

MINUTES
MCLEAN COUNTY GREENWAYS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2016
UPTOWN STATION, 3rd FLOOR
NORMAL, ILLINOIS

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:05 a.m.

PRESENT:

Mike Hall, Gretchen Monti, Tom Haynes, Jeanne Moonan, Gene Kotlinski, Marcus Ricci, Julie Sibley and Doug Welch

STAFF PRESENT:

Vasu Pinnamaraju (MCRPC), Rick Nolan (MCRPC), Jamal Smith (MCRPC)

INTRODUCTIONS:

Chair Mike Hall called on Rick Nolan of the Regional Planning Commission to introduce Jamal Smith. Mr. Smith will be taking over aspects of the McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee upon Mr. Nolan's retirement from the MCRPC. Meeting attendees introduced themselves to Mr. Smith.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Hall asked Committee members to review the minutes from the August 22, 2015 meeting. Gretchen Monti asked for an explanation of what Prairie State Conservation Coalition grants were. Mr. Hall explained that LCF grants were land protection grants utilized to protect important water resources. The Sangamon River Corridor has been a recipient of such a grant in the past. After the clarification, Ms. Monti moved to accept the minutes as presented. Her motion was seconded by Jamal Smith. The motion passed unanimously.

SUGAR CREEK STEWARDS PROGRAM:

Marcus Ricci of the Ecology Action Center presented an overview of the EAC Sugar Creek Stewards Program. It is a volunteer program to invite people to participate in removing non-native and invasive plants and beautifying the greenway along Sugar Creek. It will also provide an opportunity for volunteers to learn about rivers and floodplains and the importance of native grasses and plantings to humans and wildlife. Mr. Ricci indicated invasive plants such as garlic mustard and hemlock will be targeted for removal. Portions of Constitution Trail may be targeted as well if enough people step forward to volunteer. Doug Welch asked if the effort involved any controlled burns. Mr. Ricci said the EAC has hopes of doing those later in February if the weather cooperates at that time. Mr. Welch commented that Jay Tetzloff of the Bloomington Parks and Rec Department has been very proactive in these efforts as well during his short time as COB Parks and Recreation Director. Mr. Hall added that Jason Schumacher of ParkLands should also be contacted and be consulted on this effort since he is a recognized expert in invasive species.

DISCUSSION/SELECTION OF NEW CHAIR:

Mr. Hall announced it was his preference to resign as Chair of the Greenways Advisory Committee since he was stepping down from his position at the Parklands Foundation effective the end of May. Mr.

Nolan also announced that he was retiring from the McLean County Regional Planning Commission effective June 30 of this year. Both the Chair and liaison positions will need to be addressed.

MOVING FORWARD:

Vasu Pinnamaraju, MCRPC Executive Director, brought up the possibility of realigning the Advisory Committee or discontinuing it. She explained many community plans are addressing greenways whether it be community bike plans, comprehensive plans, environmental plans, etc. She indicated the MCRPC must be careful with not only monetary resources at this time but how staff time is spent as well.

Ms. Moonan explained the Advisory Committee has been responsible for monitoring different aspects of the plan and was important in moving many projects forward such as bike trails, water management issues, and various environmental initiatives throughout several years. She admitted the Committee has fallen short in monitoring some threatened areas but by-and-large, The Advisory Committee remains an important group in advocating for greenways. She felt the Committee filled a void in greenways advocacy that cannot be filled by individual agencies working separate and alone.

Mr. Hall added the Committee brings together varied agencies under one umbrella that helps establish partnerships which represent government and private interests. He commented that government cannot be relied in and of itself for everything in the community, including advocating for greenway initiatives.

Ms. Moonan admitted she would like to see the Committee pay more attention to “threatened areas” in the community by manpower does not always make that possible. She reminded members the Committee contributed a lot of manpower and membership while working on updates of local watershed plans.

Mr. Hall agreed it may be time to look at some type of re-organization like an “environmental committee,” but there is always going be some overlap with community efforts. He pointed out that many watershed matters are always going to be addressed by many entities because of its nature. Ms. Moonan added she is in favor of looking at different ways of coordinating efforts but that it is important to keep the Committee intact to move the plan forward and update it when necessary.

Mr. Welch commented it is tough to get immediate gratification from greenways efforts because they move slowly by nature. He used the Route 66 Trail as an example as well as other bikeway initiatives but reminded the Committee that McLean County is probably making more progress in these efforts than most and remains a leader in this type of planning. Mr. Hall added the Advisory Committee was the lead group in getting the regional trail initiative off the ground close to 20 years ago.

Ms. Monti commented that Greenways is always going to involve a “mix of groups and interests.” She said government will always have a role in these efforts not least is community education and greenway promotion. Mr. Nolan added the Advisory Committee is designated in the plan as the primary body assigned to moving greenway plan implementation forward. If major changes were made, it would probably require going back to respective planning commissions, councils and boards and getting approval to make any changes to an oversight committee structure since the greenway plan was legally adopted under this understanding that plan implementation was the charge of the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Ricci said that since greenways is a bit different than other initiatives it may be time to discuss an Advisory Committee structure that operates with sub-committees acting as policy and project advisors.

He said it may be time for members to be members of environmental, water, trails, and other sub-committees. He would be in favor of each organization represented on the Advisory Committee contributing line items every quarter to what their agency is doing and how it is helping in greenway plan implementation. In other words, he would like to see each member contribute short quarterly bullet points from EAC, Audubon, Friends of the Trail, etc. Mr. Haynes said Heyworth and the surrounding area near the village are always interested in Kickapoo Creek issues and trail development and would like to assist in any matter contributing information from his area.

Ms. Pinnamaraju suggested it is probably time to look at other agencies not already involved in the process and extend an invitation to be involved in greenways but giving said groups a reason to be involved. She also added it may be time to come up with action items for meetings and who or what agency is responsible for any greenway monitoring. She added it is important to establish metrics to measure successes no manner the future Committee structure.

Ms. Moonan again urged it is probably time to re-evaluate the plan including coming up with a list of current or future community partners that can assist in a more aggressive plan of action for continued implementation. This might include inviting McLean County Soil and Water and other conservation and ecology groups to the table.

Both Mr. Hall and Ms. Monti suggested devising some structure that would give the Chair more power in moving plan implementation forward.

Mr. Hall agreed to remain as Chair of the Committee until further notice. He will meet with Ms. Pinnamaraju in the near future to discuss agenda items for the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING/ADJOURN:

The next meeting of the McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee will be Thursday, August 4 at 9:00 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Nolan