BYRON FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT

MINUTES OF MEETING

OCTOBER 21, 2024

Commissioners present: Baker, Breen, Remhof, and Vincer.

Commissioners absent: Patterson

Staff present: Brown, Brunner, Dahlberg, deOliveira, Krueger, Leon, McCammond, Ross, Tucker, and Wombacher.

Guests present: Jeff Ludwig, District’s Beekeeper

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm.

Director Tucker suggested removing Executive Session Agenda Item 16A. President Vincer agreed with keeping Agenda Items 16B and 16C on the agenda.

BREEN MOVED AND REMHOF SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS AMENDED. BAKER – YES, BREEN – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

President Vincer opened the Public Hearing pursuant to the requirements of Sections 10 and 20 of the Bond Issuance Notification Act of the State of Illinois, as amended on the plans to issue General Obligation Bonds, Series 2024 in the amount not to exceed $2,400,000. There were no comments from commissioners or oral written testimony from the public. President Vincer announced that all persons desiring to be heard have been given the opportunity to present oral or written testimony with respect to the proposed insurance bonds.

REMHOF MOVED AND BAKER SECONDED A MOTION AT 5:35 PM TO ADJOURN THE PUBLIC HEARING. BREEN – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

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President Vincer opened the floor to Jeff Ludwig, the District’s volunteer beekeeper. Mr. Ludwig gave everyone a jar of regular honey and creamed honey. He thanked the board for allowing him to keep hives on District property at different preserves. He also thanked the board for allowing him to utilize the Expo Building for storage of equipment and extracting and bottling honey. The board thanked Mr. Ludwig for all of his volunteer work with the District.

REMHOF MOVED AND BREEN SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AND EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 16, 2024. PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, BREEN – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

BREEN MOVED AND VINCER SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 7, 2024. REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, BREEN – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

The correspondence was noted. President Vincer inquired about the Best of Ogle Co certificate the district has received yearly for about 5 years in a row now. Brief discussion followed.

President Vincer opened the floor to Shawn McCammond to discuss the Financial Reports. Shawn stated that the Golf and General Funds are both doing well. Revenue has stayed solid and he is finalizing the budget for approval at the next November board meeting.

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REMHOF MOVED AND BAKER SECONDED A MOTION TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2024. REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, BREEN – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, AND VINCER – YES.

There was no president’s report.

President Vincer reminded the board of the upcoming IAPD/IAPR State Conferences, brief discussion followed.

President Vincer opened the floor to District Department Heads to present their Staff Reports.

Todd Tucker, Administrative Services Department-5:43-5:53 pm-He thanked staff and volunteers for all their help with Halloween on the Prairie on Sunday October 20. There was an excellent turn out and the weather was beautiful. He stated that he has been talking with a lighting company that will be upgrading the fixtures in the Land Management and Expo buildings this fall for a large, discounted price under the Comed rebate program. He stated the district reserves the right to restrict hunters on the allowed preserves if they are not residents of the district. Jon Bargren will be taking over as the district’s new Hunt Manager and will be monitoring and directing the operations of hunters on the preserves. The irrigation bid is in progress to be out and reviewed by November 14. Director Tucker proposed to have this cost financed over the next five years.

Janet Dahlberg, Education Department-5:53-5:55 pm-She informed the board Education Assistants Faith and Alyssa are not available for work as of now, due to Faith in school and Alyssa on leave for the birth of her new son. Education Assistant Heather Ward and Janet have been busy with

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field trips, home school programs and Janet with the upcoming Holiday Gift Sale prep. Janet stated that the observatory has also been busy with the mild temperatures in place, drawing anywhere from twenty-five to forty visitors every Saturday night. She also stated she recently discovered there are no bats here at the preserve, they are, however, closer to the river. Brief discussion of this followed.

Russell Brunner, Restoration/Maintenance Department-5:56-6:02pm-He reported that Assistant Superintendent of Restoration, Scott Krueger has been doing some end of the season spraying of the Leafy Spurge and Wild Parsnip at the Bald Hill Preserve. He thanked volunteer Joe Jonakin for helping with the black locust herbicide application at the Ripplinger property and stated that he is now tackling some of the black locust at the Bald Hill Preserve. He reported that brush mowing has been completed at the quarry and surrounding fields behind the Land Management Center. He thanked Greg Hunter for cleaning up trees and limbs and mowing the firebreaks at the HeLeo and Etnyre Preserves to get them ready for the upcoming prescribed burn season. Russell reported that he and his staff helped the Byron Park District staff remove their dock and kayak launch from Hamas Park, in addition to removing the dock and kayak launch at the HeLeo preserve and that all went smooth. He then thanked Dan Wilmarth for the wagon for the hayrides at the Halloween on the Prairie event. Russell reported that native seed collecting has been in full swing this last month with the continuance of the nice weather. He thanked new volunteers Jan and John Jenson for their help collecting a lot of seed from the Ripplinger and Nardi Preserves. All this year’s collected seed will be mixed with purchased seed to make a mix for a large planting at the Coleman Preserve. He highlighted an endangered species of plant collected, the aster

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plants and outlined photos of all these operations with the board. Commissioner Remhof thanked Russell and his staff for all the work done on the trails for the Tiger Ten Miler race. He noted that a

gentlemen from Italy participated in this race and had a lot of positive feedback to give him on how the trails of the preserve are kept.

Scott deOliveira/Jason Wombacher, Golf Operations-6:02-6:08 pm-They noted that PrairieView rounds were twelve percent up from the year average rounds for September. October’s rounds are looking great with the mild weather. Scott reported that their first twenty-seven-hole interclub tournament against Mauh-Nah-Tee-See Country Club took place in September and was an extremely competitive tournament. PrairieView lost by two points, but it was a fun and friendly competition that they hope to continue for years to come. Brief discussion followed. Scott also reported that the annual Chili Shootout brought in ninety-six golfers, over eighty of them were from the suburbs and not regular PrairieView pass holders. Winter leagues will soon begin at PrairieFire and the December/January calendar is filling up with many full facility rentals for corporate holiday parties.

Mike Brown, Golf Maintenance Department-6:08-6:17pm-He reported that he received the bid specs for the upcoming irrigation renovation. Virtual meetings are set up with perspective bidders. Ideally there will be three contractors bidding on this job. Discussion followed about whether the bid approval from the board should be at the November 18 or December 16 board meetings. Commissioner Breen asked if there would be an advantage to approve before December. Mike responded that he could find out if it can move faster, he will let everyone know and that a special meeting can be scheduled to approve it. Director Tucker stated that he can run this by our attorney. Mike concluded with a thank you

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to President Vincer and the City of Byron for the use of their backhoe for the driving range tee renovation.

Director Tucker explained the proposed policy revisions regarding commissioners benefits in the Standard Operating Procedure for Benefits for Programs, Activities, and Banquet Room Rentals for Employees and Board of Commissioners set by the District as contained in the Policy and Procedures Manual – 4 Standard Operating Procedures – A-F. President Vincer decided to table any action on this revision until the next board meeting in November.

President Vincer inquired about the next steps in the new director search for the District in light of Director Tucker’s retirement in April. Director Tucker stated that he spoke with Alan Howard at Illinois Association of Park Districts and that the Executive Director new hire flier will be out the week of October 28th.

A brief recess was called at this time, 6:27-635pm.

President Vincer opened the floor to Director Tucker to go into the Budget Workshop portion of this regular board meeting to discuss the General Fund Budget. He stated that the annual holiday craft show does not meet revenue. He noted that Janet had the idea of merging the Holiday Craft Show with the annual Honey Harvest Festival since vendors come to both and that will open the normal Saturdays in early November in upcoming years for more revenue in building rentals. Brief discussion of this followed.

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Commissioner Breen questioned the decrease in salaries, especially the forty percent for part time employees. Janet responded that she thought she would need to hire more on, but the department decided extra hires were not needed at this time. President Vincer questioned Janet on if she believed she was pricing herself out with the preschool program, but she maintained that this program is still less than other private preschool programs and it is thriving. Commissioner Baker questioned the computer repair and support line item under the education expenses. Janet stated that with the smartboards now in the classroom it can cost quite a bit for technicians to come in and repair or troubleshoot these, and subscriptions for the apps they are using can add to that cost. Janet also reported that the cost for this should not be as large as it was last year since these smart boards were recently just updated.

The Golf Fund was discussed. Director Tucker highlighted that since the decision to build PrairieFire increased revenue, the fund for golf is better than it was in past years. Operations at PrairieFire have tripled due to the food and beverage sales. Friday rates were changed to weekend rates, and this has also helped with increasing revenue. More discussion followed.

PrairieFire and PrairieView Revenue were discussed. Scott stated that it is very similar and a lot of PrairieView staff also float to PrairieFire. Many of these employees are cross-trained. Commissioner Remhof asked about Patio 19 revenue. Scott reported that they anticipate scouting and booking more bands/singers for live music and having more steak nights to help increase revenue. Director Tucker proposed expanding the PrairieFire menu and having an all staff meeting to discuss this. Jason stated that he thinks it would be a great idea to require reservations so he can better prepare staff for a

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better experience for customers. He stated that they were cautiously over staffed this year. Since Patio 19 was such an expensive project, Commissioner Remhof stated that he would like to see even more of

an intent to make money than this past year. Scott said it was a bit of a learning year for himself and his staff and the coming year should bring a lot more events for revenue.

Commissioner Remhof inquired about the district’s group health insurance and if there has been a stabilization on the costs. Shawn stated that the increase is not going up much (1.6 percent) and that the district is staying steady due to the well health of the employees. Brief discussion followed.

Golf Maintenance was briefly discussed. Mike stated that the Training and Travel line item has increased by 100 percent due to the need to train more staff.

Commissioner Baker asked if the Top Tracer fees have dropped. Scott stated that it is about $235 per bay per month. This pricing has not changed since Covid. Baker noted that he believes the golf course is selling themselves short with the advertising for Top Tracer. Scott said he plans to include this in next year’s budget as he too believes they should have better advertising for Top Tracer games. Commissioner Breen then asked if PrairieFire or PrairieView conducts surveys including how people hear about the restaurant and the golf course. Jason mentioned that they have, and the responses have been people just driving in the country and seeing the Forest Preserve digital sign, word of mouth, or social media.

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The Special Fund Budgets were discussed. Shawn reported that the overall tax levy was dropped, and it will hold steady for now. PDRMA’s rates and social security have increased. Money is owed back to the General Fund; surplus will take care of that.

Commissioner Breen asked how much was borrowed, Todd reported that it was five million total. Interest was two percent, three million was used to buy a couple of properties and for maintenance and restoration over the last fifteen years. Discussion followed.

The Capitol Fund was discussed. Commissioner Breen inquired about the vehicle repair and maintenance line item for the Restoration Department. He asked how old the vehicles were and Russell stated that they are “pretty old.” The plan is to push to have them replaced in 2026. Commissioner Breen asked if the money that was in the budget was going to be enough for repairs, Russell responded that the emergency fund can cover the cost as well if needed.

Director Tucker stated there is a proposed $100,000 budgeted for a generator for PrairieFire. If less of that money were to be used for a partial generator instead, some of the extra money left over can be used for purchasing new restoration vehicles. More discussion followed.

Commissioner Remhof asked if the golf course staff were satisfied with the golf carts. Jason stated that they are better than most and run great with minimal problems. He also said that the course, carts, and atmosphere are very comparable to country clubs- nice amenities for a very decent price.

There is money budgeted for new flooring in the Blazing Star Room on the lower level of the Jarrett Prairie Center. It was noted that the current flooring was not glued down properly when it was

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installed and has resulted in buckling in various spots. Raul noted that he will not be using the original place that installed the floors. Raul also noted that the quotes came in well under $30, 0000. More discussion followed.

It was noted that the Ripplinger house needs updating. Director Tucker proposed selling this property when he retires. Director Tucker stated that the bones of the house are great, it just needs updating and does not have great insulation. Installing new insulation will be more cost effective in place of a high propane bill. Director Tucker also noted that it may be a good idea to replace the Director’s vehicle after he retires since the current one has 200,000 miles on it.

It was noted that the digital sign is many years old and does not have the capability to do what many other digital signs in town are doing. Kitra stated that she needs to abbreviate all the programs to get the words to fit and read properly and it is a hassle at times for people to read or translate. With many people seeing the golf course and the forest preserve when they are driving through town and are not from here, it would be a great business move for the sign to be more visible and appealing.

Janet stated that she would like to freshen up the movies and projector in the theatre. Brief discussion followed.

It was noted unanimously that Heritage Farm be sold. Commissioner Remhof stated that this is where a lot of money goes in but not a lot comes out. It was also noted that it does not bring interest to kids here like it would in bigger cities. Brief discussion followed.

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Janet stated that she would like to see an upgrade of the interactive screen in the museum as the current one has not worked for some time. As part of the upgrade, she suggested an interactive map that highlights all the preserves. Brief discussion followed.

Scott stated that storage and sound absorption is an issue at PrairieFire. A good chunk of the proposed budget will go toward repair for the ceiling to reduce the loud sounds the acoustics produce.

Director Tucker stated the golf course needs to be seal coated. Commissioner Remhof asked if this would be done in spring/summer of 2025, and commissioner Breen suggested this does not get done until after irrigation, which would not be until 2026. President Vincer suggested doing Spring/Summer 2025 if the irrigation would not damage the seal coating. More discussion followed.

More discussion on the budget for a generator for PrairieFire continued. Staff is really pushing for a generator considering all the food loss from the July 15th tornado. Commissioner Remhof asked if the $100,000 budgeted for this was just an estimate and Scott stated it is a pretty accurate number for the cost. Commissioner Breen asked if we needed one for just PrairieFire or the clubhouse as well. Scott said at this time only one for PrairieFire is needed. More discussion followed about the possibility of just buying something that covers protecting food in case of power outage like a partial generator and not a full one.

Director Tucker proposed leaving room in the budget to purchase a Husqvarna robot mower. He stated that the school uses this, and it would be great to get it out at nighttime when no patrons are

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around. Commissioner Baker stated that they do an impressive job but easily lose connection. Brief discussion followed.

Mike proposed putting in hitting mats on the golf course and one long continuous tee box to keep patrons from hitting off the grass. Commissioner Remhof questioned how many people on the driving range would be considered too many? Jason stated ten people. Brief discussion followed.

BREEN MOVED AND REMHOF SECONDED A MOTION AT 8:20 PM TO CONVENVE INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION UNDER SECTION 2(C)(5) OF THE OPEN MEETINGS ACT FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION OF THE PURCHASE OR LEASE OF REAL PROPERTY FOR THE USE OF THE DISTRICT, INCLUDING MEETINGS HELD FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING WEATHER A PARTICULAR PARCEL SHOULD BE AQUIRED, AND UNDER SECTION 2(C)(11) FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION OF LITIGATION, WHEN AN ACTION AGAINST, AFFECTING OR ON BEHALF OF THE DISTRICT HAS BEEN FILED AND IS PEDNING BEOFRE A COURT OR ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL, OR WHEN THE DISTRUCT FINDS THAT AN ACTION IS PROBABLE OR IMMINENT, IN WHICH CASE THE BASIS OF THE FINDING SHALL BE RECORDED AND ENTERED INTO THE MINUTES OF THE CLOSED MEETING. BREEN – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

BAKER MOVED AND REMHOF SECONDED A MOTION AT 8:57 PM TO COME OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION. PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, BAKER – YES, BREEN – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

REMHOF MOVED AND BAKER SECONDED A MOTION AT 8:58 PM TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. BREEN – YES, BAKER – YES, PATTERSON – ABSENT, REMHOF – YES, AND VINCER – YES.

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Respectfully submitted,

Kris Baker, Secretary

Board of Commissioners

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