

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
December 18, 2024, 5:30PM**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President Castor

Board members present: Treasurer Allen, President Castor, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Reed, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Schneller  
Board Members absent: Secretary Sams

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Minutes of the November 20, 2024, meeting. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report from November 2024; disbursements from November 22, 2024, through December 11, 2024, in the amount of \$267,487.41; and additions in the amount of \$8,970.61, as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

**IV. COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:**

1. Citizen Mack Thompson 5294 N Kruse Rd. mentioned that he sent an email to the Board and wanted to make sure that they received the communication. Executive Director Culp responded that it was received, and the Board would get the information.

**V. OLD BUSINESS:**

1. No Old Business was addressed.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS:**

**1. Approval of Macon County Conservation Foundation Bylaws Update**

Executive Director Culp discussed that the Macon County Conservation Foundation Bylaws allow for up to 15 board members and require a minimum of six members to be present for a quorum. With everyone's changing schedules it has been difficult sometimes to obtain a quorum to conduct business. The Foundation is Requesting that the Macon County Conservation District approve the request to change the number of required members for a quorum from six members to five.

Trustee Reed commented that she thought it was better to change to a percentage rather than a number. For example, a % of members present or a majority of members present. Trustee Schneller agreed that this was a good thought. Executive Director Culp will take this suggestion back to the Board. Finance and HR Director Besser mentioned that some nonprofits let a majority of those present make decisions, and when it came to larger decisions such as monetary distributions, there could be other rules. Trustee Schneller also said that there maybe needs to be a discussion as to why people are not showing up at the meetings. The Foundation's response will be tabled until the District's February meeting as the Foundation does not meet until after the January MCCD board meeting.

**2. Approval of Blue Cross Blue Shield Premium Cost-Share Update**

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that upon review of the calculations of District vs Employee shares of healthcare premiums, it was discovered that there was an error in the calculations. Upon review, the District owed a greater share and employees a lesser share than previously reported. The total premium amounts and all benefits have not changed. The error was due to not properly applying the cost share percentages to the employee portions of plans that include dependents.

The updated financial impact to the District is:

- 2024 Annual MCCD Cost: \$279,843.36
- 2025 Low-End Annual MCCD Cost: \$282,425.47
  - Low-End Increase from 2024: \$2,582.11 / 0.92%
- 2025 High-End Annual MCCD Cost: \$296,144.89
  - High-End Increase from 2024: \$16,301.53 / 5.85%

These updates result in a range of .92% - 5.85% increase from 2024 depending on employee policy elections. This cost-share update creates a potential increase in MCCD premium costs of up to \$10,969 compared to what was presented at the November 2024 Board meeting. The original total employee premium cost-share estimates could be reduced by up to this amount, and individual employees could save up to \$1,218 annually on their annual premium costs depending on their policy election.

Trustee Reed wanted to be sure that the minutes reflect that the information presented by Gallagher to the board being inaccurate does not please the Board. Trustee Schneller agreed with Trustee Reed that she shares her disappointment and concurs that salaries and benefits are important. Besser commented that the money had not been discussed with employees before the error had been caught, just the cost-share. Therefore, if approved, the employees would not have received any false or changing information. Trustee Reed wanted to reiterate that it's really important to be accurate to the staff.

Trustee Allen moved to approve Blue Cross Blue Shield Premium Cost-Share Update as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

### **3. Approval of the Holiday Break Request**

Executive Director Culp discussed that in reviewing previous discussions regarding staff time off during the period between Christmas and New Year's, it has come to his attention that the proposal made in 2019 was never formally requested or approved. Staff would like to formalize this process for the upcoming year and future years. The factors that should be considered are:

- **Eligibility:** Employees who work a minimum of 1000 hours per year will be eligible for paid time off between Christmas and New Year's, without utilizing their regular PTO.
- **Operational Requirements:** While the office will be closed during this period, the Rock Springs Nature Center will remain open during regular business hours. Operations staff will continue to perform essential duties, including completing rounds to check on and clean up facilities.
- **Snow Days:** In the event of inclement weather, staff members required to work will be handled accordingly.
- **Approval:** This request is being submitted to the Board for tentative approval of the holiday time off for this year. For subsequent years, the granting of time off will be based on the organizational and financial needs of the District, as well as the progress toward achieving District goals.

Trustee Castor asked about clarifying the dates. Nicky Besser confirmed December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> are holidays and January 1<sup>st</sup> is a holiday, so the dates in question are December 26<sup>th</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>. Trustee Allen asked how it was decided who worked, and Director Culp said the staff worked together. Program Director Alysia Callison mentioned that Weekend Staff often work at the Nature Center during this time, and it's not typically hard to get them to fill the shifts. Trustee Reed mentioned that in the current environment it is no big deal, but in the Union environment it will be a big deal. Trustee Allen moved to approve the Holiday Break Request as presented. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **4. Approval of Christy-Foltz Payout #3**

Executive Director Culp explained that The Macon County Conservation District applied for and received an Illinois Park and Recreation Facility Construction grant to construct an Indoor/Outdoor classroom at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Board of Trustees approved a contract with Christy-Foltz in the amount of \$750,578 to complete the interior portion of the project. Christy-Foltz has completed the demolition and completed all the interior wall framing and rough in work for the plumbing and electrical work. Christy-Foltz has submitted their third payout request for this project in the amount of \$86,894.10 for work completed.

Trustee Reed asked if the architects approve the work before a payout and Director Culp confirmed that they do.

Trustee Reed moved to approve the Christy-Foltz Payout as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **5. 4MC Payment Request**

Executive Director Culp discussed that The Macon County Conservation District applied for and received an Illinois Park and Recreation Facility Construction grant to construct an Indoor/Outdoor classroom at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Board of Trustees approved a contract with 4MC Corporation in the amount of \$642,885.65 to complete the exterior portion of the project. 4MC Corporation has completed the removals, rough grading, portions of the walkway and installation of the foundations for the seat walls. 4MC Corporation has submitted a request for a payout based on completed work in the amount of \$294,227.55, which is both the first and second installment because they missed the deadline to submit installment #1.

Trustee Reed moved to approve the 4MC Payment Request noting that this is a combination of two payouts. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **6. Approval of Bid for Manlift**

Operations Director Julius discussed that the District has a 2001 towable 2-45 Eagle Eye manlift. This manlift is moved using a tow vehicle (pickup truck) to position for use. In most circumstances this is a challenge to get positioned correctly being a tow-behind manlift. This unit is also one of the oldest pieces of equipment in the District's fleet. A unit that is self-propelled would be more adaptable to meet the needs of District staff. The District put out for bid a gently used self-propelled manlift. Here are the results of the bids:

- **2018 Genie S-45 with 1777 engine hours:** This machine meets all the specifications in the bid packet. Additionally, this machine has a built in 12.5KW generator, foam filled tires and an operating weight of 15,200 pounds. Unit Cost is \$42,000.00. This bid is from Altorfer Rents of Decatur, IL.

- **2018 Genie S-65 with 1900 engine hours:** This Machine meets all the specifications in the bid packet. Additionally, this machine has a built in 12.5KW generator and an operating weight of 22,270 pounds. Unit cost is \$49,900.00. This bid is from Altorfer Rents of Decatur, IL.

- **2014 JLG 600-S with 2471 engine hours:** This machine exceeds the preferred (less than 2000 hours) and is older than the (2017 or newer) specification. This machine has an operating weight of 21,461 pounds. Unit cost is \$32,400.61. This bid is from United Rentals (North America), Inc. and was disqualified due to not meeting specifications.

The District currently has a 20,000-pound flatbed trailer for hauling equipment. This is the only District trailer large enough to haul the smaller of the two Genie manlifts. The 2018 Genie S-45 can be legally hauled on the District trailer. This manlift meets the specifications of the bid. It additionally has a generator and foam-filled tires which are both nice additions. Staff would like to purchase the 2018 Genie S-45 from Altorfer Rents Decatur, IL to replace the 2001 Eagle Eye 2-45 manlift.

The financial impact is \$42,000.00 for the 2018 Genie S-45. \$50,000.00 was budgeted in Capital Replacement Equipment for a manlift in account number 6850-700. This machine is \$8000.00 under budget.

Trustee Castor wanted to clarify that it had lower engine hours as well and Julius confirmed. Trustee Schneller asked what would be done with the current machine and Julius said they would sell it.

Trustee Reed moved to approve the purchase of the 2018 Genie S-45 from Altorfer Rents Decatur, IL to replace the 2001 Eagle Eye 2-45 manlift as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

## **7. Approval of Fort Daniel Farmstead Name**

Executive Director Culp discussed that the Macon County Conservation District's acquisition of the 242 acres of land adjacent to the Fort Daniel Conservation Area in 2022 and 2023, partly funded by a Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant, was a significant step in preserving the region's cultural heritage. A notable feature of this acquisition was the inclusion of a 6-acre farmstead, which contained the historic 1860 farmhouse and barn. The previous owner, Pat Penhallegon, dedicated many years to restoring the farmhouse and was deeply passionate about its history. His commitment was so strong that he had the farmhouse placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In this application, the farmhouse was officially named the "Eli Ulery House," after its builder, and the farmstead itself was designated as "Woodbine Farm".

Following the acquisition, the Macon County Conservation District has carried forward Pat Penhallegon's preservation efforts, recognizing the house as an important piece of Macon County's cultural history. To further honor this legacy, the District staff seeks to formally name the farmstead "Woodbine Farm," ensuring that the historical significance and the work of preservation continue to be acknowledged. This decision is consistent with the historical name that was included in the original National Register application, helping to preserve both the legacy of the farmstead and the vision Pat Penhallegon had for the property. Naming the farmstead "Woodbine Farm" would maintain its connection to its rich history while supporting the ongoing efforts to conserve this important cultural landmark.

Trustee Schneller mentioned that Pat Penhallegon was very interested in and reverent of history, so it was great to move forward with the name he had utilized.

Trustee Allen moved to approve the naming the Fort Daniel Farmstead, "Woodbine Farm," as presented. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE", Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **8. Approval of Approval of Audit Contract Extension**

Finance and HR Director Nicky Besser discussed that The Macon County Conservation District approved a three-year contract with MCK which ended in 2024. Due to the retirement of Pam Smith, former Director of Finance and Human Resources, it was professionally acceptable to extend the contract with the current auditors for one year to maintain consistency in the Department during this transition. The contract is an extension of the previously approved quote, agreeing that the gross fee, including expenses, will not exceed \$14,000 for the audit, and \$1,000 for the information return preparation.

Trustee Scheller moved to approve Audit Contract Extension as presented. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor; "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **9. Staff Reports**

##### **Jerry Culp, Executive Director:**

Executive Director Culp discussed the PARC Grant for the Rock Springs Nature Center Indoor Outdoor Classroom. A cold snap has slowed the progress of the outdoor classroom although this week it has been warmer and there is work being done. The contractor is taking this time to finalize submittals and material orders to keep the project moving. The indoor portion of the project is still moving forward, the collections room is complete, staff will be relocating the collections to allow for the construction to begin upstairs. There is a delay with the exterior and interior glass doors, but work can be completed while the contractor awaits delivery. Staff will continue regular progress meetings with the contractors to ensure the project stays on schedule. For the OSLAD Grant for the Fort Daniel Pothole Prairie and Season Wetland Restoration, the District received final sign off from the IDNR on the Archeological report. The contracts were executed by the IDNR and forwarded to the District. Now that the District has approval to move forward, staff will be working with the consultants to finalize drawings and prepare for the bidding process. Staff has started working on the Rock Springs Ramble 5K run/walk. The event is scheduled for May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Staff is currently working with the Foundation on a new event at the newly named Woodbine Farm. The event is tentatively scheduled for June 14<sup>th</sup>, with more info to come as event progress is made. The Recreation Trails Program (RTP) grant was approved by IDNR. Staff will be working with the IDNR on contracts for this grant and begin preparation for construction of the trail. The project is estimated at \$218,000 and the grant will match 80%, with a total estimated cost to the District of \$43,600. The Local Government Efficiency Committee has completed the efficiency report and submitted it to the County as required by the Act. The report is required to be filed every ten years. The Committee has been disbanded and will be reestablished when it's time to update the report. The District is continuing to work though the collective bargaining process with The American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees Union. The next collective bargaining meeting is scheduled for December 19<sup>th</sup>. Staff will keep the board informed as progress is made. The budget process is moving along, department budgets are due to Finance at the beginning of December, and draft budgets will be reviewed with each Department Head before inclusion into the proposed budget.

**Phil Julius, Director of Operations**

Operations Director Phil Julius informed the Board that the transition of seasons brings different activities for Operations staff. The latest is going from air conditioning to heating. All furnaces have been fired up and minor repairs and adjustments have been made. Each year is always a mystery as to what issues may come up when starting the furnaces. With the changing season, the District had its first snowfall which led to shoveling sidewalks and salting slick spots. Fortunately, staff had snow removal equipment set up and ready to go. Before the snowy weather, staff had done some final leaf blowing and grinding for the season. So far only one unit has had a hiccup, but that is good considering the number of units there are. One last gutter cleanout was performed as well. Work on the 2025-2026 budget continues. Projects for the coming year are being planned, quotes are being requested from vendors, and numbers are being put into the budget. Operations supervisors have turned their department budgets in, and Julius has started to review them, making minor adjustments. Natural Resources and other Operations staff have been working on invasive plant removal on the Xander property. They have been operating the new skid steer and forestry mower that was delivered November 19, 2024. The new machine has performed well, and staff are grateful for this new piece of equipment and additions. The Archery Deer Herd Management program continues through December 26, 2024. Hunters have been successful at harvesting deer and two turkeys. Hunters in the handicap blinds have had great success this year as well. Being able to offer individuals that otherwise may not be able to hunt anywhere else due to physical limitations, the opportunity to hunt and then to have a successful harvest has been a great addition to the archery Deer Herd Management Program over the past few years. The season ends next Thursday and so far, 45 does and 9 bucks have been harvested. The Safety Committee met in November 2024. The committee is looking into updating the current Crisis Manual. It has been several years since the manual has been updated. A new fire evacuation plan has been created for the Nature Center. This was distributed to staff and had an unexpected trial run when a contractor accidentally caused the fire alarm to go off. No fire was involved, and everyone evacuated the building safely. The committee also brought up E-bikes and electric scooters on trails. These electric devices are not currently referred to in our Rules and Regulations. The committee is going to review current rules and regulations and make additions to include the electric devices that will then need to be approved by the Board of Directors. The staff also went and decorated for Trees on the Tees. More details on the work done per each site are in the packet.

#### **Alysia Callison, Director of Programs**

Director of Programs Alysia Callison discussed that in November there were several public programs, two special events, and many school field trips. The two special events were a Pumpkin Smash and the annual Candlelight Tour. The Pumpkin Smash was an event put on by the University of Illinois Extension office and hosted here at Rock Springs Nature Center. They were not sure what kind of turnout to expect since this was their first time offering something like this, and turnout ended up being quite low. They are not sure if they will try again next year. The Candlelight Tour is an annual event held at the Homestead Prairie Farm here at Rock Springs, and visitors get to tour the farmhouse at night, with the rooms lit only by candle and lamplight. 53 people attended this event. This was a decent turnout, especially since the weather was questionable. As far as school field trips, The District had visits from several schools including sixty 7th graders from Dennis Lab School. Callison liked working with this teacher who asked that they discuss what a habitat does look like, as well as what it should look like, which was a more focused, local program. Outside of programs, much of November was spent working on the budget. Program Services provided input on their budget areas and submitted that at the end of November, and Callison has been working to add that to the budget sheets along with any admin-related expenses and

revenues. Jerry Culp and Callison met with Melody Arnold, a representative of the Decatur Area Audubon Society, to discuss the possibility of adding an intern funded by Audubon next year. Decatur Public Schools also approached Callison about an internship as a high school student identified the District as her top choice. This DPS61 intern will start in January for 3 days a week from 1-3pm. A weekend naturalist resigned, and the position was filled by one of last season's summer interns, Hope Moore. Also, a committee of staff members met to begin thinking about the District's 60th anniversary, which will be in 2026, which starts at the end of the next fiscal year.

Trustee Schneller asked how the intern would be paid. Callison said the District would pay them and the Audubon Society would reimburse the District. Trustee Allen asked about attendance at the meteor shower, and Callison said the weather wasn't great and approximately 15 people attended.

**Ashton Nunn, Marketing Specialist (not present)**

Marketing Specialist Ashton Nunn was not present, so Director of Programs Alysia Callison gave this report. Callison reported that Engagement and Follows are still going well on social channels, although the website visits were down. This may be because October was a huge month because of the Treat Trail. Nunn spent a lot of November out and about including at the Quarterly All Staff Meeting, meetings with CivicPlus and Pagefreezer, the 60th Anniversary Committee meeting, the Environmental Education Association of Illinois Board Retreat with Alysia Callison, the Safety Committee Meeting, the Foundation Board Meeting, and the Chamber of Commerce Thanksgiving Luncheon.

**Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and HR**

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that she worked on facilitating the budget, worked with Gallagher Insurance Brokers on open enrollment, submitted the Tax Levy Ordinance, and has been working on year-end closing and tax documents for employees. She discussed the date of February 19<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 pm for the Budget Hearing, which is before the regular meeting. She asked if it was favorable to the Board and to let her know of conflicts. Besser also mentioned that although she wasn't excited about coming and admitting that erroneous information had been presented in the initial healthcare proposal, she was grateful as it helped the employees, and she appreciated the Board investing in the staff. Trustee Schneller thanked her for catching the error.

**Other Business**

**a. No New Business.**

**VII. COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:**

Trustee Reed wanted to say that the Volunteer Luncheon was wonderful, innovative, and creative and as a Board member she appreciated all the staff and all the work they did. Alysia Callison mentioned that Jenny Garver, the District volunteer coordinator, worked hard and she did a great job. Director Castor seconded the sentiment and appreciated the work of all staff members.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, Trustee Allen MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:24 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed "AYE". Motion carried.

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President

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Secretary