



## Minutes from July 21, 2016 Quality of Place (QOP) Meeting at SCEDF

**In attendance:** Larry Wickert, Diane Thalmann, Anthony Menning, Rick Anderson, Kathy Lucas, Steve Lucas, Brian McMillen, Anita McMillen, Linda Byer, Paul Byer

Larry Wickert welcomed the attendees to the meeting.

Everyone introduced themselves. Since attendees at this meeting were all from the Bass Lake / Trails (BL/T) team, tonight's focus was on that initiative. The discussion was very educational and provided a more detailed background of the trail situation. Action items were also identified.

Some highlights from the discussion:

- The North Judson Erie Trail (NJET) runs along the former Erie JK Line from North Judson to Hwy 35. It is the western 9 miles of the Erie Trail, which is part of the American Discovery Trail - a network of trails crisscrossing 15 states between California and Delaware. The long term plan is to extend the NJET to join with the eastern portion of the Erie Trail in Pulaski County, known as the Monterey Erie Trail, making the final Erie Trail 17 miles long.
- While the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (HVRRM) owns the right of way (ROW) along the train route where the NJRT trail runs, they have not expressed any interest in maintaining the trail.
- There is a group of volunteers, known as the Prairie Trails Club (PTC), which many of the attendees at this QOP meeting belong to. They have been doing the trail maintenance along the trail route.
- While the PTC has been doing basic trail maintenance, there are many other things that could be done to enhance the trail. They have been able to secure some donations towards benches, historical & educational signage, QR readers and other amenities, as well as in-kind assistance with invasive and other vegetation control, to help maintain and enhance the NJET.
- To date there has not been a formal agreement worked out between the HVRRM and the PTC to enable the PTC to take advantage of all that the volunteers could help with and do.
- Rick Anderson did talk with Corey Bennett, President of the HVRRM, a couple of weeks ago. Their conversation indicated a willingness for the HVRRM to allow extension of the paved trail to Hwy 35 and structures to be added along the trail. Rick will talk again with Corey in the very near future.
- The PTC is interested in talking with the HVRRM leadership to work towards a formal written agreement so they can move forward with the trail extension and other proposed activities.

- This could also be a great future project to partner with the Young Peoples' Group on, especially as they begin to work with Irene and her organization. More discussion on that in the future.

### Action items:

- Rick Anderson will talk again with Corey Bennett.
- Diane Thalmann will check with NIPSCO to see if they have a template that could be used as a starting point for a formal written agreement between the HVRRM and the PTC.
- Bruce Fingerhut will talk with Mark Bailey about a creating a trailhead and putting up signage at Bailey's; also about possibly running bike rentals out of that location.
- Kathy Lucas will check with Lorelei Weimer from the Porter County Tourism to see who they use for bike rentals. (Diane will make an online introduction between Kathy and Lorelei.)
- Kathy will put together a 1 - 2 page proposal of the things that the PTC would like to work on to enhance the trail.
- Diane will reach out to Jerry White from OCRA and begin a dialogue with him about how this part of the Starke County QOL initiative is progressing. We will try to get some guidance from Jerry on next steps and potentially have him meet with this group in the near future.
- Diane and Larry will work through the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) board to see if we could facilitate a future discussion between the HVRRM and the PTC.

Diane commented that this is exactly the type of project that the SCEDF/Chamber team was looking for . . . a passionate group of volunteers who have a viable vision of a project that could enhance the QOL and help make Starke County a better place to live, work, invest and play. And it is also something that the SCEDF/Chamber could help facilitate, as needed.

Kathy referenced the trail system in the Indianapolis area and commented how much of a positive impact it has had for them . . . and how much a trail system can mean to Starke County as well. Everyone agreed!

Diane also shared that a letter went out to all community organizations asking them to please start using the WKVI community calendar and to link to it on their websites. A follow up letter will be sent as well.

Larry Wickert wrapped up the meeting. We decided that the BL/T group would work more independently for a while and communicate via email for anything needed. **Our next meeting date will be set based on discussion with the Young Peoples' Group.** Everyone is encouraged to continue to bring along new people to get involved.