

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
September 18, 2024, 5:30PM**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by President Castor

Board members present: Treasurer Allen, President Castor, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Reed, Secretary Sams, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Schneller  
Board Members absent: None

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Minutes of the May 15, 2024, and August 21, 2024, Regular Public Meetings. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report from August 2024, disbursements from September 2024 in the amount of \$188,027.75 and September 2024 additions to disbursements in the amount of \$63,103.53 for a total of \$251,131.28 as presented. Trustee Sams SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:**

1. Mack Thompson 5294 N Cruise Rd. which is between Spitler Woods and Fort Daniel
  - a. Thompson is a Master Naturalist and MCCD Volunteer. He wants the Board to adopt a policy to eradicate invasive species over 7 years. He said people know that different species can strangle the forest. If you let it go too long, you won't recognize the forest. We don't know when, but it will happen. It's not unreasonable to assume that natural lands could be unrecognizable in a lifetime. The District owns a large portion of land, some are buildings and lots, and some are scattered. A large percentage is prairie where controlled burns are doing a great job. The rest are woodlands. Some are in good shape. He decided to discuss Ft. Daniel in particular, which he said was about 600 acres, and about 170 acres is wooded and maybe 60 acres is not invasive. Last year he spent about 70hrs removing invasive species. He estimates it would take 2,600-man hours to eradicate this from Ft. Daniel, and 51,000 hours to clean the entire district. These are likely overstated because his ways of doing this were not efficient and a lot of things could be done to reduce these hours. Assuming a rate of \$25 an hour, it would cost \$1.2 million. That is absolutely overstated because of the efficiencies as well as volunteers which could possibly reduce this burden by half, making it \$637,000 over 7 years or \$91,000 a year. After that it's estimated \$34,000 a year to maintain. He was hopeful he convinced the Board this is a worthwhile cause and thanked them for this opportunity to speak.
  - b. Executive Director Culp stated the District will look at the recommendations and wants to discuss the process that he used. Next steps are that Executive Director Culp will schedule a meeting with

Mr. Thompson, create a recommendation, and bring it back to the Board.

## **V. OLD BUSINESS:**

### **1. OSLAD Grant Application Update**

Executive Director Culp stated that last month an OSLAD grant was approved for a greenway to expand Ft. Daniel toward Spitler Woods for \$600,000. As he was applying for the grant, he was going to use the donated land as a match, and the grant match is 100%. He found from the administrator that the donation of land could not be banked and applied later because it was already a 100% match. So, Culp decided to include development in the grant and added the cost of the bike trail between the East and West section to connect to Ft. Daniel. This will increase the amount to approximately \$831,700. It is not a financial impact as the District will get a 100% match.

Trustee Schneller spoke in support of the project for its great impact to the community and it's a good strategy as the amount of funds available will soon decrease. Culp mentioned it was \$56 million available and next year it will be \$26 million and then the next year it will be \$13 million. He also stated that the match percentage will also likely decrease, so the District should take advantage.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS:**

### **1. Audit Report Presentation and Payment Approval**

Cathy Mansur, CPA from May, Cocagne and King, P.C. discussed the details of the 2023-24 audit. Mansur discussed that the format and information is like the audits from previous years conceptually with just updated information, and footnotes give a verbal description of what the numbers mean. The first few pages describe what auditor and District responsibilities are when working with an independent auditor. Because District financials are done as a modified cash basis, that information is disclosed.

There were not many adjusting entries, so the March financials were mostly correct. There were a few updates. In government accounting, there are 2 statements: Fund statements and government-wide statement. Fund Statements show individual numbers, and government-wide also includes any land, depreciation, and debts among other information together. Most of the District net position is unrestricted so it can be used for operating. Restrictions include property tax, and donor instructions. Government accounting is different than typical accounting in that expenses are broken down into buckets: general, conservation, recreational, and then charges for services or operation grants that provide income. The negative number is the difference before adding property revenue, taxes, etc., which are then listed below. The Final change in net income was \$503,914 including depreciation but taking out things used to purchase large items. After are fund statements – both major and minor. The Major is general and capital, and minor are all other funds. These balances are then reconciled with the fund balance. On p7 it shows the basic revenues less expenses, which shows generally where the majority of funds come from including taxes, grants (less \$150,000 which was late and received the following fiscal year), and then larger expenses like acquisition are shown. In the end, there was a net loss of \$273,251. This is one of the most straightforward pages. The information is there, but it is separated in this way per the format.

Disclosures included significant accounting procedures, assets, cash, investment policies, pension plan, the Macon County Conservation Foundation (which is a component unit of the District), and budget to actual statement per fund. No funds overspent the budget. There were no deficit fund balances, so that is good. The only one issue was the outstanding \$150,000 “loan” between the General Fund and Capital

Projects Fund because the payment was delayed, which was received in the next fiscal year.

Trustee Reed asked about a note on depreciated capital assets in one of the letters. Mansur responded by reviewing each note. The first note just says that there were no difficulties, there were a few adjusting entries, and then there was a management letter stating there were no issues with the accounting process. In the other letter, they disclosed some recommendations that are not deficiencies but things that could improve practices including payroll procedures mainly in reference to employee housing and the need to include that as a taxable benefit. Similarly, District vehicles should be taxed for personal use and added to their W2. Financial reporting should be done monthly to make sure there has not been any fraud as checks can be made fraudulently. As far as capital assets, the District needs to make sure that there is a capital inventory including updates and upgrades. This would include maintenance list and how old an item is and when it is up for maintenance.

Mansur also provided an invoice for approval in the amount of \$14,200.

Trustee Reed moved to approve the Audit Report Presentation and Payment as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE". Motion carried.

## **2. Approval of Annual Treasurer's Report**

Director of Finance and HR Nicky Besser presented the Annual Treasurer's report for approval. This report contains information that is also found in the audit, but describes certain things in more detail, such as listing all vendors paid over \$2,500 in a year. This report must be subscribed and sworn to by the Treasurer of the Board and filed with the office of the County Clerk within 6 months after the fiscal year end.

Trustee Sams MOVED to approve the Annual Treasurer's Report as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE", Trustee Sams, "AYE". Motion carried.

## **3. Approval to Move Funds from Contingency to Legal Fees**

Director of Finance and HR Besser presented a memo for approval to move \$20,000 from 9019-000 Contingencies to 5190-000 Legal Fees to cover the expense of labor negotiations. The Legal Fees budget is \$12,400 and expenses to date are \$18,113.75. This overage is due to the unforeseen costs of labor negotiations. The Contingencies budget is \$50,000 and there have been \$0.00 in Contingency expenses.

Trustee Reed asked if this was enough, and Director Culp said that this was an amount recommended by colleagues that had done labor negotiations, and we would have to come back if it was not sufficient.

Trustee Reed MOVED to approve moving \$20,000 from 9019-000 Contingencies to 5190-000 Legal Fees. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed; "AYE". Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

## **4. Approval to Extend Friend Creek Campground Season**

Director of Operations Phil Julius presented a memo for provide trustees with information to extend the camping season at Friends Creek campground and to make an adjustment to the daily camping fee for all sites during this extended period. Currently Friends Creek Campground closes on November 2, 2024, for the normal camping season. This is due to shutting off water to the campground, the comfort station, and the dump station. Staff would like to keep the campground open until December 29, 2024, to offer camping to hunters, travelers on I-72, and anyone else interested in camping with limited provisions. The only amenities the campground can offer will be electric

and a pit toilet due to colder weather conditions. With these limited amenities, staff recommends lowering the daily fee to \$20 for all campers.

Trustee Schneller asked if the campground attendant would still be there. Julius said no, but there is a staff with a residence close and the District has QR codes that can be used to easily pay and check in. Schneller said it did seem like a good benefit. Trustee Reed is asked if this is permission for just one year, or if it is longer-term. Julius stated that right now it is just for one year. Director Castor asked how it would be advertised. Julius stated it was on the searchable campground booking system and they could post on social media. Trustee Reed asked if there was more liability needed and Julius said not any more than in the regular campground. Trustee Schneller clarified that we needed to know if the liability insurance extends over those months. Finance and HR director Nicky Besser stated that hunters are already there, so the liability insurance should cover this, but it will be confirmed. Trustee Reed wanted to know if the District anticipated that the utility bill will increase, and Trustee Castor said likely the \$20 fee would meet that burden.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to Extend the Friend's Creek Campground season to December 29, 2024, and lower the daily fee to \$20 for all campers. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

## **5. Staff Reports**

### **Jerry Culp, Executive Director:**

Executive Director Culp discussed the OSLAD Grant Fort Daniel Pothole Prairie and Season Wetland Restoration. The District is currently working with consultants on the topography and wetland concept design for the pothole prairie and seasonal wetlands. The District has submitted the requested Archeological study to the IDNR and is waiting for response. In the interim, staff continues to work with the consultants to prepare the drawings and specifications for the proposed work. The District has complete preconstruction meetings with both contractors on the PARC Grant for the Rock Spring Nature Center Outdoor Classroom and is working on finalizing contracts and schedules. Christy-Foltz is scheduled to begin work on the interior at the end of September and 4MC is scheduled to begin work beginning part of October on the exterior work. Staff is preparing for the MCCF Prairie Pedal bike ride fundraiser, held on Sunday September 29th. Volunteers are still needed and welcome and sponsorships are up from last year. The District is in the process of completing an OSLAD grant application to extend the greenway from Fort Daniel Conservation Area towards Spitler Woods and the Mt Zion Bike Path. Staff is finalizing the grant will proceed with the application submittal. The application is due September 13th and notification of the grant is typically January-March. The District Continues to work on technology updates with IT Consultant Network Solutions. The District is currently testing a new wireless WiFi system called "Starlink" at Friends Creek to find a more reliable network access for the operations staff. The District is also working with Network Solutions on computer replacements to ensure staff are getting replacement computers that meet the requirements for the software they use. The District is continuing to work though the Illinois Labor Relations Board's collective bargaining process with the newly formed American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees Union (AFSCME). The District has had several meetings with the union representatives regarding the negotiations and will keep the board informed as progress is made. The IDNR continues to transition the grant process and implementation to an electronic format call "Amplifund". The training and webinars are held several times per month and staff continues to attend these trainings to better prepared for grant applications,

management, and implementation. In many trainings, Illinois is an outlier, so next month will be training for Illinois specifically.

Trustee Reed asked if Amplifund was a new system. Director Culp said it is not a new system, but the State is using it for more items, and it is being done piece by piece. For example, it used to be electronic submission and everything else is paper, but now they are moving toward more electronic submissions and reporting throughout the process.

### **Phil Julius, Director of Operations**

Operations staff helped with the Archaeology dig conducted at the Penhallogen farmstead. This was done to see if any artifacts could be found around the barn and sheds, before construction begins on the new plaza and parking lot. An old pipe wrench and baling wire were the only items found, so the project can move forward. The unfortunate thing is that a few things had to be torn up including some driveways, but it's good that nothing of significant value was found. The next step is to get a signed contract with the State of Illinois to get the grant funding. A new Polaris Ranger was purchased for Operations and will be used by the Natural Resources crew. These offroad utility vehicles are crucial to helping staff do maintenance work and land management in the field. The new skid steer for the natural resource crew has been ordered and should be delivered by the end of September. The trailer at Griswold has been moved out. This took longer than expected, but it is finally off the property. Now, a contractor can access the site to do the final cleanup after they are finished with the Rock Springs Hedge Row Project. This is one of the projects the Macon County Conservation Foundation will be funding. Julius is also working with the architect at the Penhallogen Property. Staff has also changed computers to iPads to make it much more efficient so it can be used in the field for real-time reporting. Details about other work done by Operations Staff is included in the written report.

Director Castor asked about construction at Fort Daniel. Julius stated that there is a piece of land adjacent to the property that has a retaining wall. There has been erosion in this area and if it is not maintained the District will eventually lose a significant portion of trail, so work is being done to prevent this.

### **Alysia Callison, Director of Programs**

Director of Programs Alysia Callison reported that August is a quieter month as camps end and school starts up again. This gives staff a good time to assess the programs and think about improvements for next year. Private programs were booked for groups like the Blue Mound and South Macon Public Libraries, a local Girl Scout troop, a local Boy Scout troop, a group of students from Millikin University, and Mid-IL Senior Services in Sullivan. Public programs were also well-attended, including "Intro to Foraging", a Van Trip to the Indianapolis Zoo with 15 attendees, a Van Trip to the Wheels O' Time Museum, and a history program entitled, "A Connecticut Yankee in Macon County". Two large special events were held in August: the 40th Annual Astronomy Jamboree and the Hummingbird Festival. There was great weather for both events, and Astro Jam had approximately 82 people in attendance, with roughly 150 people in attendance for the Hummingbird Festival. This year's Hummingbird Festival was a record year, with nearly 60 birds captured. This year a volunteer constructed "dummy cages" around the hummingbird feeders about a week before the festival to acclimate the birds to the cages, and Staff attributes the large number of captures to this strategy. Three birds had been previously banded and about 10 of the birds were captured multiple times that day. A volunteer workday was held in the native garden at the Nature Center, an archaeology workday was held at Homestead Prairie Farm, Callison led a volunteer hike leader training, and a group of volunteers helped label the newest edition of the Prairie Islander. Other goings-on included a quarterly all-staff meeting at Friends Creek with catering from Smack'n Tacos and fun games for staff,

and a free Staff tour at the Lincoln Presidential Museum. In September, Program Services will do a lot of planning, including planning programs and events for the next fiscal year, planning the winter newsletter, and more. New programs include the upcoming “Treat Trail” that already has sponsorships as well as extensive program planning for next year.

Trustee Reed was at an event at the Children’s Museum and sat next to one of the summer interns at the District and he shared that it was a wonderful experience.

**Ashton Nunn, Marketing Specialist (not present)**

Marketing Specialist Ashton Nunn was not present, so Director of Programs Alysia Callison also gave this report. Callison reported that Engagement and Follows are increasing every month on social channels. Nunn attended a lot of community events as well in-person almost every weekend with more planned through September. MCCD is getting ready to do an overhaul of the website and Nunn has been doing a lot of work on the Prairie Pedal.

**Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and HR**

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that she assisted in finalizing the 2023-24 audit, created reporting efficiencies by recording electronic payments in Accounts Payable, worked with Executive Director Culp to finalize fund transfers for CDs that had come to term, attended and provided data analyzation for collective bargaining negotiations, updated the Cash Balance Report for greater transparency in reporting, and began work for Financial Reporting due at the end of September. The first Tax Levy payment was received at \$1,202,938.97. On the Human Resources side, Besser coordinated volunteers to serve at The Good Samaritan Inn, began work on a new “phone tree” to create a more efficient phone answering system, assisted in the planning and execution of the Quarterly Staff Meeting at Friend’s Creek, and attended the District website update meeting. She is excited to start the budgeting process in October.

**6. Other Business**

**a. No New Business.**

**VII. COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:**

No comment.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

Trustee Allen MOVED to go into Executive Session at 6:34p.m. for the purpose of:

1. 2(c)(2) Collective negotiating matters between the public body and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees.
2. 2(c)(5) The purchase or lease of real property for the use of the public body, including meetings held for the purpose of discussing whether a particular parcel should be acquired.

Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, “AYE”; Trustee Sams, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; and Trustee Castor, “AYE”; Trustee Allen, “AYE”. Motion carried.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to return to the Regular Public Meeting at 6:53 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Reed, “AYE”; Trustee Sams, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; Trustee Castor, “AYE”. Motion carried.

Trustee Reed MOVED to approve the Executive Session Minutes of September 18, 2024, as read aloud in closed session. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Sams, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, Trustee Allen MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:54 p.m. Trustee Sams SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed "AYE"; Trustee Sams "AYE". Motion carried.

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President

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Secretary