

KANKAKEE COUNTY SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Minutes June 10, 2021

The Kankakee County Soil and Water Conservation District held its regular monthly board meeting on Monday, June 10, 2021 at 7:30pm. Chairman O'Connor called the meeting to order at 7:27pm. Present were Directors Jeff O'Connor, Alan Wissmiller, Larry Kirchner, Jim Frogge, and Ed Brown, Administrative Coordinator Linda Settle, Resource Conservationist Emilie Watkins, Educational Coordinator Crystal Sauder, Outreach Coordinator Maddie Hanson, and Associate Director John Settle. Absent was District Conservationist Trenton Rader.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Frogge made and Kirchner seconded a motion to approve the agenda with no additions. Motion passed five to zero.

CONSENT AGENDA: O'Connor made and Wissmiller seconded a motion to approve the consent agenda as written. Motion passed five to zero.

SECRETARY REPORT:

Minutes of May 10, 2021 Board Meeting

TREASURER'S REPORT

Approval of Time and Travel
Approval of Financial Report
Approval of Bills

CORRESPONDENCE: N/A

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Approval of NRI Report(s) – Watkins recommended a letter of no effect for NRI case #2021-05. Kirchner made and O'Connor seconded a motion to approve a letter of no effect for NRI case #2021-05, a request to redevelop existing structure into a residential building containing 24-48 apartments that are currently zoned I-2. Motion passed five to zero. Watkins recommended the Board's approval for no opposition for NRI Case #2021-06. Frogge made and Brown seconded a motion of no opposition for NRI Case #2021-06, located Northeast of Grant Park, to rezone from A-1 to A-2 and build a single-family home with a pole barn. Motion passed five to zero.

Watkins also shared we have received the full \$82,435 for the solar NRI reports. Heritage Prairie is anticipated to submit their SUP permitting application to the county by the end of June with a

possible hearing in July. Sauder will attend the county meeting if Watkins is not here. No new news has been reported on the upcoming Essex wind project.

NRI Wind Policy and Application – Watkins reported she is unable to locate any of the old wind NRI reports in the office but did find an old application. Some surrounding SWCDs charge anywhere from \$150-\$300 per turbine, some do the project area, and some do full parcels. Based on how often the project areas charge and completing an NRI report on full parcels would allow for the biggest flexibility, the Board decided completing Special Use Permits for full parcels only. Kirchner made and Wissmiller seconded a motion to complete NRI reports on whole parcels for special use permits (i.e. solar projects, wind projects) moving forward. Motion passed five to zero. Watkins will be updating the policy and posting on website to insure it is updated before the new wind project starts.

Grants – Watkins shared she will hear the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation Board's decision on or around July 13th. If awarded, our District will need three full-time staff members to fulfill the grant. The GDDF grant will support the salary of one full-time staff member. Hanson shared the Cover Crop Champions Grant has been renamed to the Conservation Champions Grant. Applicants are eligible to receive up to \$15,000 in funding to deliver innovative, "out of the box" conservation outreach to producers in their region. This is \$5,000 higher than the Cover Crop Champions Grant we were awarded previously. The deadline to apply for the grant is August 6, 2021. O'Connor is thinking of new plans and ideas to apply for a second round of funding.

Education & Outreach – Hanson discussed the two activities herself and Sauder hosted at Heldt Park. At the beginning of the month they discussed native plants, pollinators, and pollination. Towards the middle of the month, they created mini composters and had a large turnout of over 10 local kids. Sauder shared that their June Nature Quest sessions with the Kankakee Valley Park District were canceled due to no enrollments. Their next set of sessions are supposed to start July 6th, but so far nobody has enrolled. Sauder shared they canceled the May Bird Brain Scavenger hunt due to no enrollment. She is hopeful the Insect Scavenger hunt on June 25th will have some enrollments. Nicole Jenkins, Willowhaven Facility Coordinator for the Bourbonnais Township Park District, shared she has been having very low enrollment rates compared to previous years and is not sure why. Hanson reported herself, Watkins, and Sauder are beginning to plan a Community Habitat Workshop for early December. The District will partner with US Fish and Wildlife Service and Pheasants Forever to promote private lands programs, The Wetlands Initiative to promote edge of field conservation, and FSA and NRCS to promote CRP information and guidance.

Sales – Sauder shared the District made a profit of \$3,498.40 from their Spring Fish Sale. The Spring Tree Sale had a profit of \$1,685.58. The native plant sale had an approximate profit of \$660.72, but there are a couple things needed still to calculate the final profit.

RCPP – Watkins shared the Mantoans received an appraisal but are disappointed in the price per acre. Emy Brawley from the Conservation Fund shared most landowners/farmers are not interested in anything under \$2,000 per acre from the RCPP projects to keep in an agriculture land easement. Watkins shared she is working with The Conservation Fund, Savanna Institute, Black Oaks Center, FSA, and NRCS to organize an open house in Pembroke. She created an easy to follow FSA/NRCS checklist and information on conservation practices for those who attend the open house. Watkins will share a follow-up email to staff after the event to let everybody know the results of the open house.

Agriculture Impact Fees – Watkins shared she is scheduling a phone call with Emy Brawley and Janice Hill, Executive Planner for Kane County Farmland Protection and Local Foods Program. They were the first group to have Agriculture Impact Fees in the state. With the influx of renewal energy coming into the county, having Agriculture Impact Fees set up would help create a pool of money different partners could use for grant match funds to bring in different conservation-based projects into the area.

Peotone Airport – Watkins shared there are no updates on the Peotone Airport’s website concerning the Environmental Impact Statement. She will update the Board when they have released the statement.

NEW BUSINESS:

State Funding – Watkins shared they received FY21 state operations and cost-share funds on May 25th. The FY22 District operations allocation has increased from \$4.5 million to \$8.5 million in the most recent budget bill. The FY22 Partners for Conservation cost-share has been extended for one more year. Hanson will begin to promote cost-share to farmers through fall. Finalized cost-share rates will be approved at the July board meeting. Fall Cover for Spring Savings program funding levels increased from \$330K to \$660K.

Open Meetings Act Update – Hanson shared Pritzker’s most recent executive order for electronic meetings being permitted remain in effect until June 26, 2021. Pritzker will be extending the declaration monthly, most likely through Labor Day.

Health Care Policy – Watkins shared the Board needs to discuss, edit, and approve the District Health Insurance Policy. Sauder is enrolled in Health Insurance through the District, effective July 1, 2021 and the District will receive the invoice. O’Connor made and Wissmiller seconded a motion to approve the new Health Insurance Policy that will now read “Regular, full-time and part-time employees will be offered a health insurance stipend. The District will pay the actual

cost, up to \$300/month, for coverage of a Local Government Health Plan through the State of Illinois upon the completion of a 6-month probationary period.” Motion passed five to zero.

FY2022 Budget – The FY22 budget meeting was postponed until before the July Board Meeting on July 12, 2021 at 7:30am.

Employee FY22 Contracts – Employee evaluations were completed before the Board Meeting for Sauder and Watkins. Sauder will be conducting Hanson’s employee evaluation the following day during work hours. The Board will be giving Watkins a \$2,000 bonus and Sauder each a \$1,000 bonus for the double NRI report they both completed. Sauder has been working under her new contract and pay rate since mid-May. A motion was started to approve Watkins’ new contract and payrate, but Watkins asked to counter her contract. After a discussion with the Board, Watkins’ new hourly pay rate will be \$24 per hour and will have her health stipend removed once on her husband’s insurance. An amend to the motion to change Watkins’ payrate to \$24 per hour starting on July 1, 2021 was made by O’Connor and seconded by Wissmiller. Motion passed five to zero.

Peotone Airport – Frogge reported that Tribune ran an article about the Peotone Airport discussion continuing. Watkins is continually monitoring the Peotone Airport website for the Environmental Impact Statement.

Rock Creek Watershed-based Plan – Watkins shared the Living Waters Consultants Inc. reached out to herself and Sauder concerning a Section 319 grant to create a watershed-based plan for Rock Creek Watershed. The application is July 30, 2021 and Kankakee is a priority watershed for planning this year. 80% of the watershed spans in Will County with the remaining 20% in Kankakee County. In order to apply for the grant, there needs to be a GATA approved organization to submit the application and to provide administrative duties. The District was asked to be the organization that applies and provides the administrative support for the grant. If the District would be interested in this, it would receive 10% of the overall grant amount, which is around \$12,000. With the current task load the District has, it was decided that it would not be a high priority for the District to lead the grant application and administration tasks. The District would like to partner down the road as a committee member if the grant is awarded, due to this matching our mission and vision statement.

Indiana RCPP – The Indiana State Department of Agriculture and other partners in the Kankakee River Basin are using RCPP dollars to create a cost-share program and educating farmers/landowners on soil health, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat. The RCPP will have a EQIP style payment for the conservation practices. Watkins has a phone call with Jennifer Thum in the beginning of July in order to learn more about the Indiana RCPP. A match fund is required from the Illinois side in order to participate.

Watkins shared a project recap for all of the current opportunities and what projects the District needs to prioritize. The GDDF grant to support the RCPP through the Conservation Fund is our highest priority, with Ag Impact Fees and the Conservation Champions Grant following.

Employee Training – Watkins shared Hanson will be taking a Microsoft Excel online training course through KCC that will begin in July. They are submitting the application to the IDOA for reimbursement of the course fee. Sauder and Hanson will pursue NRCS Certified Conservation Planner training, with Hanson taking the priority role. There is no set time for how long it will take to complete the training. Most of the training takes place online, but there are still in-person trainings required, with no set dates. Hanson will start the moving forward with starting the AgLearn courses required for the Certified Conservation Planner training. Watkins shared she wanted to hear the Board’s thoughts on beginning training to write burn plans. There are two online trainings available, with a 3-day burn training course that is in-person now but is being transferred into a virtual version. Due to not being able to charge fees for NRCS burn plans, the Board decided the need for writing burn plans would not be needed outside of NRCS.

REPORTS – In addition to printed reports, if necessary

RC Report – Nothing additional

AC Report – Nothing additional

EC Report – Nothing additional

OC Report – Nothing additional

Outreach Intern – Nothing additional

DC Report – None

FSA Report – None

Committee Reports – None

The next regular District Board Meeting will be July 12, 2021 at 8:00 am with a budget meeting before starting at 7:30 am.

O’Connor made and Kirchner seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion passed five to zero. The meeting adjourned at 9:07 pm.