

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**March 5, 2020**

The first quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2020 was held on March 5, 2020, in the Elkhart County Public Services Building, Goshen, Indiana. Daragh Deegan, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself and discussed the purpose and makeup of the SJRBC. Roll call was taken, and it was noted a quorum was present with the following members in attendance:

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Vice-Chair:* Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart  
*Secretary:* Kris Thomas, City of Angola  
Adam Bowden, City of Mishawaka  
Rod Edgell, Indiana DNR  
Mark Espich, St. Joseph County  
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County  
Jim Hess, Elkhart County  
Ray Hoover, Town of LaGrange  
Dan Lash, Noble County  
John Law, St. Joseph County

Tara Lee, Steuben County  
Janel Meyer, Steuben County  
Jim Moyer, Kosciusko County  
Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County  
Steve Schweisberger, Elkhart County  
Randy Sexton, Noble County  
Steven Vaughn, LaGrange County  
Robert Weaver, Kosciusko County  
Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Todd Clark, Elkhart Co. SWCD  
Melissa DeSimone, MLSA  
Annie Klehfoth, Elkhart Env. Center  
Clinton Knauer, Steuben Co. Build/Plan  
Jeff Moore, Town of LaGrange  
Dustin New, MEANDRS  
Ron Niezgodski, FotSJR  
Charlie Pettibone, Steuben Co. Build/Plan

Jeff Reece, FotSJR  
Casey Stoffel, University of Notre Dame  
Cassy White, St. Joseph Co. Health Dept.  
Peter Kelly, Dallas Lake Assoc.  
Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik  
Matt Meersman, MACOG  
Leah Thill, MACOG

**MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 5, 2019**

Daragh Deegan, SJRBC Vice-Chair, asked the Commission members to consider the minutes of the December 5, 2019, meeting. There being no additions or corrections, the following action was taken:

ADAM BOWDEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER  
2019 REGULAR MEETING. MARK ESPICH SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR.  
THE MOTION CARRIED.

**FINANCIALS**

**Financial Report**

Matt Meersman, SJRBC Director, provided the financial report for the second quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 (10/01/19 – 12/31/19). Financial reports and bank statements were provided to the members of the Commission for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt drew the Commission's attention to the Statement of Financial Activities. He explained that due to an extension of the Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF) Grant the revenue amount for Special Projects is expected to be \$4,000 more than initially forecasted. Matt also anticipates that additional expense will be incurred for the GLPF Project and noted the projected cost under Special Projects.

To accommodate the \$4,000 increase in Special Projects revenue, as well as the subsequent \$4,000 increase for expenses to the GLPF Project, Matt requested the Commission consider a budget amendment.

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE \$4,000 BUDGET AMENDMENT.  
ADAM BOWDEN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. Matt shared that the Total Fund Balance was \$209,200.41 and indicated the Commission was in a strong financial position.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and pointed out that the statement is prepared on a cash basis and reflects all cash receipts and disbursements for the reporting period.

Matt asked if there were any questions or comments regarding any of the financial statements. Hearing none, Daragh called for a motion to approve the financial report for the second quarter of FY 2020 as presented.

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR  
THE PERIOD ENDING 12/31/2019. ADAM BOWDEN SECONDED. ALL  
IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **Approval of Claims**

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Matt noted that there were two invoices related to the North Branch Elkhart River Project approved at the last meeting. Claims also included invoices from MACOG for October, November, and December expenses, as well as quarterly meeting legal services.

Hearing no questions or comments, Daragh called for a motion to approve the payment of claims as presented.

STEVE SCHWEISBERGER MOVED TO APPROVE THE CLAIMS AND  
PAYMENT OF THE EXPENSES AS PRESENTED. JANEL MEYER SECONDED.  
ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **2020 Annual Symposium Planning**

Matt reported that Fernwood Botanical Gardens in Niles, Michigan, has been secured as the location for the Annual Symposium on May 8, 2020. The facility has been newly renovated and now seats up to 150 people, which is approximately twice the number of seats previously

available. Matt stated he has also secured the event's keynote speaker, Eric Eckl, Owner of Water Words That Work, LLC.

### **Additional Staff**

Matt explained that a part-time River Basin Coordinator position was posted on the MACOG website on February 3, 2020. He told the Commission that several qualified candidates will be interviewed, and a decision is expected to be made by the end of March. A description of the position is available on the MACOG website.

### **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Urban Tree Project**

Matt reported on the GLRI grant-funded project with ReLeaf Michigan, the Michigan DNR, Indiana DNR, and Davey Resource Group. The partners are working with six communities in the watershed to perform urban tree canopy (UTC) assessments, identify tree planting locations with the greatest potential to mitigate stormwater, train communities to utilize the UTC data, and foster a volunteer-led tree planting program to plant 300 trees in key areas of the watershed.

Matt reported the six communities selected for this project were Angola, Middlebury, and Syracuse in Indiana, as well as Buchanan, Coldwater, and Sturgis in Michigan. Criteria such as need, capacity, interest in trees, a motivated City/Town/Village manager, Tree City USA status, a tree ordinance and a strong volunteer base were considered in the selection process.

Matt explained the project will take place over a couple of years. The UTC assessments should be completed within six months, and tree plantings will take place over the following year and a half. Communities will sign maintenance agreements to insure the new trees will be cared for.

### **North Branch Elkhart River Project**

Matt explained the North Branch of the Elkhart River watershed is located in LaGrange and Noble Counties. Since the last SJRBC meeting, an agreement has been signed with Christopher B. Burke Engineering (Burke) to provide professional engineering services for the completion of a flood risk management plan and the process has been initiated with Indiana University Grand Challenge to receive the grant funds.

Matt reported the project team held its stakeholder kick off meeting on March 4<sup>th</sup>, and it was well attended. Burke plans to provide the results of the field assessment at the Commission meeting on June 4<sup>th</sup> and have the draft summary report completed in August.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Lake Michigan Watershed Seminar**

Matt has been working with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) to plan a Lake Michigan Watershed seminar at Notre Dame. The goal is to connect watershed efforts and remove barriers by bringing together Lake Michigan watershed groups and water managers. Commission members will be invited to attend once a date is set.

### **Partner Grant Support**

Matt reported that over the last quarter he has provided grant application support letters to the St. Joseph County (MI) Conservation District for an application to conduct a mainstem invasive species inventory, as well as the City of Goshen's application to the Community Foundation of Elkhart County. Goshen would utilize the grant funds to do a study on tree resilience and climate change. Matt has committed to providing 48 hours of in-kind match on Goshen's proposal.

Matt indicated the Cass County Conservation District (CCCD) intends to submit a grant proposal to update the Dowagiac River Watershed Management Plan in order to meet EPA requirements and become eligible for nonpoint source pollution grants. CCCD is requesting in-kind match assistance from SJRBC for meeting participation and gathering data. Matt reported he had drafted a letter committing his time and mileage for a total contribution of \$1,479.

Hearing no questions or concerns, Daragh called for a motion to approve the in-kind assistance to CCCD and provide the letter of commitment.

JOHN LAW MOVED TO APPROVE THE SJRBC SUPPORT FOR THE CASS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROJECT. RAY HOOVER SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **Other Business / Updates**

Daragh updated the Commission on the City of Elkhart's dam removal project in downtown Elkhart (Waterfall Drive). He indicated the contractor and the Army Corp of Engineers have recently removed the dam and the project is close to completion. Daragh stated the goal of the project was to support ecological restoration and it has been successful.

Jon Roberts suggested a photo directory of Commission members with contact information. He thought it would be especially useful given the Commission's expanded membership. Matt stated that he would be willing to facilitate the project if the members were in agreement. Numerous members spoke in support, and Matt offered to take pictures following the meeting.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Matt indicated the majority of his work was reported on during the course of the meeting, but he wanted to note that he has joined the board of the Indiana Water Monitoring Council. Matt hopes his participation will help inform the Commission's water monitoring strategy.

Matt also reported on his involvement with WNIT efforts to produce a documentary about the St. Joseph River. They have recently secured a primary sponsor and the project is moving forward. It will be produced by the same individual who produced a documentary on the Kankakee River called "Everglades of the North".

Work continues on the drainage apportionment project supported by the Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF). Matt has been working with Kieser & Associates to secure future project funding for the project from the GLPF.

## **PRESENTATION**

### **Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy Experience**

In partnership with Friends of the St. Joe River Association, the Commission provided financial assistance to four recipients to attend the Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy in 2020. The recipients were Melissa DeSimone, Peter Kelly, Annie Klehfoth, and Casey Stoffel. Each of them attended the meeting, thanked the Commission for their support and shared some of their experiences with the group.

## **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

There was considerable discussion about the need to revisit and update drainage laws and watershed management in relation to Lake Michigan's increasingly high elevations.

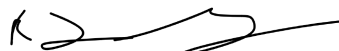
Jeff Reece invited everyone to the 13th Annual St. Joseph River Watershed Council Celebration being held on March 20, at the Sturges-Young Center for the Arts in Sturgis, Michigan. The keynote speaker will be Melissa Widhalm from the Purdue University Climate Change Research Center. Matt added registration is available on-line ([www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org)) and the cost is \$25.

Matt was asked if he has had the opportunity to look into the recent water quality deregulation and its potential impact. He responded the largest one he is familiar with is the repeal of Waters of the US rule. Matt noted he is aware and is staying informed but has not participated in any advocacy efforts on behalf of the Commission.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Daragh Deegan called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

DAN LASH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE SJRBC MEETING. RAY HOOVER SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.



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Kieran Fahey, SJRBC Chair

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