

Dickinson County Conservation Board meeting minutes

Dickinson County Nature Center, Okoboji

5 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 14, 2019

Chair: Eric Stoll

Vice chair: Steve Anderson

Board members: Kathy Kleen, Willia Mueske, Joan Gronstal

Employees: Lee Sorenson, Kiley Roth

Board of Supervisors: Steve Clark

Public: Phyllis and Jim Currell, Steve and Karen Sabasta, John and Carol Huigens, Lois Clark, Bill Maas, Susan Dimezza, Teresa Herold

Call to order at 5:01 p.m.

Agenda approval: Kleen motion, Mueske second. Approved.

Public comment: Dimezza, later in the meeting, asked about the Audubon Sanctuary. Sorenson said how the Audubon Sanctuary has been in plans with the Spirit Lake Middle School and will be managed once again solely by the conservation board. Sorenson has talked to local landowner Harlan Christenson about mowing the area.

Consent agenda: Mueske motion, Gronstal second. Approved.

- Approval of past month's minutes
- Recycle report
- Environmental education report
- Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County minutes

Dickinson County Conservation Board areas

-253rd Avenue Right-of-Way planting:

-The Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management program has been sprayed and replanted to natives on the east side of 253rd Avenue, between the road and bike trail. This area is county right-of-way, and the bike trail easement is still being mowed by the conservation board.

Maas, mayor of Orleans, said that landowners are upset about the look and lack of information about the planting.

Native plantings take about three years to establish. Stoll said, "The first year is the most difficult aesthetically." Maas said that looks is part of it. Prairie grasses were planted by a local cemetery, and he said even after five years it still doesn't look like people want it to.

Huigens said the landowners would like it to be returned to a grass, park-like area as opposed to natives. He said the original donor of the land did not intend it to be like it is now. He also brought up concerns about snow build-up, coyotes, rodents, standing water and mosquitoes. He said the landowners are researching the intent of the donor's easement. A petition has not been started, but if need be, the landowners will start a petition. "We want it considered to be replaced and repaired back to what it was." The written concerns were provided to the board members.

Anderson said the native plantings is not in the easement, it is in the county right-of-way. The conservation board should never have been mowing the area anyway. The plantings were not just to decrease mowing cost but to assist in water quality. Established prairie areas and rain gardens assist in water quality as water drains. Water quality increases as water quantity slows and goes through natural filters. This could be handed to secondary roads, as it should be, and they can mow it or not mowed. "We were mowing it as a courtesy. That is not our job. We're trying to do what's best for the environment and wildlife." He added that he has seen coyotes in the middle of Milford, and that it has nothing to do with prairie plantings. The coyote population is high right now.

"If you don't want it there, we can back ourselves out," Anderson said.

Phyllis Currell asked who to talk to next and was directed to the county.

The conservation board will continue mowing the bike trail right-of-way.

Maas said there was no communication between the city of Orleans and the county, and he started getting phone calls as the mayor about the spraying and replanting. The city has had similar issues in other areas of the city as well. He suggested keeping it as a grassy area is the landowners take care of it. Anderson said that is not this board's decision. It would need to be taken to the board of supervisors.

Sorenson has talked to the county engineer, and the city of Orleans has an agreement to maintain snow removal there. He suggested that the city could also make another agreement to have the city of Orleans take care of that right-of-way.

Anderson suggested having the county engineer mark the road right-of-way to see where the boundary is. Maas suggested talking to the county engineer and go from there to see if an agreement can be reached with the county. The IRVM program is run through the conservation board in partnership with the county engineer.

The county engineer was happy that the county right-of-way. He wrote in an e-mail that native plantings reduce snow drifting and should have more native plantings.

Maas said the biggest problem on the lake roads is people who take their snow from one side of the road to the other side.

Sorenson said he would be willing to talk to the county engineer, but Maas said he would be willing to talk to the county engineer first. Clark suggested if the issue is not resolved then it could be taken to the Dickinson County Board of Supervisors.

-Brooks Golf Course RFP status: The dates from the original discussion have changed. The RFP was issued to 11 entities that requested it. A facility tour and conference will be combined into one day, Aug. 19. Companies also have an option to have a private tour on another day. The deadline to submit notice of intent is Sept. 6. Proposals are due Oct. 4.

Sorenson has been contacted with requests for financials, but he only has one year available. A request for former financials was submitted by Sorenson but was denied.

A bond issue was included to cover in case of bankruptcy.

Some companies have also inquired about equipment. It will be offered to the management company at wholesale, otherwise it could lease equipment and the equipment will be sold at auction.

-REAP grant approval: A REAP grant application will be submitted for the Okoboji wetland and requests \$2,500 for appraisal on the area. There is another offer on the table for the property. Gronstal motion to approve \$2,500 and submit application, Anderson second. Approved.

-Okoboji Commons motel road: The conservation board was granted an easement, and then it granted an easement to East Oaks. It does have ingress and egress but there is nothing in the easement about maintaining the gravel roadway.

-Kenue Park lodge update: Poppema-Sikma has built footings for the new lodge and is almost ready to pour the concrete flooring.

-Superior Marsh: A NAWCA grant was approved to regenerate Superior Marsh. Work will begin this fall to make this into a functioning wetland again.

Operations and facility update

-The Horseshoe Bend shop septic is still not working. The area has been dug up to see what the water is doing.

Approval of expenses: Anderson motion, Kleen motion. Approved.

General discussion

-A grand opening date has been set for Pollinator Paradise for Saturday, Nov. 16.

-Volunteers want more volunteers for the new Pollinator Paradise addition.

-Bee & Butterfly Festival is 4-8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 6.

-Anderson said the sanitary district project along Nature Center Road has gone to bid.

Adjournment: Anderson motion, Mueske second. Approved. Adjourn at 6:26 p.m.