Award plaque.

Kim thanked Matt and the team for all of their work to put this event together. Chris Temple has invited Joe Ditts from the South Bend Tribune, and he may be able to attend. Matt clarified that a registration deadline would probably need to be one week prior to the event on May 12th. Matt said that the venue's capacity is 120 individuals. Kim suggested that a +10% buffer or maybe 25 meals would be a good idea and only incur an expense of \$500. After additional discussion, Chris moved that Matt be authorized by the Board to fund 25 meals or \$500 if additional guests need to be accommodated with the caterer. Doug McLaughlin seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent. Matt expects the event's overall enrollment level to be in the range of 70 individuals. Danielle reminded the group that extra food could potentially be split among the attendees if there is leftover. Everyone agreed that the event promises to be a fun and exciting day.

E. New Business

1. Officer Elections - Matt reminded everyone that new Board members were elected at the last meeting and now it was the time to elect new officers. Matt invited everyone in attendance to express any interest in being an Officer (President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary). He also said that all of the current Officers are willing to serve another year. Both Matt and Jeff reiterated their willingness to serve again but that they did not want to stop any other interested parties from stepping forward to be an Officer. Everyone in attendance seemed supportive of Matt, Jeff, Kim, and Carolyn serving in the same positions for another year. Doug moved that the existing officers stay in office for another year. Chris seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

2. Other - Matt gave a report to the group about a new member of the Friends, Brian Will who recently organized a trash pickup in South Bend along the river for Earth Day on April 22nd. The WNDU television station ran a short local news piece that mentioned Friends as the event sponsor and interviewed Brian. Matt showed the short television clip to everyone in the Zoom meeting. Matt said that Brian purchased the donuts and coffee, and the city provided some of

the supplies such as bags, gloves, and trash grabbers. Matt mentioned that liability issues might need to be kept in mind regarding having our name affiliated with events like this. Chris thought these types of events would be more common for the Friends organization. Matt explained the history of trash pickup events and welcomed the group's involvement with these. Matt recalled past times when Bob Owens was active in a so-called "South Bend Chapter" of the Friends of the St. Joe and would annually organize trash pickup events in South Bend. Matt and Danielle talked about the big volume of trash that can be found along the river each year. Matt asked if Chris would do some leg work on the legality of event sponsorship relative to liability concerns. Chris agreed to do so. Matt mentioned "River Network" as a national organization for potential liability guidance. Danielle mentioned her past experience with dumpsters filled with cleaning up the same spot on the river each year. Doug mentioned the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council's partnership with other cities to facilitate cleanup or paddle events where the city took the lead and accepted the liability responsibility. Doug explained that whoever hosts the event is important for determining liability waiver agreement details. Doug also mentioned strict protocols and safety guidelines that are in place for things like the Adopt-A-Highway program. Shaun Grace mentioned doing a number of river cleanups and the MiCorps Volunteer Stream Cleanup Program as a potential resource for guidance. Kim voiced this question about liability: "you have to ask yourself . . . what do you have to lose?" and having something to protect is an important thing to keep in mind for liability. Matt said the Board would be amenable to supporting these trash pickups. Doug thinks it is great media attention and worth the relatively low investment. Matt commented that it can also raise public support for other goals such as legislative priorities that might be related to bigger water quality issues. Annie Klehfoth mentioned Elkhart's effort to do an annual river cleanup, and they have a river cleanup kit for Elkhart area projects. The group was very supportive of trash pickup events and just wanted to be smart about liability concerns.

F. Items from the floor (Watershed Council and Visitors)

1. Announcements - Jeff Reece mentioned that Chris Svoboda (immediate supervisor Yun Gao) on the Watershed Council had retired from AEP on March 31st, and this led to a discussion of the challenges of keeping the point-of-contact information accurate and current for watershed partners and stakeholders. Matt described the intent of trying to keep representatives from all of the counties in the St. Joseph River watershed involved as well as organizations such as AEP, I&M Power, EGLE, IDEM, and the like to encourage attendance at Friends meetings. Jeff mentioned the illusion of a conflict of interest in the past when he worked for I&M Power. Matt described the challenges of keeping the listing up-to-date and showed everyone the Friends website where a lot of useful information is on display but a lot that is also out-of-date. Jeff updated many of the website's links last year. Matt saw himself as perhaps the best expert for the role but asked if anyone would be willing to help be a liaison to all of the Conservation Districts, government agencies, and the like to update information. To simplify maintenance, Doug asked if just the organization could be maintained on the website and individual names could just be on the Friends agenda. The discussion ended with a general consensus that the information was useful but challenging to maintain.

2. Next meeting – May 25 or June 22 at 1:00 PM – location: TBD. Kim moved that our next Friends meeting be held on June 22nd. Chris seconded the motion. Matt verified on the website events calendar that the location will be the Elkhart Environmental Center. Annie Klehfoth confirmed that the site was available. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent. Matt summarized that unless plans change, the next two Friends meetings (June and August) will be “in person” rather than Zoom.

Kim moved that the meeting be adjourned. Jeff Reece seconded. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent. Matt adjourned the meeting at 2:22 PM. Everyone again repeated their enthusiasm about the Watershed Doubleheader event on May 12, 223 at Pinhook Park.