

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
November 20, 2024, 5:30PM**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President Castor

Board members present: Treasurer Allen, President Castor, 1st Vice President Reed, and 2nd Vice President Schneller
Board Members absent: Secretary Sams

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Minutes of the October 16, 2024, meeting. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report from October 2024; disbursements from October 24, 2024, through November 13, 2024, in the amount of \$257,987.38; and additions in the amount of \$53,145.86, as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

IV. COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:

1. No comments were made by the audience.
2. Michael Wilmore, staff representative from AFCSME introduced himself and asked that the Board recognize the special group of employees working for the District. He said they show care and kindness to the citizens of Macon County and their dedication to Natural Resources and especially in their caring for the children of Macon County. They are impressive and he hopes the Board recognizes them for how great they are.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

1. No Old Business was addressed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Approval of Health Insurance Premium

Shannon Garrett, Area Vice President of Gallagher Benefits Services attended the meeting to lend to the discussion of the annual health care premium approval. Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that the District received the annual health insurance renewal notice in late October. Brokers from Gallagher searched for the best plans prioritizing both finances and benefits for the District and its employees. Plans from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Health Alliance, and United Healthcare as well as the Chamber of Commerce combined large group plan with Health Alliance were considered. The Health Alliance denied the District access to the Chamber's Tier 1 plan due to employee health issues. Blue Cross Blue Shield rates were more competitive than plans from United Healthcare and Health Alliance.

A change for 2025 is that the District has moved to composite rates. Previously age bands were used, meaning costs increased with every year older an employee/dependent was. With composite rates, every employee is charged the same rate. This rate is based on an analysis of District staff by insurance carriers. Categories for these rates are Employee, Employee + Spouse, Employee + children, and Employee

+ Family. District Admin valued continuing to offer employees a plan covered by the District at 100% while maintaining good benefits.

The District has a small group plan due to employee numbers, so there is little negotiation. Blue Cross forced changes to the Renewal of the District's current plan, lessening the richness of the benefits. For instance, there is a slight increase in the deductibles, out-of-pocket maxes, and primary and specialist copays. Although benefits were reduced, the cost was raised 14.21%, creating an annual increase of \$3,070.08 to employees and \$39,759.84 to the District.

A plan was created to offer a lower tier plan maintaining 100% coverage for employees and 90% coverage for dependents, while providing individual employees the choice to "buy up" to the Renewal plan covered at 90% for employees and 80% for dependents. These offerings would create an annual difference between (-) \$6,787.44 (savings) and \$5331.72 (increase) to the District and an increase between \$524.04 and \$37,498.20 annually to employees, which is split among all employees. The high increase to employees would be if everyone elected to buy up to the higher tier plan. Additionally, staff costs will be borne more by employees with dependents. Every employee still has the option to be covered for free if they choose.

The Board must approve an insurance policy for the plan year beginning January 1, 2025. Besser noted that there was an error in the memo, and the year was intended to read 2026.

Trustee Schneller asked if there were any changes to benefits. Besser responded that there were forced increases and that both plans had changes. The cheaper plan with higher deductible had cheaper costs in many cases to copays. Trustee Reed asked if employees had already been informed as she was concerned about the amount of information. Besser responded that employees would be given the information in a pared down one-pager that pertained to their options. Besser commented that the plan, although comparatively less benefits than the previous year, was still a great plan with good benefits and the amount covered by the District exceeded most workplaces that were known to the brokers. Trustee Reed asked if Shannon Garrett had anything to add, and she said only that the District did everything they could to keep the best benefits at the lowest costs for both employees and the District.

Trustee Scheller moved to approve the Health Insurance Premium as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE". Motion carried.

2. Approval of Tax Levy Ordinance

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed the proposed Tax Levy and Tax Levy Ordinance for 2024. Besser discussed that the Tax Levy is a function of taxable dollars available in the area and historical requests by the District. The District can only request up to 5% more than what it requested the previous year without a Truth in Taxation process involving public notices and hearings before possible approval. The amount of available tax dollars is related to the Consumer Price Index as well, although the 5% annual limit is low enough that it is not often a big concern.

Besser discussed that most of the funds are required payments, and the majority are driven by payroll. The process for designing the levy begins with estimating the funds required by the minor funds, then requesting the leftover available amount in the General Corporate Fund with the budget parameters. The District is not in position to not need all available funds for its operation at this time, so the funds requested are typically maxed up to the 5% with a little margin.

Besser discussed the process for calculating each Fund. First, the beginning balance is taken from the audit. The expenses and income for the current fiscal year ending

March 2025 were calculated for each Fund to find its ending balance. This gives an estimated starting fund balance for 2025-26, the fiscal year supported by this levy. Expenses and income from that year are then estimated to give an amount, and the levy request is made so that the estimated ending balance is within the Fund Balance Policy designations. These funds all designate that 25% of that year’s funds should be left in the fund at the end of the year as a contingency.

Social Security, IMRF, and Unemployment all utilize multipliers based on payroll. That means as payroll increases, so do obligations to these funds. Worker’s Compensation and Liability are mostly driven by insurance quotes outside of District control, although the Liability Fund also includes applicable safety-related expenses. The Audit is used to pay for the annual audit. Once these are calculated, the remaining monies within the 5% limit can be utilized in the General Corporate Fund. The following amounts were calculated:

FY2026 2024 Levy		
EAV (EST. on 11/15/2024)	\$2,205,863,800.00	
Max Request Gen Corp (0.1% of EAV)	\$2,205,863.80	
GENERAL CORPORATE FUND	90.7%	\$ 2,008,000.00
IMRF	0.0%	\$ 500.00
SOCIAL SECURITY & MEDICARE	3.6%	\$ 80,000.00
LIABILITY INSURANCE FUND	4.7%	\$ 104,500.00
WORKERS COMP FUND	0.3%	\$ 7,000.00
UNEMPLOYMENT FUND	0.0%	\$ 500.00
AUDIT FUND	0.6%	\$ 14,000.00
TOTAL LEVY ALL FUNDS REQUESTED	100.0%	\$ 2,214,500.00
% change from prior year	4.98%	

This budget is just for Tax Levy funds. The Ordinance simply presents this information in written form. The overall District Budget includes other revenue sources including programming, rentals, camping, Corporate Replacement Taxes, Farming Rental Revenue, and Grants.

Staff requests that the Board approve the Tax Levy Ordinance as presented.

Trustee Reed moved to approve the Tax Levy Ordinance as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; Trustee Castor; “AYE”; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

3. Approval of the Holiday Schedule for 2026

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser presented the 2026 Holiday Schedule with no changes from 2025. Staff requests approval of this schedule.

Trustee Schneller moved to approve the Holiday Schedule 2026 as presented. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; Trustee Castor; “AYE”; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, “AYE”. Motion carried.

4. Appointment of the Delegate(s) to the IAPD Annual Business Meeting.

Executive Director Culp explained that IAPD has a meeting at the annual conferences and presented the annual recommendation to appoint delegates to the IAPD Annual Business Meeting. Executive Director Culp recommends he be named as primary delegate with Trustee Schneller as a secondary. IAPD is the legislative group that the District belongs to in Illinois.

Trustee Allen moved to approve Jerry Culp as primary delegate and Karen Schneller as secondary delegate to the IAPD Annual Business Meeting as presented. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

5. Christy-Foltz Payment Request #2

Executive Director Culp discussed the second payment request for Christy-Foltz. The Macon County Conservation District applied for and received an Illinois Park and Recreation Facility Construction grant to construct an Indoor/Outdoor classroom at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Board of Trustees approved a contract with Christy-Foltz in the amount of \$750,578 to complete the interior portion of the project. Christy-Foltz has completed the demolition and completed all the interior wall framing and rough in work for the plumbing and electrical work. Christy-Foltz has submitted their Second payout request for this project in the amount of \$106,200 for work completed.

Funds in the amount of \$1,161,000 are budgeted in the Capital Fund Account 6800-700 for this Project. There are sufficient funds in the Capital Account 6800-700 for this expense totaling \$106,200. Staff asked for a motion to approve Payout Request #1 from Christy-Foltz in the amount of \$106,200 for expenses related to the Indoor/Outdoor PARC Grant PARC-23-127.

Trustee Scheller moved to approve the Christy-Foltz Payment Request #2 as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE". Motion carried.

6. 2024 Summer Camp Report

Program Services Director Alysia Callison was sick, so Director of Finance and HR Nicky Besser discussed the 2024 Summer Camp Report. The Macon County Conservation District offers five different educational camps: Earth Adventures (6-12yrs), Adventure Club (6-12 yrs), History Camp (6-12 yrs), X-Treme Camp (10-15 yrs), and Mini Camp (1-5 yrs).

Earth Adventures was open to children ages 6-12 and met five days a week from 9am-4pm. Before and After Care was again offered this year. This option allowed parents to drop their kids off as early as 7am and pick them up as late as 6pm. The price to enroll in Earth Adventures is \$140 per child. Families with multiple children received a \$15 discount for each additional child. Again, this year, the Decatur Public School District 61 offered scholarships to their students so they could participate in community programs over the summer. Last year, DPS covered 100% of student camp expenses. This year, they covered up to \$300 per student, and any further costs were at the family's expense.

Other clubs that met once a week included Adventure Club, History Camp, X-treme Camp, and Mini Camps. Together, Summer Camps netted a profit of \$4,648. Details about each camp can be found in the 2024 Summer Camp Report provided in the Board Packet.

The recommendations for 2025 include increasing the cost of Earth Adventures to \$150, a \$10 increase over the last two years. With wages and the cost of goods continuing to rise, this is a small increase that can help to offset some of those costs. If enrollments match this year, it will result in roughly \$3200 in additional revenue. Staff recommends keeping enrollment costs for the other camps the same in 2025, and revisiting for 2026.

Another recommendation is to have one seasonal camp counselor with more responsibility than the others that could handle some of the administrative tasks associated with Earth Adventures. Parent feedback wanting more communication before and after camp, and current staffing provides little time for administrative tasks

outside of their camp duties. This counselor would assist Brock with tasks like weekly parent emails and phone calls, contacting parents about schedule changes, and holding the other camp staff accountable as needed. Because this position would have more responsibilities, it is recommended they are paid \$2 more than the other counselors. For a 40-hour work week over 10 weeks, this would add approximately \$800 in wage-related expenses over the current year.

Staff recommends accepting the 2024 Summer Camp Report as presented, including approving the recommendations.

Trustee Reed noted that she was in favor of the increase in fees, but that due to negotiations no salaries changes should be approved at this time.

Trustee Scheller moved to approve the 2024 Summer Camp Report as presented and to approve the recommended increase to Earth Adventures camp admission. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

7. 2024-25 Burn Recommendations

Natural Resources Manager Mitch Lovgren presented the 2024-25 Burn recommendations for the District. He noted that he arrived after burn season and that the previous Manager, Ethan Snively, did a great job. He discussed maps, which are important because some of these get burned every year. The goal is to do a burn rotation so that we are adequately managing all property. The District is falling short in some areas, especially in edges of properties and properties near residences due to smoke. This year the District is presenting an aggressive schedule including areas that haven't burned as much typically. Macon County Conservation District burned 1400 acres in the 2023/2024 burn season across 7 conservation areas as well as assisting on burns with the City of Decatur, Decatur Park District, and Decatur Sanitary District. This was an exceptional burn season and set back a lot of the invasive woody species. Continued interagency collaboration has also allowed Staff to burn areas adjacent to District sites, setting back additional invasives species and reducing seed sources.

Staff recommends that the Macon County Conservation District should attempt to burn 1026 acres out of 3,870 total acres. The long-term goal is implementing a burn rotation. As Staff push into areas in the outer boundaries of the District, smoke management becomes a major issue due to proximity of houses. Staff will also continue to keep up fire maintenance on areas already in a burn rotation.

Staff will make a shift away from the core areas of Rock Springs for this upcoming burn season to target several large tracts with no recent fire history. These acres are high priority and come with an elevated risk due to the proximity to houses. The two small prairie burns are new and ongoing restorations being burned to promote natives.

At Sand Creek Staff are trying to push out to our outer boundaries with prescribed fire. At Fort Daniel conservation area we are continuing to try and push fire into the new prairie restorations on the Seay property acquisition. At Friends Creek Staff are continuing to burn frequently on the new prairie restorations on the Rannebarger acquisition on the North end of the property. 10 Acres where the building sat is in the process of being restored and has already been chemically treated and burnt as of this report. The other units are mixed prairie and woods due for maintenance burns to set back invasives and woody encroachment. Staff will be doing maintenance burns on Bois du Sangamon nature preserve and the Floyd Property addition as well as the south half of Willow Branch II.

Staff recommends the Board approve the Burn Recommendations for 2024-2025 as presented.

Trustee Reed asked if there was a burn schedule. Lovgren commented no, and that they want to do more of a 2–3-year rotation. Although some people want to burn over

and over, this is not always the most advantageous as there are even species that thrive in fire. Reed wanted to know how success can be measured if there are no goals. Lovgren noted that it's not necessarily something you can specifically plan for as the grounds need to be assessed every single season. Operations Director Phil Julius commented that burning new areas is a priority this year and this should be an advantage as there are some areas that have not been touched in years. Lovgren commented that access to these lands is partially available due to interagency cooperation.

Trustee Allen moved to approve the Burn Recommendations for 2024-2025 as presented, including approving the recommendations. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

8. Staff Reports

Jerry Culp, Executive Director:

Executive Director Culp discussed the PARC Grant Rock Spring Nature Center Outdoor Classroom. Progress on the project is being made. Some wet weather slowed outside progress a little, but a large portion of the earthwork has been completed, the main walkway is complete and foundations for the retaining walls and seating have been poured. The Interior work is moving quickly, the demolition is complete, framing for the walls is complete, drywall is almost complete. Operations staff have been great in helping the contractors with different things to keep the project running smoothly. The contractor is working on door installation finalizing the electrical and plumbing rough in. Staff have regular meetings with the contractors to review progress and answer questions. The District is currently working with consultants on the topography and wetland concept design for the pothole prairie and seasonal wetlands for the OSLAD Grant Fort Daniel Pothole Prairie and Season Wetland Restoration. The archeological study has been completed and submitted to the IDNR for review. As soon as the review is complete staff will begin grant implementation. Staff have started working on the Rock Springs Ramble 5K run/walk. The event is scheduled for May 17th, 2025. The Rock Springs Scovill Park West Bike Trail Connection (RTP Grant) was approved by IDNR. Staff will be working with the IDNR on contracts for this grant and begin preparation for construction of the trail. The project is estimated at \$218,000 and the grant will match 80% or a total estimated cost to the District is \$43,600. As a member of the Joint Legislative Committee through IAPD, staff attended the quarterly meeting of the committee to review existing legislative accomplishments and begin to review proposed legislation. Staff also attended a Legal Symposium hosted by IAPD, where several speakers reviewed government management, changes in federal overtime rules, hiring practices, FOIA requests and new regulations on social media. The District is continuing to work through the collective bargaining process with the newly formed American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees Union. Negotiations continue as Staff work with the union and its representatives on an agreement. Staff will keep the board informed as progress is made. Staff presented a District project update to the Decatur Area Audubon. The annual board tour was on October 17th, it's a great opportunity for board members from the District and the Foundation to learn more about the District Properties and current projects the staff are working on. Staff reviewed the latest changes and options for employee benefits. The District held its quarterly staff meeting on November 1st that included department updates and a safety training video on winter driving.

Phil Julius, Director of Operations

Operations Director Phil Julius informed the Board that The Operations department has been transitioning from the busy summer activities to the fall leaf drop and colder temperatures. Many of the locations including the Friends Creek campground and

Griswold pavilion have had the water shut off and lines drained in preparation for freezing temperatures. Equipment such as canoes and wagons have been put away for the winter. Most locations have started mulching leaves in public areas and doing a final turf mowing. The Unit Supervisors and Julius have started looking into items for the 2025 budget including getting prices on material, equipment replacement and general maintenance needs for the coming year. Along with the budget comes planning for next year to determine what projects and maintenance needs the district has and prioritize how they will be done. Natural Resources and other operations staff have been working on putting firebreaks in wooded areas that have not had fire in them since the district has owned the property. These areas will add to the acres Staff are currently managing for invasive and exotic species control. Fall burning would be preferred but with recent rainfall the burning could be pushed to next spring. Several locations have also had bush honeysuckle sprayed with a mist blower, spraying herbicide to kill the bush honeysuckle. There is a small window of time in the fall when most plant species have gone dormant but bush honeysuckle is still actively growing. This is the time staff can use the mist blowers to spray the honey suckle to kill it but no other plants around it. Julius continued to work with the contractors on the new outdoor classroom. He recently worked with a local vendor to get pricing for furniture for the outdoor classroom and other small details have been addressed as well. The annual archery deer herd management hunt has begun. Hunters in this program can hunt deer at Friends Creek, Fort Daniel, Sand Creek and Rock Springs. The hunt runs from November 1st to December 26th, 2024. More details can be found in his staff report. Mitch Lovgren added that a doe and buck were harvested at Sand Creek, and a turkey was harvested at Rock Springs as well as an 8-point buck. Both of these hunters were veterans, so these are great successes. A staff member, Adam Reef, attended a large Equipment Expo in Louisville, KY which was worthwhile and something hopefully more staff can attend in the future. Mitch Lovgren, Jerry Culp and Phil Julius met with Mack Thompson to discuss Invasive Species removal on MCCD property. From that meeting it was agreed that staff would look into a grant to possibly hire a Volunteer Recruiter to find volunteers and train them on Invasive species removal. The Volunteer Recruiter could then work with the Natural Resource staff to have volunteers help in the field where needed to remove invasive plants.

Trustee Schneller commented that Decatur is a big volunteer town so hopefully it should be easy to find support.

Alysia Callison, Director of Programs

Director of Programs Alysia Callison was ill so her report was given by Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and Human Resources. Staff hosted several school groups for fall field trips, including Taylorville Junior High, Johns Hill Magnet School, Montessori Academy for Peace, Argenta-Oreana Grade School, and a homeschool co-op. Three of those groups were able to visit thanks to bus transportation grants from the Decatur Area Audubon Society. Staff also visited several schools for programs, including Eisenhower High School, Muffley Elementary School, and Warrensburg-Latham Elementary School. Homestead Prairie Farm and Bethel Schoolhouse had their final open houses of the season. Homestead Prairie Farm is open every weekend from 1-4pm in June – October, and 445 people joined Staff for tours over that time. Bethel is open on the first Saturday of the month from June – October, from 1-4pm, and 70 people toured this season. A weekend staffer proposed and led a Bigfoot Hike program on October 5. The Program started out with a maximum enrollment of 30, but demand was so high that we opened it up to 50. If possible, enrollment could have been higher. Other well-attended weekend programs included a collaboration with Professor Claire Taylor of Millikin University for *Five Sacred Trees: Music and Mythology*, and *Nature: Myths and Legends*. Fall Harvest Festival was held on Saturday, October 12.

from 1-4pm at Rock Springs, the event attracted roughly 400 people. Most activities were free, including wagon rides, homestead tours, children's crafts, s'mores, and more. Archery, canoeing, and pumpkin painting had nominal fees, and we received over \$800 in revenue from those activities. Treat Trail was held the following weekend on Saturday, October 19 from 6:30-8:30pm. With stations set up along the bike trail and into the pine forest, people were invited to walk the trail, collect treats, and learn something nature-related along the way. Staff were blown away by the response to this event, as it was the first time trying something like this (although there used to be a Halloween trail event 20 years ago or so). 280 people signed up to collect treats, and once parents and other folks that weren't required to sign up were accounted, it was estimated that roughly 500 people were in attendance. Each station was sponsored by a community organization or business, so about \$2,150 was made on this event. Staff was very excited at how well the event went (and all the great feedback we received) so they plan to do it again next year. Staff was approached by the Decatur Area Audubon Society about adding an internship opportunity at Rock Springs that would be funded by Audubon. This position would support District work as well as Audubon, and Audubon will reimburse the District for their wages. Staff are grateful for the opportunity and for Audubon's continued support. Other notable activities: Jenny Garver led a weekly volunteer hike series; staff volunteered one evening at Boo at the Zoo; Callison met with an employee from Macon County Soil and Water Conservation District to see how the District can collaborate; Callison did a radio interview with the WTIM Morning Show; Beth Lane led October Mini Camps; and staff had their annual Program Planning meeting.

Ashton Nunn, Marketing Specialist (not present)

Marketing Specialist Ashton Nunn was not present, so Director of Finance and HR Nicky Besser also gave this report. Nunn reported that Engagement and Follows are still going well on social channels. Nunn spent a lot of October planning for next year as well as attending events including the Chamber of Commerce Luncheon, the MRI Fair, the Millikin Wellness Fair, the MCCD Board Tour, the Quarterly IACD Meeting, and the Quarterly Volunteer Meeting. She also assisted with the Fall Harvest Festival and Treat Trail Events. A highlight of the month was featuring the Timber Frame Pavilion at Friend's Creek built by Operations Staff led by Andy Murphy. This was featured by WAND and NowDecatur and reached over 6,800 people on Facebook and WAND also featured the installation of the District's Peace Pole.

Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and HR

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that she worked on the Tax Levy Ordinance, assisted with the Budgeting Process as it continues, attended meetings and provided data for the collective bargaining negotiations, coordinated District volunteers at Boo at the Zoo and Trees on the Tees, facilitated the Health Care Renewal Plan via Gallagher Insurance, and prepared the 2026 Holiday Schedule.

Other Business

a. No New Business.

VII. COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:

Trustee Reed would like to thank all the guests who attended the meeting, and the Board all agreed that they appreciate the staff and all the hard work that they are doing.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Allen MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:37 p.m. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed "AYE". Motion carried.

President

Secretary