

**City of Blaine
Anoka County, Minnesota**

**Natural Resources Conservation Board
Tuesday, September 19, 2017**

7:00 PM
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. Roll Call – Chair McKinley called the roll call. Those present include: Boardmembers Castillo, Genet (arrived at 7:24 p.m.), Lizakowski, Rafferty, Theisen (arrived at 7:06 p.m.), Truchon, Villella, and Chair McKinley.

Absent – Boardmembers Perkins and Ruth

Others Present: Recreation Manager Shari Kunza and Rebecca Haug, Co-Liaison, Water Resource Manager.

3. Approval of Agenda

Chair McKinley suggested combining item #6 and item #10. Recreation Manager Kunza stated the reason they were listed separately is that Boardmember Genet will be presenting and will not be present until later in the meeting. Chair McKinley stated she will have two announcements at the end of the meeting.

MOVED by Boardmember Truchon, seconded by Boardmember Villella, to approve the September 19, 2017 Board Agenda as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes

Chair McKinley corrected on page two, paragraph 7. Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Updates to read:

“Chair McKinley noted prior to the meeting, the NRCB participated in a walking tour of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary with Jason Husveth. Some posts have been constructed on both ends of the trails to restrict vehicles. Walkers and bikers have not been restricted. She encouraged people to walk the boardwalk. The BWS sign had been moved during construction. Chair McKinley will ask Steve from Public Works to move the sign to a better spot so it is more noticeable.”

MOVED by Boardmember Rafferty, seconded by Boardmember Lizakowski, to approve the minutes of the July 18, 2017 Board Meeting as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

Boardmember Theisen arrived at the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

5. Open Forum for Citizen Input

No one appeared to address the Commission.

6. Presentation for Programming at BWS

Co-Liaison Haug introduced Ms. Ferris. Ms. Heidi Ferris from Growing Green Hearts presented programs the NRCB can hold at the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.

Ms. Rebecca Haug, Water Resources Manager with the City of Blaine, and Heidi Ferris, Growing Green Hearts LLC, met on August 3 at the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary to discuss plans and potential for the site, specific to environmental education opportunities. Rebecca gave a tour of the site, explained the land bank, shared history of the site, and expressed the need for wetland awareness and education.

Growing Green Hearts is all about science education that invites people to play, learn and love nature. Through best educational practices in environmental science, tech, engineering and math (eSTEM), Growing Green Hearts helps schools, educators and communities increase environmental stewardship and science literacy. Services provided by Growing Green Hearts include: teacher/community trainings, natural playground coaching, curriculum development, and fun, hands-on eSTEM programming. Learn more about Growing Green Hearts online: www.growinggreenhearts.com. Growing Green Hearts would like to explore providing the following services for the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary project:

Fun Hands-On Educational Programming

- Site-specific environmental education utilizing up-to-date research and tools-of-a-scientist, making learning fun and engaging.
- Programming for youth, adults, and intergenerational groups throughout all seasons and at many skill levels.
- Variety of wetland-related topics, including botany, sustainability, biodiversity, animals, hydrology, ecology, etc.

Engaging Community Outreach

- Build relationships with educational groups (public, private, home childcare, schools) by visiting then teaching educational leaders in the Blaine area.

- Design interactive eSTEM projects for the City of Blaine that bring intergenerational groups to the site while building science literacy around water.
- Conduct interviews, surveys, and/or research to gather data on what school groups are looking for in field study experiences for youth.

Expanding Science Literacy

- Create user-friendly, playful ways for the community to better explore and understand the interconnectedness of environmental systems and human impact.
- Strategize with the City of Blaine team to develop science themes, nature center, and long-term plans specific to the site.
- Translate higher level science into everyday concepts for the general public.

Ms. Ferris provided a power point presentation “Playing with eSTEM”. She reviewed her background and described the programs she has led.

Chair McKinley asked about funding and how much do these types of programs cost? Ms. Ferris stated her rates could be a flat rate for teacher trainings \$150/hour, 2 hours hands-on with students is \$250. Another alternative would be on a contract basis for a specified number of hours. The third alternative would be grant writing.

Boardmember Villella asked if Ms. Ferris has connections within the school district. Ms. Ferris stated she has some connections with the schools. He asked Ms. Ferris to explain the Genesis Program at Woodcrest and she explained the program.

Boardmember Truchon stated the NRCB is interested in having the community involved with the BWS. Since there is no building, would Ms. Ferris be able to do special events. Ms. Ferris stated she started five years ago doing events and she has five different event curriculum.

Chair McKinley asked if Ms. Ferris and Ms. Haug would come up with a proposal for a 2-hour event. Ms. Haug stated Ms. Ferris came to present to the Board to see what types of things they would be interested in.

Boardmember Truchon stated she is excited about what Ms. Ferris has to offer. She reviewed the current means of communicating with residents about the BWS.

Boardmember Genet arrived at the meeting at 7:24 p.m.

This proposal is intended to be a starting point for more in-depth discussion with the City of Blaine on the community’s need for environmental education and how Growing Green Hearts can best meet that need. Growing Green Hearts is excited

to explore potential areas of partnership in more detail. Please contact Heidi Ferris at heidi@growinggreenhearts.com or 763-516-3513 to discuss next steps.

Chair McKinley suggested Item #10 be moved up on the agenda so Ms. Ferris can participate if needed.

10. Possible Programming Ideas for BWS and Other Open Space Areas

Boardmember Genet reviewed the NRCB is requested to brainstorm with staff on programming ideas for educating residents on wetlands, open space and the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. She stated what some of her students are doing as far as making eight interpretive signs for the BWS. The students will present their sign designs at the November NRCB Meeting. It would be helpful for Boardmember Genet to know the size of the signs. The brackets are already placed along the boardwalk.

Some suggestions were:

- Frog Walk – Spring
- Interactive signs where additional information can be obtained
- Photo Contest – with Arts Council judges and displayed in City Hall with three categories, landscapes, animals and people.
- Mystery Walk
- Firepit with seating outdoors
- Partnership with ARCC
- Contracting with Wargo and Anoka County Naturalists
- Possibilities with Heidi – Growing Green Hearts

Boardmember Villella stated earlier today he rode his bike past the BWS and the parking lot was full.

Ms. Kunza stated a couple of programs would be offered this winter. They would want to get going on the photo contest so pictures would be available for use at the BWS on the signs and on the website.

Boardmember Theisen asked if Anoka-Hennepin may have funds available for programming.

7. 25 BY 25 UPDATE

Boardmember Truchon reviewed the League of MN Women Voters coordinated a Community Water Meeting on Tuesday, August 29, 2017 at the Anoka Ramsey Community College at 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. The meeting was set up to provide feedback to Governor Mark Dayton on Minnesota's 25% by 2025 Water Quality Improvement Goal. The Governor is going around the state asking people how we can reach this goal together, and what our priority actions should be. The Governor is hosting ten regional Town Hall meetings across the state in addition

to locally coordinated Community Water Meetings such as the one on Tuesday, August 29, 2017. Mayor Tom Ryan was also present.

The meeting included a brief introduction by Gretchen Sabel, Chair of the League of MN Women Voters, an explanation of what the Governor's 25% by 2025 initiative is about by Anna Henderson, Water Advisor at the Governor's office and Bruce Bomier, Environmental Resource Council discussed the importance of water quality for the State of MN.

Once the speakers were finished, people sat at their tables and worked together addressing questions provided by the table's facilitator. The questions were geared towards finding out what are the biggest problems facing water quality, what actions can be taken at the individual, community, state and federal levels and what are the top barriers in reaching the goal and what support is needed to overcome them.

Ms. Haug stated she received some feedback from the Anoka Conservation District and reviewed the questions posed along with responses.

Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to hear about the discussions at each table. The comments from the meeting will be submitted to the Environmental Quality Board along with the comments from all of the other meetings and used to determine the 25% goals and top 10 proposed ideas for actionable steps or policy.

The results of the meeting will be presented in a report sometime this winter.

8. Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Grand Opening

Chair McKinley reviewed the grand opening of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary was held on Tuesday, August 15. A large group of residents gathered to celebrate the long-awaited opening. Mayor Tom Ryan cut the ribbon and the crowd cheered as they took a walk along the boardwalk admiring the beautiful views that will forever be preserved. Ms. Kunza shared photographs from the Grand Opening. The photographs are available on the website.

Boardmember Truchon thanked Staff for their hard work. Boardmember Rafferty noted there was good coverage of the event on cable and the ABC Newspaper.

9. Open Space Budget

Ms. Haug provided a copy of the Open Space budget for Board review. The budget includes revenue from the Park Dedication Fund as well as projected revenue from the sale of wetland credits in the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS). The expenditures include the continued restoration work at the BWS, and overall open space management at Pioneer Park, Kane Meadows, Aquatore, Laddie Lake,

Lochness Park, Oak Savanna, Hidden Ponds Park and the City's Rain Gardens throughout the City of Blaine.

Projections for both revenue and expenditures are also included in the budget. The Park Dedication fee is dependent upon the amount of development that occurs in the City for the upcoming years. The wetland credit revenue is also dependent upon how much development requires the need to purchase wetland credits.

The expenditures include costs to continue the restoration efforts at the BWS and required monitoring work that Critical Connections Ecological Services (CCES) will be doing to ensure the credits are released. Costs also include management of the city's open spaces and Pioneer Park. These costs were determined based upon previous contracts with the consultants. At the October NRCB meeting, a more accurate budget for the upcoming contracts work will be provided for the management of the open spaces.

Chair McKinley asked about Buckthorn management. Ms. Haug stated she believes that may have been included in Open Space Management. Chair McKinley stated funding is limited and she is addressing that in a letter to the City Council and Mayor.

Boardmember Genet asked if programming for BWS would come out of this budget and Ms. Kunza stated she will research and get back to the NRCB. There are some shared responsibilities between the NRCB and the Park Board.

11. Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Neighborhood Update

Ms. Kunza reviewed staff met with members of the BWS Neighborhood Committee on August 21 and walked the site. In attendance were three neighborhood residents, two NRCB members, Mayor Tom Ryan and three staff members. The neighborhood residents pointed out areas where they thought trees should be planted.

City Councilmembers Dave Clark and Julie Jeppson met with neighborhood residents on September 5. It was reported that it was a productive meeting. Boardmember Truchon noted she attended the September 5 meeting.

Staff is preparing a revised estimate for some landscaping at the BWS including trees and landscaping. There is no landscaping planned for the maintenance area.

Boardmember Castillo asked for more information on the meeting as far as the comments by the residents, mood of the residents and the Council. Boardmember Truchon noted not much had changed from previous meetings in her opinion. The Mayor had very practical comments for the neighborhood. People were civil.

Boardmember Castillo suggested at future meetings the residents should walk on the trails. The trees were removed for a reason. The privacy is still there for those residents.

Chair McKinley passed a letter among the Boardmembers and asked for their comments/input before it is sent to the City Council. Ms. Kunza stated the letter can be sent to the City Council via email tomorrow.

Boardmember Lizakowski suggested some changes to the wording of the letter. Ms. Kunza noted no decision has been made by Council. The emphasis should be on what should happen rather than what should not happen to put a more positive spin on the letter.

Boardmember Castillo suggested some changes regarding the park dedication fees.

Boardmember Truchon suggested removing the word “continual”. Boardmember Genet suggested adding the recommendations of the consultant should be followed regarding future trails and tree plantings.

MOVED by Boardmember Truchon, to resend the letter to the City Council as revised.

The motion failed due to lack of a second.

MOVED by Boardmember Lizakowski, seconded by Boardmember Genet to recommend to City Council that they consider the ecological expert’s opinion before planting any trees or making a decision on paths or trails.

The motion passed unanimously.

REVISED MOTION by Boardmember Lizakowski, seconded by Boardmember Villella to recommend to City Council that they consult with the ecological expert (Jason Husveth) before planting any trees or making a decision on trails.

The motion carried unanimously.

12. Communications

Tour with Jason Husveth – on another section of the BWS that he has obtained a grant on restoring the 200 acres. Ms. Haug stated the tour could be held before the October 2017 NRCB Meeting.

MN Non-native Phragmites Early Detection Project – Haug stated the University of MN is doing a study and a kit has been requested. A student from ARCC is willing to do the research project.

Email compliments on the BWS – Ms. Kunza shared some emails received regarding the BWS. Chair McKinley requested a response be sent thanking them for their comments. The compliments will also be shared with Council and the Park Board.

Boardmember Villella sent an email on Wednesday, September 20, 2017 regarding the BWS Neighborhood Update – After discussion last evening at our NRCB meeting, I feel compelled to make my views on this matter clear as a member of the NRCB and also as a citizen. As everyone recognizes, the City could have been more proactive communicating its actions, but the City was well within its right to proceed with its long-term plans for the BWS. I would be against any remediation in the form of planting trees on the site for several reasons. The trees that were removed were done so to rehabilitate the wetland to enable sales of wetland banking credits. The planting of new trees could put some of these credits at risk and ultimately increase costs. Any changes to the wetland banking plans could necessitate permitting changes which would be onerous on staff and again increase costs. Trees are expensive and as a taxpayer, I don't believe this is a wise investment of the City's limited resources. If the Council still deems some corrective action is necessary, Jason Husveth should be consulted and his approval should be requisite for any actions. I hope all of you have had a chance to walk the board walk to see how truly magnificent the BWS is. Thank you for your consideration.

13. Future Meeting Proposal

Staff is recommending that the Natural Resource Conservation Board alter the pattern of their meeting schedule. Odd months would be official board business and televised on cable. Even months would be discussion only and not be televised. All meetings would need to be publicly announced and the board would have to take their own brief meeting notes on the even months. Staff would be present on odd months and as needed on even months.

MOTION by Boardmember Theisen, seconded by Boardmember Rafferty to table consideration of this item until the October 2017 Meeting.

Boardmember Castillo recommended keeping the meetings as they are as being monthly.

The motion carried – Boardmember Castillo voted nay.

Chair McKinley requested the open space reports be made at the October meeting.

Adjournment

MOVED by Boardmember Villella, seconded by Boardmember Castillo, to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.