

ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
December 1, 2022

The fourth quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2022 was held on December 1st, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://youtu.be/9N1-vAv4Wbg>

Kris Thomas, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself along with Kate Barrett, Brandon Bowman, and Ashley Matthews from the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG). He briefly reviewed instructions for participation 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:

VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT IN PERSON:

<i>Chair:</i> Kris Thomas, City of Angola	Dan Lash, Noble County
<i>Vice-Chair:</i> Alicia Walsh, Steuben County	John Law, St. Joseph County
<i>Treasurer:</i> Jim Hess, Elkhart County	Sue McGee, City of Kendallville
Phil Barker, Elkhart County	Janel Meyer, Steuben County
Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart	Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County
Rod Edgell, Indiana DNR	Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County
Martin Franke, LaGrange County	Steve Vaughn, LaGrange County
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County	Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

OTHERS PRESENT:

Donny Aleo, Elkhart Co. Parks	Mark Walker, Kuert Concrete
Todd Clark, Elkhart SWCD	Steve Weideman, Shipshewana Lake
Monica Davis, Wood Lake Scout Camp	Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik
Eric Fisher, LaGrange Co. Lakes Council	Kate Barrett, MACOG
Trevor Hampshire, City of Kendallville	Brandon Bowman, MACOG
Matt Horsley, Indiana DNR Fisheries	Ashley Matthews, MACOG
Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen Stormwater	Matt Meersman, MACOG

CONSENT AGENDA

Kris Thomas, SJRBC Chair, reminded members that they can request to have any item removed from the consent agenda if they believe it warrants its own separate vote.

Minutes – September 1, 2022

Kris asked the Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes of the September 1, 2022, meeting. Hearing no corrections or additions, Kris moved on to the next item on the consent agenda.

Financial Report

Matt presented the financial report for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2023 (07/01/22 – 09/30/22). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities (Profit & Loss). Matt noted the high interest rates have generated about \$750.00 a month in unexpected revenue. He explained the delayed

water monitoring efforts have temporarily reduced expenses. The net change in assets for this period is a little smaller than last year, largely due to the expanded water monitoring program and the additional staff brought on to support it.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. The accounts receivable item is for the Q1 appropriation from the State, which is noted on the Statement of Financial Activities. Matt noted the accounts payable was for services provided by MACOG for July, August, and September. Total Fund Balance for the FYE was \$342,217.68.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and mentioned that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 09/30/22. Matt explained the State appropriation was shown on the financial activities statement because it was invoiced, but the funds had not been received at the time of this statement. The appropriation from Steuben County was for the second half of last year's appropriation. The Town of Syracuse appropriation was received early this year.

Matt asked if there were any questions on the financial report. Hearing no questions, he moved on to the next item in the consent agenda.

Claims – December 1, 2022

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$27,496.79 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included invoices from MACOG for July, August, and September services, and Thorne Grodnik for quarterly legal services. There was also an invoice from Christopher Burke Engineering for the first payment of Steuben County's Needs Assessment. Matt asked if there were any questions about the claims, or any other items from the consent agenda. Dan Lash asked if Matt had thought about putting any money into a CD. Matt said right now the special government checking account interest rate is better than the CDs he has seen, but it is something that can be considered in the future.

Hearing no other questions or comments, Kris called for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

DAN LASH MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA.

JEWEL WISE SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS

Existing Projects

Matt noted that all of the existing projects to be discussed fall under the heading of Special Projects in the budget, and they would not be possible without the financial support of the local government members of the Commission, which cover the cost of basic operations.

Wetland Task Force

Matt stated Senate Bill 389 was passed last year and as a result the Wetlands Task Force was created to review state wetland regulations. The Task Force held their last meeting and approved the Final Report on September 14. Matt briefly discussed some of the major findings that were included in the report. He mentioned one recommendation from the Task Force was to provide more support to state agencies that are under-resourced and understaffed. The full report can be found on the SJRBC website: <https://www.sjrbc.com/resources/wetlands/index.html>.

Drainage Benefit Apportionment

Matt stated he has continued work with the LaGrange County Surveyor's Office on determining drainage benefit apportionment. By analyzing the land cover and soil characteristics of their drainage watersheds, he has been able to better determine how much each landowner benefits from drain maintenance. Using this method, rather than just considering acreage owned, the maintenance funds are divided in a more agreeable and fair way among landowners. Matt stated he participated in Farm Bureau's Drainage School with LaGrange County Surveyor, Zach Holsinger. Since then, he has received several inquiries from a number of attorneys regarding the benefit apportionment technique. Matt and Zach also met with the Shishewana Lake Association to discuss sediment issues. In addition, Matt and Zach were interviewed for a Great Lakes Protection Fund video that will help people understand why the drainage benefit apportionment method should be considered.

Matt also mentioned that a Drainage Task Force had been formed by the Indiana General Assembly and their first meeting was last Monday. He said the Commission's service area was well represented with four legislators on the Task Force. Kris Thomas asked what the goals of the Drainage Task Force are. Matt replied that there are numerous goals, similar to the Wetland Task Force, but the primary objective was determining if the State is taking control over drainage from local governments. He explained that his biggest concern is related to their charge of determining if drainage law is yielding to conservation and pollution control objectives.

Watershed Leadership Academy

Matt stated that a partnership between the Commission and the Friends of the St. Joe River Association covered the tuition for four people from the St. Joseph River Watershed this year. The individuals selected were Kyle Burchett (Technician/Educator for LaGrange County SWCD), Monica Davis (Volunteer for Wood Lake Scout Reservation), Shaun Grace (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area Coordinator for St. Joseph County, MI, CD), and Natasha Kauffman (Redevelopment Coordinator for Elkhart County).

Steuben County Stormwater and Drainage Needs Assessment

Matt discussed the Commission's work in Steuben County to review their policies and ordinances related to water management. Burke Engineering was hired to complete an audit of the existing drainage, stormwater, and floodplain management policies, create a flood resilience checklist, and present a list of recommendations with examples. Matt said there was a meeting with the Maumee River Basin Commission at the end of November to review findings and recommendations since they are also impacted by the ordinances. There will be a presentation to the Steuben County Drainage Board on December 5, 2022.

Water Monitoring Program

Kate Barrett provided an update on the SJRBC Water Monitoring Program. There are 12 biological monitoring locations which are meant to complement existing efforts by various partners throughout the basin. Kate said there was a 100% retrieval rate of the samplers placed throughout the St. Joseph River Basin and she thanked Brandon Bowman for all of his help in making that possible. She also reminded the Commission the Elkhart County Water Quality Trends Report was finished in May 2022. The final report can be found on the SJRBC website: <https://sjrbc.com/resources/monitoring/index.html>. Kate discussed recent projects which included strategic planning for the Steuben County Water Monitoring Program, Nottawa Creek

sampling with Calhoun County Conservation District in Michigan, and continued work on the SJRBC interactive web map. The web map can be viewed at <https://stjoe.riverdata.org/>. Brandon also gave a watershed presentation at John Adams High School in South Bend, IN. Currently, Kate is working with Steuben County to help guide a strategic water monitoring program. At this time, they are determining water monitoring sites and what parameters they want to measure. Matt asked Kate to explain how the sampling by the Steuben County Lakes Council compared to Elkhart County's water monitoring. Kate said Steuben County has been sampling three times a year for each site compared to Elkhart County's weekly sampling.

Kate shared that she has been interested in the sociological aspects of what it means to be in the watershed. She has been integrating some of the work she does with SJRBC with her Ecology class at Holy Cross College. She thanked SJRBC members who have helped her students become involved and excited about the watershed. Kate also thanked Brandon Bowman, who has been critical to the success of the water monitoring program and has been a great addition to the SJRBC. Brandon graduates this month with his BS in Biology.

NEW BUSINESS

Election of 2023 Officers

Matt explained that the traditional process for creating a Slate of Officers for the Commission is for the Vice Chair to be nominated for Chair, Secretary for Vice Chair, and Treasurer for Secretary, leaving the Treasurer position to be filled each year. He stated Jewel Wise, of the Kosciusko County SWCD, expressed a willingness to serve last year and confirmed again this year. Ray Hoover of LaGrange County also said he would be willing to serve if there were no other nominations. Matt stated unless there were any other nominations, there would need to be a motion to approve the slate of officers with the addition of Jewel Wise as treasurer. Kris Thomas asked if there were any other nominations from the floor. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the slate of officers presented with the addition of Jewel Wise as Treasurer.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2023 SLATE OF OFFICERS PRESENTED. SUE MCGEE SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

SJRBC Member Survey

Matt stated Kate has put together a survey to gather feedback from Commission members on how the Commission can best fulfill its statutory purpose, what the role of its staff should be, and areas for improvement. Matt would like to send the survey out to everyone by the end of the year. There was discussion about the survey serving as a starting point for eventually developing a strategic plan.

Watershed Awareness

Matt discussed the importance of understanding the physical connection everyone has by being part of the watershed. He suggested that raising public awareness of this connection by working with partners, such as Friends of the St. Joe River Association and Michiana Watershed, could help the Commission fulfill its statutory purpose. Matt and Kate worked with MACOG's graphic designer to create an image of the watershed and how it connects Indiana and Michigan. He presented the graphic during the meeting and said his goal was not only to increase awareness, but to drive people to seek more information about the basin and what they could do to improve water quality and reduce flood risks.

23rd Annual Symposium

The St. Joseph River Basin Symposium has traditionally been an in-person event providing a networking opportunity for decision makers and water managers from Indiana and Michigan. The event was held virtually for the past three years. Matt stated he would really like to return to an in-person format and there is interest from Friends of the St. Joseph River Association to consider partnering with their “Watershed Celebration” event. Matt proposed holding the symposium as the educational component of the event in the afternoon, with the celebration immediately following in the evening. He would like to keep the event scheduled for May and would like ideas for topics and speakers. He also noted that SJRBC funds would not be used for the evening event, only for the symposium.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO INVESTIGATE A JOINT EVENT. ALICIA WALSH OFFERED AN AMENDMENT TO APPROVE COMBINING THE SYMPOSIUM AND CELEBRATION EVENTS. MARTIN AGREED TO THE AMENDMENT. DARAGH DEEGAN SECONDED THE AMENDED MOTION. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Other Business/Updates

Matt said the December 2023 SJRBC meeting occurs at the same time as the County Commissioners Conference in Indianapolis and asked the Commission if they would like to consider rescheduling or keep it as scheduled. After some discussion there was consensus that the meeting should stay as originally scheduled for December 7, 2023. Since the County Commissioners have the ability to appoint non-Commissioner representatives, and getting a quorum in December has generally not been a problem, there was no need to adjust the previously approved meeting schedule.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Matt received a draft of a bill from Representative Mike Aylesworth, which would allow for the formation of Watershed Development Commissions across the state. He highlighted some of the changes from previous versions of the bill. There is now a process for how existing Commissions like the SJRBC could transform into a Watershed Development Commission (WDC) if all the county members chose to do so. The bill would now allow a WDC to address water quality issues, which was the original purpose of the SJRBC. John Law noted that a WDC would only consist of one representative per county and a representative of the Indiana DNR. The remainder of the existing SJRBC members would become an advisory committee to the WDC. Matt said he will keep the Commission updated as he learns more.

Matt stated that, in the past, Steuben County has never fully funded the appropriation request made by SJRBC. He was pleased to report that Steuben County just passed their 2023 budget and they have fully funded the 2023 appropriation request. He thanked the Steuben County representatives, especially Commissioner Leichty for their support with the request. Matt also mentioned he spoke with Tom Selman, Water Superintendent for the City of Angola, regarding interest in conducting a regional water resources study. He said it is already on the Commission’s radar and he would like to work together in developing a proposal.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

Kris Thomas stated the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District, along with the City of Angola MS4 program, is hosting a free Contractor Workshop. Registration is due today and the workshop will be held on December 9, 2022.

Kris thanked Matt for his leadership while she served as Chair for SJRBC.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Kris Thomas called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

DAN LASH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. ALICIA WALSH
SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Alicia Walsh, SJRBC Chair

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