



1996 S. Kirk Rd. Suite 320
Geneva, IL 60134

Forest Preserve District, Planning and Utilization Committee

Meeting Minutes

Chair Cherryl Strathmann, President Christopher Kious, President Pro Tem, Mavis Bates, Ron Ford, Michelle Gumz, Mike Kenyon, Anita Lewis, Mike Linder, Vern Tepe

Thursday, March 28, 2024

9:30 AM

3rd Floor Board Room

I. Call to Order

The Forest Preserve District Planning and Utilization Committee meeting was held Thursday, March 28, 2024 at the Administration Offices located at 1996 S. Kirk Road, Suite 320, Geneva, IL 60134. President Kious called the meeting to order, Chair Strathmann participated via remote at 9:30AM.

PRESENT Board Member Mavis Bates
Board Member Michelle Gumz
Board Member Michael Kenyon
President Chris Kious
Board Member Vern Tepe
Board Member Ron Ford (Remote)
Board Member Anita Lewis (Remote)
Chair Cherryl Strathmann (Remote)

ABSENT Board Member Michael Linder

Also Present: Commissioners Allan (Remote), Molina (Remote), Roth, Juby; Exec. Dir. Haberthur; CFO Petschke & staff Carrano, Marano; Ops. Dir. Jensen; NRM Dir. Chess & staff Blackburn, Graser; Chief of Planning & Land Mgmt. Rooks-Lopez & Trades Mgr. Darby; HR Dir. Clough; Chief of Police Burger; Dir. of Community Affairs Metanchuk; Admin staff Rafferty, Figliozzi and Attorney Hodge.

II. Approval of Minutes from February 29, 2024

RESULT: **APPROVED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT**
MOVER: Michael Kenyon
AYE: Mavis Bates, Ron Ford, Michelle Gumz, Michael Kenyon, Anita Lewis, Cherryl Strathmann, and Vern Tepe
ABSENT: Michael Linder

III. Public Comment (Each Speaker is limited to three minutes)

None.

IV. Bids and Proposals

None.

V. Presentations

NRM Dir. Chess introduce Wildlife Biologist Bill Graser. Graser shared a presentation of the

North American Badger that was recently sighted at one of the District Preserves that underwent prairie restoration. Graser noted that during a District controlled burn, he noticed a hole in the ground that looked like a badger burrow. Graser then installed a motion-activated game camera to capture footage of which species were using the burrow. Graser stated that it is very rare to see badgers in the wild. By working diligently through land restorations, the District is bringing the animals back to their natural habitats. He provided images of the different burrows throughout Kane County and provided a video of the spotted badger at his burrow.

***DISCUSSION:** Brief conversations regarding wildlife and land restorations ensued. President Kious thanked Graser and the Natural Resource Management department for the presentation.*

VI. New or Unfinished Business

TMP-24-2117 Resolution Approving the Establishment of the Agricultural Land Use Policy

NRM Dir. Chess presented the first District agricultural land use policy for the farming program. The District currently owns 23,404 acres of land in Kane County and approximately 5,978 acres of farmland is under annual Farm License Agreements for the production of row crops and grass hay. About 36 local farmers have annual license agreements with the District. The interim land use of farming row crops and grass hay provides for the suppression of undesirable vegetation on the landscape that has the potential to be problematic for future restoration and development, sustains the farming culture of Kane County and provides an important revenue source for the District. The District has the responsibility of implementing best management practices and sound stewardship on all its holdings, including farmland.

Many institutional and public land owners have adopted conservation farming strategies to protect the current and long-term ecological health of their land and have enlisted a dedicated team member to implement these strategies. With the addition of a dedicated Agricultural Coordinator on staff at the District, efforts have been made to revise the current Farm License Agreement with contemporary agricultural practices and refreshed license language. This includes pesticide restrictions and implementing no-till and conservation tillage conditions to the Farm License Agreement.

The Policy recommended shall govern the stewardship and licensing of agricultural lands, reflect a commitment to agricultural practices based on regenerative agriculture goals, soil health principals, conservation farming concepts, and provide for the history of this framework. The District will be a leading example and strong partner to other conservation organizations moving forward.

***DISCUSSION:** Commissioner Roth asked about the “good standing” qualification. Dir. Chess responded that good standing refers to paying license fees on time and following all the approved guidelines and procedures implemented in the agreement. Dir. Chess explained that each year the District utilizes the USDA productivity index to determine the rental rate. There were discussions regarding hay fields. President Kious asked about new additions to the policy. Dir. Chess responded that the only change to past procedures would be within the lottery system, to be a Kane County resident. Commissioner Bates asked about the differences of farm rates prior to the District purchasing the land. Dir. Chess responded that conversations with farmers that have been farming leased land vary. Some farmers were paying a much higher rate while other did not pay any rates.*

Commissioner Tepe asked about the revenues generated. Dir. Chess responded that the District receives just over \$1.4M per year. The farm program is the second highest revenue source for the District. There was discussion regarding increasing the farm rent. CFO Petschke explained that the District utilized the same type of bonds to acquire the farm lands as the Ice Arena building. There are restrictions on how much the District can gain as revenues. Currently the District has met the cap of allowable revenue until these bonds are retired in 2026, the rent rates can then be reviewed and adjusted. Commissioner Bates asked about the lottery and

additional incentives for farmers to utilize regenerative practices. Dir. Chess noted that the District does assist farmers who want to start regenerative farming, however there are no incentives within the lottery for that specifically.

Agricultural Coordinator – Presentation

Dir. Chess introduced the District's Agricultural Coordinator Michelle Blackburn, noting she oversees the farm program. Blackburn provided a PowerPoint presentation covering soil health, nutrient management and different kinds of conservative practices permitted. The District has implemented fees into the license agreement to cover costs for soil health testing. This data is shared with the farmers to assist in best practices as well as monitor the soil health.

DISCUSSION: Commissioner Bates asked about the 2,4-D herbicide used. Blackburn responded that this particular herbicide is not restricted at this time and explained the level of residual. Commissioner Kenyon explained that the 2,4-D was utilized for larger weed control. Commissioners discussed the different types of herbicides and pesticides that have been brought forth in legislation to restrict use. Commissioner Bates asked about a farmer who dedicated the six years for organic certification and land that is purchased with grant funds that has a time limit to restore. Dir. Chess stated that the different acquisitions that have been purchased through grants were specifically documented for this purpose, knowing that restoration is required within a limited time frame. The goal is not to push farmers out, the District has had open communication with all farmers. Commissioner Gumz asked about good quality hay and the birds. Dir. Chess noted that the District has a cutting date restriction because of grassland nesting birds. The District prioritizes bird conservation rather than hay production. Blackburn noted that the season that was decided is best for bird population and farmers can still sell the hay.

Exec. Dir. Haberthur explained the season chosen for hay is a compromise, because protecting the bird population is the District's mission. The quality hay used for horse feed is being missed, however the farmers understand that leasing the land and producing the hay in the District's farming program is not geared for hay revenues. The District does not want to create an ecological trap for birds, staff would rather not have hay at all if it were detrimental.

There was discussion regarding transitioning to organic farming and encouraging farmers with a permanent reduced rate. Dir. Chess noted that for the first 3 years, farmers do have a reduced rate for the startup timeframe. Dir. Chess noted that the policy being presented is the first of its kind and changes will mostly likely occur after the first year.

RESULT: **MOVED FORWARD BY ROLL CALL VOTE**
TO: Forest Preserve District Executive Committee
MOVER: Michael Kenyon
SECONDER: Mavis Bates
AYE: Mavis Bates, Ron Ford, Michelle Gumz, Michael Kenyon, Anita Lewis, Cheryl Strathmann, and Vern Tepe
ABSENT: Michael Linder

VII. Closed Session to Discuss Land Acquisition, License Agreements, Potential Litigation and Personnel

None.

VIII. Communications

Community Affairs Dir. Metanchuk commented on the social media coverage of the North American Badger footage on the District's Facebook page. She stated that the public loved it. Campground online reservations will be up and running ready to book on April 1, 2024. Dir. Metanchuk promoted the Earth Day tree planting event on Saturday April 20th, 2024 and the

Annual Native Plant sale on Saturday April 27, 2024. Summer camps are available for registration.

Commissioner Kenyon asked about the rain barrels. Dir. Metanchuk responded that the District partners with The Conservation Foundation (TCF), they sell rain barrels annually and distribute them at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve.

There was brief discussion regarding a need for an increase of crossroad bridges for both people and wildlife.

Commissioner Kenyon stated that the Forest Preserve Foundation will be hosting a golf outing this summer, more information to come.

IX. Chairman's Comments

None.

X. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:38AM

RESULT:	APPROVED BY VOICE VOTE
MOVER:	Michael Kenyon
SECONDER:	Michelle Gumz
AYE:	Mavis Bates, Ron Ford, Michelle Gumz, Michael Kenyon, Anita Lewis, Cheryl Strathmann, and Vern Tepe
ABSENT:	Michael Linder

Cherryl Strathmann, Chair
Forest Preserve District Planning and Utilization Committee
Forest Preserve District of Kane County

Respectfully Submitted,

Gabriella Figliozzi

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Recording Secretary