

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

August 28, 2018 4:00 p.m.

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by President Jensen.

Board members present: President Jensen, 1st Vice President Elliott, and 2nd Vice-President Schneller.

Board members absent: Secretary Johnson and Treasurer White

Macon County Conservation Foundation Board Members present: Director Rathje, President McAfee, Director Siudyla, and Director Vermette.

COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE: None

Master Plan Workshop:

Steve Konters with Hitchcock Design Group facilitated a joint meeting with the Macon County Conservation District and Foundation Boards. He emphasized that the workshop was to focus on the needs, strategies to meet those needs and the action plan. The action plan is a preliminary draft pending further input from Board Members and review with staff.

Steve brought both Boards up to date on the process by reviewing the analyze, inventory and connect phase of the project. He shared some highlights from the stakeholders, community, and staff workshops as well as the online survey.

The following was shared with the Boards:

1. A map highlighting the conservation area distribution in Macon County emphasizing that the Northwest and Southeast corners were lacking the presence of the District. Director Rathje suggested that they consider depicting other agencies that are serving the public in those areas to give a clearer picture of where the District needs to reach out to the public.(Such as Lake Shelbyville and Clinton areas)
2. Steve shared that in analyzing the demographics Macon County was decreasing in population and the age distribution showed that the 65 plus age group was increasing.
3. Steve shared a graph bench comparing the District with other similar agencies such as Forest Preserve Districts and other Conservation Districts. The District fared well in comparison when considering McHenry Conservation District as an outlier since it was a considerably a larger organization.

Next Steve reviewed the nine needs that came out of the workshops and online survey:

1. Continue and expand conservation and restoration efforts
2. Increase conservation area connectivity and accessibility
3. Provide new and expanded amenities and programs of community interest and/or need
4. Improve community awareness of conservation areas and programs
5. Foster partnerships with citizen groups and other conservation and recreation agencies
6. Monitor and improve water quality and mitigate watershed impacts
7. Address distribution deficiencies in underserved areas of the county

8. Maintain and update District facilities and structures
9. Identify and develop strategies to maintain operations and management needs

Some discussion followed concerning how they arrived at the needs of the District and the need for conducting a marketing study to understand exactly what the community really needs or wants. The nine “needs” came out of the workshops and online survey. Paul Marien emphasized that the Master plan is a broad plan which will require drilling down for a deeper look. Steve Konters stated that it was a living document and would have to be revisited – it’s just a roadmap.

A suggestion was made regarding need #9 that talked about the benchmark of FTEs per 1,000 acres. It was suggested to Steve Konters that their firm look at another method in determining FTEs beside acreage owned and population of the county.

Next the objectives for each need were reviewed:

Need 1:

- Continue to prioritize management and set goals based on best management practices
- Utilize volunteer groups to assist in regular maintenance
- Leverage partnerships to obtain materials, equipment, and staff to complete projects
- Identify properties with conservation and/or restoration value for acquisition
- Continue to advance and implement a plan for farmland conversion
- Develop goals and implementation strategies for land acquisition over the next 5 years
- Develop Funding source reserved for land acquisition

Need #2:

- Develop District-wide trail plan
- Improve wayfinding and identification signage to improve visitor awareness and navigation
- Identify closed conservation areas to be opened recreation activation
- Add programming and events at all conservation areas and other community spaces prioritizing population centers
- Work with transit providers to connect conservation areas to public transportation
- Provide shuttle service from population centers to key conservation areas

Some discussion followed concerning working with transit providers and the language that was used in the action plan “conduct feasibility study to provide shuttle service”. Is feasibility not strong enough and was the year 2020 too late to conduct study?? Steve reminded the Board members that the action plan was still in the draft stage and their comments and/or suggestions were welcome.

Need#3:

- Provide in demand outdoor recreation amenities to meet community demand and benchmarking needs

- Provide restrooms with water access and drinking fountains at publicly accessible conservation areas
- Expand outdoor interpretive signage and events
- Provide programs that meet resident interests
(*Some discussion followed concerning this being a living topic and would have to be constantly re-evaluated.*)

Need#4:

- Continue to participate in local outreach with engaged user groups, schools, and other conservation and preservation agencies
- Continue to utilize social media and website resources to reach visitors
- Develop special events at all five accessible conservation areas to promote available recreation opportunities and facilitate staff and resident communication

Need#5:

- Continue to develop and expand partnerships

Need#6:

- Continue to prioritize management and set goals based on best management practices
- Identify properties with aquatic features, stream buffers and potential watershed impacts for future acquisition and protection
- Continue to stabilize eroded streambanks
- Provide educational opportunities discussing the importance of water quality and Conservation District efforts to manage and improve water quality.
- Utilize volunteer groups to assist in regular maintenance and special events such as river clean-ups

Need#7:

- Identify acquisition opportunities in underserved areas of the community
- Monitor population changes and demographic shifts

Need#8

- Develop management and restoration standards for barns and other farm structures to guide future use or demolition
- Complete planned interpretive updates and museum renovation at Rock Springs Nature Center
- Maintain partnership with Oglesby Mansion Inc., and interior maintenance of the Oglesby Mansion
- Develop plan for Rock Springs Bottling Plant
(*Some discussion followed concerning what the Bottling plant was and where it was located*)

Need#9:

- Identify and pursue additional funding sources for land acquisition, restoration, land management, amenity development and programming
- Align Conservation District resources including staff, equipment, and funding to continue effective completion of District initiatives and upkeep

After reviewing the objectives, Steve Konters reviewed the 10-year action plan. It was noted that the action plan correlates with the nine needs/strategies and is coded accordingly with numbers. A question was raised as to the Trustee's responsibility for the action and how that works. Paul Marien and Steve both informed them that the final draft of the plan would have to go before the Board of Trustees for approval so in essence the Board of Trustees is approving the plan to be implemented.

Katherine Unruh voiced concern whether or not it was feasible to open up additional conservation areas such as Wright Banton and Leiby Hall especially since some of the open conservation areas are already underutilized. Paul Marien emphasized that opening up some of the areas would take minimal work to get them open to the public. Questions were raised if utilization is increased whether or not the District would be able to accommodate the increased traffic such as parking. Trustee Jensen mentioned that the Audubon Society had an interest in opening Wright Banton. Several Board members were not familiar with Leiby Hall so Paul briefly explained it was a 35 acres piece of property with a pond close to the Rock Springs Conservation Area.

Some specific topics discussed in reviewing the action plan were as follows:

- Question was raised as to the need to redesign restrooms at Fort Daniel and the response was that this was a result of the online survey in which restrooms ranked fairly high on the scale. Currently Fort Daniel has pit toilets. Discussion followed with concern that it's a matter of interpretation. Trustee Schneller asked if the individuals who completed the survey could be contacted for more details on their responses and the answer was no. Thus, the reason to form focus groups to get more clarification on what the public wants to see happen.
- Hosting special events at Griswold and Friends Creek due to lower visitation to those areas
- Opening Kaufman Conservation Area would increase public access to urban population
- Discussion regarding terminology such as "develop" designated fund for land acquisition – terms are important and use of terms needs to be reviewed
- Discussion took place concerning the information behind the strategies
- The overall consensus seemed to indicate that this was a very aggressive plan. Steve Konters emphasized the need to take advantage of the entire 10 years for this very reason. Paul Marien commented that the entire plan needed to be shoved out a year to allow time to complete some current projects and more time to prepare for budgeting.
- Steve Konters emphasized that the action plan needed to be updated at least every five years.

Paul Marien is to email out the action plan to the Board members and Steve Konters asked them to respond with their thoughts to Paul by September 14, 2018.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Elliott MOVED to adjourn the Regular Public Meeting at 6:10 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. All members of the Board present voted, "AYE". Motion carried.

President

ATTEST:

Secretary