

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
March 7, 2019**

The first quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission in 2019 was held on March 7, 2019, in the Elkhart County Public Services Building, Goshen, Indiana. Martin Franke, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman introduced himself and Leah Thill, with MACOG, and discussed the role and makeup of the SJRBC. Roll call was taken and it was noted a quorum was present with the following members in attendance:

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Martin Franke, LaGrange County  
Phil Barker, Elkhart County  
Adam Bowden, City of Mishawaka  
Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart  
Mark Espich, St. Joseph County  
Kieran Fahey, City of South Bend  
Larry Gilbert, Steuben County  
Jim Hess, Elkhart County  
Dona Hunter, LaGrange County  
Dan Lash, Noble County  
John Law, St. Joseph County  
Sarah Longenecker, St. Joseph County  
Sue McGee, City of Kendallville

Janel Meyer, Steuben County  
Jim Moyer, Kosciusko County  
Lydia Mertz, M.D., Elkhart County  
Jeff Moore, Town of LaGrange  
Roger Nawrot, St. Joseph County  
Jeremy Price, Indiana DNR  
Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County  
Kris Thomas, City of Angola  
Alicia van Ee, Steuben County  
Robert Weaver, Kosciusko County  
Suzie Weirick, Elkhart County  
Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Jordan Beehler, Elkhart Co. SWCD  
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart Co. Health Dept.  
Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen MS4  
Jamie Miller, Indiana DNR  
Ron Niezgodski, FotSJR

Sue Stuckman, Elkhart Conservation Club  
Cassy White, St. Joseph Co. Health Dept.  
Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik  
Matt Meersman, MACOG  
Leah Thill, MACOG

**MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 6, 2018**

Martin Franke asked for the Commission to consider the minutes of the December 6, 2018 meeting. There being no additions or corrections, the following action was taken:

ADAM BOWDEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER  
2018 REGULAR MEETING. LYDIA MERTZ SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR.  
THE MOTION CARRIED.

**FINANCIALS**

**Financial Report**

Matt Meersman provided the financial report for the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2019 (10/01/18 – 12/31/18). Financial reports and bank statements were provided to the members of the Commission for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt drew the Commission's attention to the Statement of Financial Activities. During the December meeting he indicated the SJRBC financial account had changed to a different bank. Due to the change, the amount of interest earned each month will increase from about \$3.00 to between \$200 and \$300 per month. Overall, the quarter ended with a change in net assets of \$13,051.19.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. Matt shared the Total Fund Balance was \$139,036.96 and indicated the Commission was in a strong position and could support operating costs for approximately two years of activity if necessary.

Martin Franke asked if Matt thought it was appropriate for representatives from the member local governments to question when they notice their entity has not paid its appropriated amount. Matt responded it is his responsibility to request funding and if any Commission members have any questions now or in the future, they should feel free to ask him. Counties have different payment cycles; formal invoices will be distributed in April.

Martin asked if there were any questions or discussion regarding any of the financial statements. Hearing none, he called for a motion to approve the quarterly financial statements ending December 31, 2018.

SUZIE WEIRICK MOVED TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR PERIOD ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2018. DARAGH DEEGAN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **Approval of Claims**

A list of the quarterly claims and a description of invoices received was distributed to the SJRBC members for review. Claims included invoices for October, November, and December MACOG expenses, mileage reimbursement to the River Basin Program Director, and legal expenses. There being no questions regarding any of the expenses, the following action was taken;

ROGER NAWROT MOVED TO APPROVE THE CLAIMS AND PAYMENT OF THE EXPENSES AS PRESENTED. DARAGH DEEGAN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Matt Meersman briefly reported on his efforts on behalf of the SJRBC over the last quarter that he said would not be addressed in other items on the agenda.

#### Administration

Quite a few administrative functions were completed over the last quarter including website management and updates, meeting preparation, invoicing, reporting, and budget development, as well as working with the State Board of Accounts to resolve issues with the SJRBC Tax Identification Number. Matt also met with the President of WNIT Public Television about a documentary project he would like to do on the St. Joseph River. The working theme is "Celebrating the St. Joe" and WNIT is looking to the SJRBC to assist with story ideas for the potential, multi-episode documentary.

### Education Outreach

The Basin Director has had numerous opportunities for Education Outreach. Matt had the opportunity to attend a couple of different workshops, offer several presentations, and provide relevant reports.

A location in LaGrange County has been secured to host a Floodplain 101 Workshop. It will be held at the Wolfe Community Building, in Shipshewana, on June 19. Matt is working with the City of Elkhart, Elkhart County, Indiana DNR, and the Director of the Maumee River Basin Commission to organize the event.

### Advocacy

Matt has been following a couple of bills (Senate Bill 4 and House Bill 1406) concerning a “Water Task Force” related to regional water planning. The Indiana Finance Authority will potentially be receiving funds they would need to allocate to communities for drinking, storm and waste water infrastructure. Matt met with members of the Indiana Water Resources Association to discuss how this legislation could affect existing commissions. Matt suggested the Commission members review the bills and the ranking criteria they contain. He has also been monitoring House Bill 1266 regarding storm water regulations.

### Partner Support / Awareness

Matt indicated a letter of support was provided to the Indiana University Conservation Law Center for a Flood Attenuation Study – an official response has not been received.

The LaGrange County Surveyor’s office and GIS department has some new staff members. Matt reported that he has spent some time assisting them with water related GIS data.

The Great Lakes Protection Fund project activities slowed down near the end of the quarter but a project team meeting was recently held and an invoice was submitted. The Commission should receive about \$3,500 from the project later in the month.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Basin Updates – Commission Members**

Last fall, Martin Franke was contacted by the Indiana Geologic Survey. A seismic monitor was installed a couple miles north of LaGrange – Martin is not aware of those results. Then, a couple weeks ago a drill rig was sent that drilled down to the bedrock (about 220 feet) collecting four-inch soil samples to analyse the effects of glacial activity in northern Indiana.

On behalf of the Friends of the St. Joe, Dona Hunter invited the members to the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Water Celebration on March 22, in Sturgis. The featured presentation will be “Feathered Friends of the River”. Matt Meersman will be serving as the Celebration’s MC.

Kiernan Fahey informed the Commission that he will be co-hosting an Indiana University Environmental Resiliency Institute webinar on March 13, from 12:00 – 1:00 PM. The webinar is titled “Managing Storm Sewer Flooding”.

### **2019 SJRBC Symposium Planning**

Traditionally, the annual Symposium has been held at Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve in Niles, Michigan. This year, it was decided to move the event to Pokagon State Park and it will be held on May 10, 2019. Matt indicated he was not able to secure enough presenters to do an Ignite style presentation as has been done in the past. However, Pete Hippensteel with the Steuben County Lakes Council will present on “Lakes Country: Where the River Begins.”

Also, Matt noted there will be a presentation by Ron Hellenthal, a member of the Juday Creek Taskforce, on “Influencing Development and Drainage Management”.

The keynote “Managing Flooding and Sediment in Rivers and Streams” will be presented by Robert Barr, IUPUI Center for Earth and Environmental Science, and Siavsh Beik, with Christopher B. Burke Engineering.

In the past, attendance has been capped at 70 due to the capacity of Fernwood. Matt explained the current budget also reflects an attendance cap, but probably closer to 100 attendees. Due to the limits, invitations are first offered to Commission members and their proxies, then to key stakeholders, then to the larger outreach group.

Martin Franke wanted to know how restrictive the attendance cap has been. Matt responded that no one has been turned away in the past, but they have bumped up the number because there is more room at Pokagon. The additional capacity at Pokagon could also create an opportunity for registrants beyond the cap to pay for their meals.

For the future, Fernwood is happy to have the Symposium return to their venue. They have a new education center that will seat more people and has better audio/visual equipment. If things go well at Pokagon this year, the suggestion was made to alternate between the two locations.

### **State Budget Request**

Since the last Commission meeting, the State Budget Bill (HB 1001) was introduced and it includes an increase in funding for the SJRBC. The increase is from \$52,487 to \$105,000 annually. The Kankakee and Maumee River Basin Commissions also receive special project based appropriations in the State budget. In the future, Matt indicated the SJRBC could make a request for special project funding as well.

John Law stated that he is also a member of the Kankakee Commission. He said the special funding they received is due to the serious flooding that occurred in 2016. The State is looking more closely at river basin commissions to help mitigate flooding. The Kankakee is a highly altered system. It has gone from 218 miles down to 80 miles and is highly vulnerable.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Budget Planning**

The fiscal year will end on June 30, 2019 so, at the June 6 SJRBC meeting, Matt will present the FY 2020 budget for approval. Also at the June meeting, the contract with MACOG will be offered for approval.

As previously discussed, the amount of funding from the State and local governments is increasing. The reverse is true as well and some of the expenses will be increasing.

Matt explained that when he started as the Director and a new contract was negotiated with MACOG, the Commission was losing as much as \$20,000 a year. The contract was generously negotiated at a low rate for rent and overhead expenses. The MACOG office is expanding, which will allow the Commission office to grow as well. The overall cost of rent and overhead is increasing in proportion to the amount of space that will be utilized.

Matt created a draft budget for discussion and explained that it addresses some of the concerns about sustaining the basic operations of the Commission and the compensation of the Director. Matt's goal has been to cover the basic operations portion of the budget with local government funding. Because of this goal, the Director has been resistant to an increase in compensation. However, as part of the new contract negotiation, the MACOG Executive Director is asking the SJRBC to consider a \$2.00 per hour increase in the SJRBC Director's hourly rate.

A potential concern voiced by SJRBC members in the past is the future need for a full-time Director. Currently, the position is contracted and budgeted based on a part-time hourly (up to an average of 30 hours per week) employee without benefits. The contract can be revised to allow for the hiring of a full-time Director and if, in the future, it becomes a necessity, funds can be shifted within the budget to make the modification.

Matt will coordinate an Executive Committee meeting with the MACOG Executive Director, James Turnwald, to discuss the new contract, proposed changes, and the SJRBC Director's performance and compensation.

With the increase in funding and Matt's desire to remain part-time, he explained the draft budget allows for additional staff support from MACOG. A line item already exists for this purpose in the current budget and contract. With some amending, the contract could allow for additional staff support, provided it is requested by the SJRBC and reflected in its budget.

Matt indicated a significant portion of the draft budget is allocated for water monitoring. Going forward, he would like to focus on three types of monitoring.

1. Expand the existing biological monitoring program in the basin:

Things that live in the water (bugs and fish) give the best long-term indication of the health of a waterbody. Chemistry monitoring gives a “snapshot” of what is currently happening, but it can change quickly because of land use or a rain event. The City of Elkhart has a biological monitoring program that currently operates throughout Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties with a focus on the Cities of Elkhart and South Bend. There has been discussion of bringing on additional staff in order to monitor more sites. There could be one or more sites added in Steuben, Noble, LaGrange, and Kosciusko Counties.

2. Expand the existing flow monitoring within the basin:  
The flow gauge on Waldron Lake has been critical for Noble County. Matt has been talking with the USGS, IDNR, County Surveyors and SWCDs to identify gaps in flow and volume data. There may be historical gauges in the basin that could be brought back on-line with additional funding.
3. Develop a volunteer based seasonal bacteria monitoring program:  
Bacteria in the water that negatively affects people does not necessarily have a negative impact on the fish and bugs. Matt asked the Commission to consider the coordination of a volunteer based seasonal bacteria monitoring program. Volunteers would collect samples from a few locations that are not already being tested. There is potential to coordinate with the labs at local wastewater plants to test the samples.

Martin Franke shared that he has access to a water testing lab and some equipment but no funding for operation. He suggested there might be more equipment in other places available for use, but lacking resources for operation.

Sue McGee noted the City of Kendallville tests two lakes for bacteria once each week, from April through Halloween. Daragh Deegan indicated the City of Elkhart tests weekly as well. Matt stressed the desire for SJRBC to collect all of the different types of data that are available and be the communicator of the data and disseminate it to local government and the public; even if the Commission is unable to contribute additional information.

Suzie Weirick wanted to ensure the new contract with MACOG, which would include the opportunity to pay a full-time Director and hire additional staff, still provides the ability to receive grant funding and hire staff associated with it. Additionally, she wanted to make sure the amount budgeted for the Director’s compensation is available on an annual (rather than monthly or quarterly) basis to make sure all time worked is compensated.

Meersman presented the draft FY 2020 budget for discussion. He noted that Operating Expenses have increased in the proposed budget to \$63,160. The 5% increase would be reflected in the FY 2020 local government appropriation requests. Further, he noted the budget amounts for Additional MACOG Staff and Conference/Training Attendance have been shifted to the Special Projects portion of the budget. Education and Outreach were combined into one line item.

Adam Bowden stated that with the expanding role of the Commission a 5% increase is a reasonable request.

John Law asked if the actual Postage expenditure for FY 2018 was correct at \$12.08. Matt responded the postage decreased significantly after they stopped mailing the meeting packets.

Martin Franke requested verification of the increase in Office Rent. Matt confirmed it was correct and based on square footage and the increase in MACOG's rent to St. Joseph County.

Matt Meersman asked the Commission to consider what projects they would like to have done with the funding that is received from the State. Now that local government provides the funding for basic operations, the SJRBC has project funding available. It was noted the ability to support special projects is one of the primary reasons the Commission was created.

### **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

There were no items from the floor.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, Martin Franke called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

DONA HUNTER MOVED TO ADJOURN THE SJRBC MEETING. ROGER NAWROT SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

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Martin Franke, SJRBC Chair