

**City of Blaine
Anoka County, Minnesota**

**Natural Resources Conservation Board
Tuesday, February 20, 2018**

7:00 PM
Council Chambers
10801 Town Square Drive

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. Roll Call – Ms. Kunza called the roll call. Those present include: Boardmembers Castillo (arrived at 7:30 p.m.), Genet, Lizakowski, Perkins, Rafferty, Ruth, Theisen, Truchon (arrived at 7:10 p.m.). Villella and Chair McKinley.

Absent – Boardmember Ruth

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

2. Approval of Agenda

MOVED by Boardmember Rafferty, seconded by Boardmember Villella to approve the February 20, 2018 Board Agenda as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes

Boardmember Perkins noted on page six the first paragraph should read “. . . Boardmember Perkins stated he agrees the City should pay for the trees for the two property owners. . .”

Boardmember Genet noted on page three the fourth paragraph the abbreviation should be corrected for BWSR.

MOVED by Boardmember Theisen, seconded by Boardmember Genet, to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2018 Board Meeting as amended.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Open Forum for Citizen Input

No one appeared to address the Board.

5. Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Committee Update

Ms. Haug reviewed the City Council discussed options for tree replacement at the BWS at their February 8 workshop meeting. Council consensus was to direct staff to pursue a landscaping plan for the gated area along with a 20-foot buffer for consideration at an upcoming Council meeting. Staff was also directed to provide further information regarding how the wetland credits would be impacted. Ms. Haug stated since the direction was received, staff has had discussions with BWSR and learned that if the City makes any changes to the buffer area or within the wetland bank, the City would be subject to having their permit re-opened and an additional 135 days to review with no guarantee that it would be approved. The Army Corp of Engineers would take another year to review. Staff is going back to Council with this update and will recommend not making any modifications. Staff will advise the Board the date this will be going back to Council.

Boardmember Truchon arrived at 7:10 p.m.

No action is necessary on the part of the NRCB.

Chair McKinley asked if there was any additional input received from the homeowners and Ms. Haug stated emails were received asking additional questions that Council will need to answer.

Boardmember Villella asked about the status of the trees the homeowners were going to plant on their own properties. Ms. Haug stated the property owners can plant their own trees. As far as the City reimbursing them, she was not certain how that will be decided. There may not be enough Council votes to go forward with that.

6. Environmental Education Update

Ms. Kunza reviewed Staff has completed the initial phase of environmental education and will promote the programs in the Summer Recreation Connection due to come out in mid-March. A draft copy of the publication was provided for Commission review.

Staff requested some feedback on American Wetlands Month and provided some ideas:

- An interactive display at City Hall focusing on wetlands. Displays will be provided by the Anoka Conservation District and the Rice Creek Watershed District.
- Staff will purchase a professionally printed banner supporting AWM.
- A table at World Fest on May 19 - NRCB members are needed to volunteer for this event.
- Educational social media posts regarding the benefits of wetlands and value of the resource in Blaine.
- Resources promotion families to explore the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary on their own.

Ms. Kunza provided a draft of the banner planned (6' x 3') which will hang in the atrium of City Hall.

Boardmember Truchon complimented the staff on the nice job of pulling together the information for the summer brochure. She asked if invitations could be given for children to make paintings on why they love wetlands and post them when completed. She would be willing to help with that activity.

Boardmember Genet asked about the programming and whether picnic tables (meeting space) would be available for the classes and Ms. Kunza stated that is the plan.

Boardmember Genet asked who will be leading the activities and Ms. Kunza stated Growing Green Hearts will be leading along with Wargo Nature Center.

Boardmember Truchon suggested a passport be offered to encourage visiting all the Open Spaces within the City. Chair McKinley stated that idea has come up in the past but no one has offered to work on it and encouraged Boardmember Truchon to work on that. Boardmember Truchon agreed.

7. Eagle Scout Projects

Ms. Kunza stated Larry Sable has contacted staff regarding possible Eagle Scout projects. One idea that was discussed and can be feasibly accomplished is construction of photo poles at the site.

The purpose of the photo poles is to document the changes to the wetland over time, whether it be time of day, season or years. People will be asked to take photos and upload them to the BWS website.

The signs may be constructed out of 4 x 4 posts and at heights of 2, 4, and 6 feet. The Eagle Scout would number them and possibly create designs on them using wood burning. In addition, signs would be placed next to them with descriptions of what they are for and how to upload the photos. Six stations are proposed at intervals along the boardwalk. Ms. Kunza provided a photo of what the posts would look like. The Board is requested to discuss ideas for additional Eagle Scout Projects.

Mr. Larry Sable stated he has been working with Troop 509 on the photo pole idea. There are still some issues to be resolved as it is an undeveloped program. Some coordination needs to be done between the scouts and staff. There were bat houses built some years ago and put into parks but they were never put in concrete footing. The hope is to find these and put them in concrete footings. The scout may come to a Board meeting in the future and explain his plan and get NRCB input. Mr. Sable would like to see the signs for the photo poles the same format as the other signs created by Boardmember Genet's students.

Chair McKinley asked if there is already a scout that wants to do this project and Mr. Sable stated there is. Mr. Sable does not know if the scout is fully on board to do both projects and it is still being discussed.

Boardmember Villella suggested a simple diagram showing how the photo poles are to be used. Mr. Sable agreed it would be important to take photos from the same angle.

Boardmember Castillo arrived at the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Sable also suggested a woodchip area with a picnic table anchored down in the location the Mayor thought was appropriate.

Boardmember Genet asked if the photo poles would be attached to the boardwalk itself or sunk into the wetland and Mr. Sable stated they would be attached to the boardwalk. Boardmember Genet suggested data that should accompany any photos downloaded onto the website. Arrows to standardize the direction from which the photos are taken would be needed. Mr. Sable stated the NRCB will need to decide what the signs should read along with any wood burning done on the poles. The functionality will need to be determined by staff and the NRCB.

Boardmember Perkins suggested a compass be burned with the arrow to indicate the direction.

8. Open Space Management Plans Update

Chair McKinley reviewed at the January 16 meeting, the NRCB decided to review the Open Space Management Plan. Chair McKinley and Boardmember Truchon are reviewed the plan to determine what has been done and what has yet to be done. The NRCB will then go through the plan section by section.

Chair McKinley provided the following report:

Site #2: Pioneer Park – Designated as a Special Use Park and defined as parkland obtained and maintained for its environmental resources. The first 40 A. parcel was purchased in 1962, a second 40 A. parcel was added in 1972, and the third 20 A. was purchased in 2000. A Natural Resources Inventory study was conducted in the 1990's, which found a large population of twisted yellow-eyed grass and several other rare or endangered native plants being overrun by invasive species. The western half of the acreage is wetland and the eastern half is mostly wooded upland with some pockets of wetland.

Restoration of the degraded wetlands was carried out by a professional environmental service, and in 2005 a boardwalk was constructed across the wetland to connect to the neighborhood on the NW side of the park. An extensive paved trail system, along with several wood chip trails and bridges across the drainage ditch allow public access for visitors to fully enjoy this special place.

The wetland restoration project was successful but will need continued monitoring to prevent regrowth of the invasives. The woodland areas were heavily infested with buckthorn. Extensive targeted removal projects have been carried out over several years, and much of the buckthorn has been removed, but this too will require diligent oversight to prevent its return.

Site #3: Lochness Park – another Special Use Park of 90 A. that features a man-made 80-foot-high hill overlooking a 20 A. man-made lake. This site has been city property since 1971. Along with an extensive paved trail from the parking lot to around the hill and back past the lake, it features a fishing dock, 2 shelters for gatherings, and a disc golf course that was added in 2009.

The Management Plan called for establishing a native prairie on the top of the hill. This will require removal of the present non-native grasses, followed by several years of follow-up attention. This plan was given a low priority and has not been addressed. In addition, restoring the wet forests on the acreage was given a low priority too.

Site #5: 131st Ave a 10A parcel purchased in 2004 with the Bond Fund. Essentially, a narrow rectangle between 2 privately owned lands., Unfortunately, oak wilt was discovered early on and has been an ongoing problem, especially since both sides are also wooded and have oak wilt occurring. Initially heavily wooded with red oak, many infected trees have been removed, and a logging trail was established which has since been upgraded to a wide woodchip trail. Public Works has replanted open areas with different tree species. Buckthorn was also a big problem, and removal has been a high priority. For now, the parcel remains in the need of continual monitoring for control of the oak wilt and the buckthorn.

Sites #8-9-10-11: Historically, these sites were pastured farmland, and mostly acquired by the City through tax forfeiture. Essentially the sites are contiguous and management is recommended to treat the sites as one unit. The highest priority is elimination of the buckthorn in the wet meadow of Site #9 and elimination of invasive brush by controlled burnings in all the sites. A third priority is protection of and restoration of the lakeshores in Sites #10 and #11.

The Open Spaces at Kane Meadows are attached to the neighborhood park of the same name. The Open Space is approximately 125 A. stretching from 85th Avenue northeasterly to 93rd Ave with a paved trail through the entire parcel. This trail system receives heavy usage by walkers and bikers enjoying the abundant and varied wildlife and the lush growth of the plant species. As in Pioneer Park and the Blaine Preserve, scattered areas of rare native plants have been found.

Site #12 – Lever Street: This 11.7A parcel was purchased by the Open Space Bond Fund in 2007 and an addendum management plan was produced in 2009 by Great River Greening. This parcel is completely surrounded by private ownership. An easement for public access is to be granted when development of the private land takes place. Its attractive feature is a 4 A man-made pond of open water surrounded by a cattail marsh

and highly popular with waterfowl. The wooded areas are dominated by red oak and scattered patches of red maple. The most prevalent problems with this site are buckthorn in the wooded areas and Reed Canary Grass in 50% of the non-forested areas. Besides no public access is available yet, restoration/management work plans have not begun.

Boardmember Truchon presented the following report:

Site #1 – Laddie Lake Park – located on the North end of Laddie Lake in the SW corner of Blaine, the site is about 15 acres and is mostly woodlands with a small dry prairie, and a small cattail marsh. The park has a paved trail system which connects with neighborhoods to the North, East, and West. There are two picnic shelters, a park building and a parking lot at the West trailhead. With a past history of vandalism, there are no picnic tables. The plan calls for the restoration of the dry oak savannah, and the removal of extensive buckthorn invading the forested areas as the most important objectives. Oak Savannah is a major habitat on the Anoka Sand Plan, so these restoration projects will help to return some of the space to its native condition. Restoration work has been done to replant native species in the dry prairie and in the forest openings, and a good deal of buckthorn has been removed. A report from Prairie Restorations during the next growing season will help us to assess how much progress has been made. In the future we could work on restoring the Laddie Lake shoreline, the cattail marsh and the erosion site near the parking lot on the lakeshore. Public education could be done by putting restoration updates and pictures on the website, and maybe targeting the close neighbors with a mailing about the park, or an invitation to an event. More educational signage is needed as restorations are completed. There is a pamphlet ready to be used. Ms. Haug noted more work has been done in the Park and it is looking much better. Some work is still needed. The City has contracted with Coon Creek Watershed District to make modifications to the wet area along with the DNR.

Site #4 – Hidden Ponds – a five-acre parcel attached to a city park and playground, south of a large storm water pond, is mostly upland forest, with underlying Isanti soil on its Western edge. The plan calls for removal of buckthorn and restoration of the oak forest while also paying attention to the replanting of native species in the forest openings. The site has experienced restoration problems in the wetter soils. Prairie Restorations could also report on these efforts during the next growing season. Even though this is a small Open Space site, there are many opportunities to restore the nearby forested and grassy areas in the park. Such a project would not take away from the playground or lawn area, and it would enhance the natural value and beauty of the trail corridor. With development fast approaching from the East, the trail system will become an even more valuable recreational resource for the neighborhood. Also, there is an Anoka County pond directly to the North of the Blaine Hidden Ponds property. It would seem a natural addition to the park, if that is a possibility. Ms. Haug stated it is a storm water pond used by the County. The City could ask that it be added to the Park. Chair McKinley stated there is a wood chip trail that needs to be restored.

Site #6 – Oak Savannah – a seven-acre fair quality oak forest in the Lakes development near East Lake Park, which is now fully surrounded by development. The Management

Plan calls out the value of this site for environmental learning and for helping the neighborhood to embrace good stewardship. The trails which have been established are adequate for the site. Restoration of native species on the edges of the forest has been attempted but might need revisiting in the next growing season. The plan reports that the survival of the site in good quality depends on how well the public respects the trails and the edges of the forest. There is a good brochure, but we also need a real education campaign, and possibly an event where the residents could help with replanting.

Site #7 – Blaine Wetland Sanctuary – our largest Open Space parcel is a wetland complex of 511 acres. Because of its high ecological value, this site is a treasure for Blaine, the surrounding area, and the larger scientific community. Its restoration and maintenance will be a continuing responsibility into the future. At this time, the central wetland area has been restored using Blaine EDA fund. The management plan for this wetland area will be revisited and implemented periodically. The ENRV (Exceptional Natural Resource Value) site on the Northern end of the Sanctuary was purchased with and is being restored using the \$3.5M bond referendum fund. The restoration and wetland banking process is proceeding well and is in the best of hands. Critical Connections is available to give updates to our city staff and the NRCB. The boardwalk connecting Lexington Avenue and the paved looped trail to East Lake Park has been completed and is being enjoyed by many visitors. There are parking lots at Lexington and at East Lake Park. The boardwalk and parking lot will serve many environmental education purposes, and we look forward to building a nature center in the future. An excellent program of environmental education and community involvement has been developed by the collaboration of our city staff, the Blaine Parks and Recreation Department, Growing Green Hearts and Wargo Nature Center. Effective and beautiful signage has been designed by a group of Anoka Ramsey Community College students under the direction of their instructor, Kristen Genet of the NRCB. The present trail and boardwalk system in place in the Sanctuary is the only trail planned at this time. As the future direction of the Southern part of the Sanctuary becomes known, and as we understand the ecological value of that site, the NRCB will be able to complete a management plan to restore that area. For the entire Sanctuary site, good stewardship must be stressed to the surrounding neighbors and to the visitors using the Sanctuary. It will be a great challenge to the NRCB to advise our Blaine City Council on policies to ensure responsible public use of our natural treasure. We must work on communication and public involvement. The future establishment of a “Friends of Open Space” committee or foundation could greatly aid our open spaces. We should also involve area businesses. Kristen has developed an excellent brochure which can now be used to inform our residents.

Some General Recommendations from the Management Plan – Executive Summary

- Encourage controlled access to open space – trail connections, site protection, and signage.
- Public volunteer events, especially hands-on restoration led by experts.
- Public education most important tool in ensuring success of management plan.
- Blaine should maintain healthy water throughout the City and encourage water conservation.

- Manage storm water on site and infiltrate clean groundwater.
- Use native vegetation in all landscaping within the City – parks and open space.
- Encourage partnership in natural resource protection by residents.

Chair McKinley stated she learned much from reviewing the plan. She suggested for next month the NRCB discuss Lochness Park and what can be pursued. Laddie Lake needs some attention and discussion. Ms. Haug suggested Infinite Campus be contacted about partnering with the City. Boardmember Truchon stated she believes the employees of Infinite Campus help keep the area clean. Boardmember Genet noted one of the issues is the unleashed dogs on the site and she questioned whether anything could be done about that. Boardmember Truchon noted a great deal of public money is spent to manage the open spaces. The users of the park need to practice good stewardship. Ms. Haug stated she will discuss with the police department to see if anything can be done. Boardmember Villella suggested the NRCB take a tour of Lochness Park prior to the discussion. Boardmember Genet stated Lochness had a problem with drainage and it may be difficult to get around in the spring as the snow melts. Boardmember Castillo asked if the snow on the ground would prevent the board from seeing the condition to make a management plan.

Chair McKinley suggested 131st Avenue open space for next month's discussion. The NRCB will meet there at 6:30 p.m. prior to the regular meeting.

9. Communications

Lever Street Development – Ms. Haug stated there has been discussion of an open space area off of Lever Street. There is a development in the planning stages and there is a plan for a trail back to the open space. There are no plans for a parking lot but alternatives for parking are available.

Open Space Budget adopted by Council – Ms. Haug stated the budget was approved by the City Council and there were no changes as to what was approved previously.

BWS Brochure Update – Ms. Kunza stated the brochure was updated adding the new logo. She asked the NRCB to review the draft and provide feedback to staff. Boardmember Truchon stated it is very beautiful and is pleasing to look at. She likes the map with the trails which is useful to residents. Boardmember Truchon suggested the vision include the NRCB, the bond fund, and when the site was purchased. Chair McKinley noted that may be too much information to keep the brochure small. Boardmember Castillo suggested some hashtags be used in the brochure. Boardmember Theisen suggested on the back list the titles of the programs that will be offered along with the website. Ms. Kunza stated generally dates are not included to keep the brochure current. An insert could be included on current programs.

BWS Website Update – The City web designer has been working on the website. Ms. Kunza showed the current website. Work is still being done. The attempt is to keep a

consistent message. Boardmember Genet stated the website looks great. She stated quite a few of the photos are not from the site. Ms. Haug stated she was contacted by the Minnesota Seasons today and they requested more information about the site and could they share the BWS information and take pictures. Boardmember Truchon has been looking at paper maps to see if the BWS is noted on maps and hopes that in the future it be shown. She suggested there may be other websites where the BWS could be shown. Boardmember Perkins asked if there is a process for handling donations and Ms. Kunza stated a form would be very easy to create. Boardmember Truchon stated the boardwalk in itself is a nature center and will serve for educational purposes. Chair McKinley asked if staff had a chance to ask about setting up a trust. Ms. Haug stated the City is not able to do that.

Chair McKinley reminded the NRCB that there still is an opportunity to give comments on the proposed Comprehensive Plan from WSB until March 22.

Boardmember Theisen asked if those funds could be earmarked for a brick and mortar nature center since a trust cannot be created. Ms. Haug stated that is part of the long-term budget.

Boardmember Truchon stated through the years a Foundation was discussed and if anyone was interested in starting a foundation in the same way Springbrook has a foundation. No one expressed interest in creating one and the NRCB cannot be involved.

Chair McKinley stated she received an email from an Eagle Scout who lives in Blaine looking for an Eagle Scout project. She asked if any members had a suggestion for a project. Mr. Sable stated Nate Monahan should be contacted at the City about any Eagle Scout projects.

10. Adjournment

MOVED by Boardmember Castillo, seconded by Boardmember Theisen, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.