

Friends of the St. Joseph River  
Board & Annual Membership Meeting  
March 23, 2023  
Via zoom  
Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Grace

**Meeting Started** by Matt Meersman at 1:02 pm

**Board Present:** Daragh Deegan, Matt Meersman, Chris Temple, Carolyn Grace, Ron Niezgodski, Grant Poole, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Annie Klehfoth, Jordan Shedd, Jeff Wenzel, and Carol Higgins

**Other Members Present:** Doug McLaughlin, Becky Shank, Melissa DeSimone, Janel Meyer, Pat Wiltshire, Nancy Carpenter,

**Visitors Present:** Eric Anderson, Aimee Wentworth, Jill Swartz, Terry Loomis, Brian Will, and David Maturen, Kristi Todd,

**Approval of the February Board Minutes:** C. Higgins motioned to accept the February board minutes, second by Jeff Wenzel. Motion passed

**Treasurer Report:** Kim Sinclair, presented the profit and loss statement and the balance sheet. Currently the group has \$56,884.36 in the bank. Net income is -\$550.16 for the year with \$300 in membership dues and \$50 in the form of a donation since the last meeting. Jeff Reece made a motion to accept the Treasurer's report; Ron Niezgodski second, motion passed.

### **Old Business**

**Action Taken Via Email** included the Board voting for the winner of the Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award. Matt reported that there were two great candidates nominated and the winner will be announced at the Watershed Celebration.

**Watershed Collaborative Event** is scheduled for Friday May 12, 2023 and will be held in conjunction with the Symposium at Pinhook Park Community Center in South Bend. The Symposium will be from 1-4pm speakers talking about 2 stage ditches, controlled tile drainage, flood plain reconnection and more. After the symposium there will be a cash bar, and the attendees can leave or stay for happy hour. The Celebration will start at 5:30 pm with a welcome message and then dinner. Grace mentioned she had dishes and silverware for the event. Chris Temple will invite and sponsor the attendance of a local newspaper reporter. Matt gave Annie and Daragh a lot of credit for helping to plan the event.

### **New Business**

**Election of Directors:** Meersman reported that there were 7 people interested in filling the 5 seats up for election, including all 5 members with expiring terms. He provided an online poll to vote for the 5 seats after giving the candidates present an opportunity to talk about why they want to serve on the Board. After closing the poll, Matt shared the results, which showed Matt Meersman, Kim Sinclair, Ron Niezgodski, Shaun Grace and Doug McLaughlin receiving the most votes. Matt said he would file the voting report generated by Zoom to verify the membership of those who voted. The new Board will vote for officers at the next meeting.

**Earth Day Event:** Nancy Carpenter explained that in Berrien County they will be having an event at Hull Park in Benton Harbor and if you would like to attend, please RSVP to her at the Berrien County Conservation District. If any board member or volunteer would like to represent the Friends at a table let her know. Along with this event Ox Creek trash pick up will be happening. She will have waders for people to borrow and really hopes families will participate and enjoy the event.

**Announcements from the floor:**

**Items for Discussion**

**Doug McLaughlin** spoke about Earthviews and the progress they have made with the St. Joseph River data upload. Continue to watch for more as they add this information to the website.

**Pat Wiltshire** shared his experience conducting a workshop about county-wide lake monitoring with help from Kate Barrett and the LaGrange County Soil and Water District. He demonstrated EPA's "How's My Waterway" tool.

**Becky Shank** reported that the theme for this year's Three Rivers Festival in June is Tropical. The people from Smithsonian will have a display at the Silman House about Innovation come and check that out. The feature will include the St. Joseph River movie.

**Grant Poole** encouraged people to check out the EPA tool mentioned by Pat Wiltshire and Doug McLaughlin.

**Matt Meersman** provided a brief explanation of a couple water related bills he is following in the Indiana legislature. House bill 1639 would allow for the creation of "Watershed Development Commissions", which could levy a special assessment against landowners to raise money for watershed management efforts. Senate bill 414 is related to on-site sewage treatment, but a seemingly unrelated amendment was recently made that removes wetland protections.

**Daragh Deegan** mentioned that Ron Niezgodski's brother David was a sponsor of SB 414 and Ron said he would talk to him about what could be done to remove the amendment.

**Melissa DeSimone** shared information about the Michigan Lakes & Streams Association's event at Crystal Mountain on May 5 and 6<sup>th</sup>. She named lots of great speakers who would be there including someone from the Two Rivers Coalition who is connected to our watershed.

**Jeff Reece** made a motion to adjourn with the understanding that next month's meeting will be held virtually. Seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Meeting adjourned

**Next Friends meeting will be held virtually on Thursday April 27, 2023, via ZOOM.**