

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
June 2, 2022**

The second quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2022 was held on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube. Due to technical difficulties some portions of the meeting were not included, but a recording of what was captured is available here: <https://youtu.be/KW3MgD-YBzM>

Kris Thomas, Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself along with Kate Barrett, Brandon Bowman, and Ashley Matthews from the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG). He briefly reviewed instructions for participation and discussed the purpose and makeup of the SJRBC. Roll call was taken, and it was noted a quorum was present with the following members in attendance:

**VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT IN PERSON:**

<i>Chair:</i> Kris Thomas, City of Angola	Andy Laughlin, Steuben County
<i>Vice-Chair:</i> Alicia Walsh, Steuben County	John Law, St. Joseph County
<i>Secretary:</i> Adam Bowden, City of Mishawaka	Sarah Longenecker, St. Joseph County
<i>Treasurer:</i> Jim Hess, Elkhart County	Sue McGee, City of Kendallville
Phil Barker, Elkhart County	Janel Meyer, Steuben County
Mark Espich, St. Joseph County	Brad Rogers, Elkhart County
Kieran Fahey, City of South Bend	Randy Sexton, Noble County
Martin Franke, LaGrange County	Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County	Steven Vaughn, LaGrange County
Ray Hoover, Town of LaGrange	Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County
Dan Lash, Noble County	

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Todd Clark, Elkhart SWCD	Kate Barrett, MACOG
Mattie Lehman, City of Goshen	Brandon Bowman, MACOG
Ryan Miller, City of Goshen	Ashley Matthews, MACOG
Jenna Wait, Elkhart SWCD	Matt Meersman, MACOG
Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik	

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Kris Thomas, SJRBC Chair, reminded members that they can request to have any item removed from the consent agenda if they believe it warrants its own separate vote.

**Minutes – March 3, 2022**

Kris asked the Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes of the March 3, 2021, meeting. Hearing no corrections or additions, Kris moved on to the next item on the consent agenda.

**Financial Report**

Matt presented the financial report for the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2022 (01/01/22 – 03/31/22). Financial reports were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting. A Fiscal Year End Forecast was included to help with the budget discussion later in the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities (Profit & Loss). He noted the local government income was low last quarter, but is now back to expected due to local government appropriations received. He said there will still be a shortfall on local government appropriations due to Steuben County not meeting the requested contribution. Matt explained that accounting services expenses were reduced due to handling the financial reporting and invoicing himself. The YTD expenses for water monitoring were lower due to invoices that had not been paid yet.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. There were no receivables. Matt noted the accounts payable was for services provided by MACOG. Total Fund Balance for the FY22 Q3 was \$349,769.89.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and mentioned that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 03/31/21. Matt reminded everyone that the quarterly appropriation from the State of Indiana for FY21 Q4 was not received until FY22 Q1 along with their Q1 funds, so it is about \$22,000 higher than normal for the year. He also explained that the appropriations from Goshen, Kendallville, South Bend and Mishawaka had not been received as of 03/31/22.

Matt asked if there were any questions on the financial report. Hearing no questions, he moved on to the next item in the consent agenda.

### **Claims – June 2, 2022**

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$37,500.00 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included invoices from MACOG for January, February, and March expenses, and Thorne Grodnik for quarterly legal services. There were also invoices from Christopher Burke for the Flood Resilience Planning Project and Midwest Biodiversity Institute (MBI) for water monitoring data analysis. Matt asked if there were any questions about the claims, or any other items from the consent agenda.

Hearing no questions or comments, Kris called for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA.  
BRAD ROGERS SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **Existing Projects**

Matt noted that all of the existing projects fall under the heading of Special Projects in the budget, and they would not be possible without the financial support of the local government members of the Commission, which cover the cost of basic operations.

#### **Wetland Task Force**

Matt stated Senate Bill 389 was passed last year and as a result the Wetlands Task Force was created to review state wetland regulations. Task Force Members were asked to complete a ranking exercise of eight different items in order to determine priorities to be discussed at upcoming meetings. Matt said the first priority is consistency between the state and federal level of regulations. The second and third priorities are determining incentives for voluntary wetland restoration and the preservation of existing wetlands and avoidance during development.

Matt then shared that the Great Lakes region of the National Audubon Society commissioned a poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies which determined 94% percent of Hoosiers wanted to maintain existing wetland laws or make them stronger. Martin Franke said he feels there is an inappropriate reliance on the National Wetland Inventory because it is inaccurate and outdated information. He said LaGrange County uses the National Wetland Inventory for planning and zoning purposes. Matt agreed the maps are not useful for regulatory purposes due to inaccuracy and changes in land use.

### **Member/Partner Support**

Matt discussed opportunities for member/partner support and how it demonstrates the value of SJRBC. He said presence at local meetings and building relationships with Commission members helps identify how the Commission can support water management efforts. Matt said Kate's work analyzing Elkhart County's storm water data allowed SJRBC to participate in the recent Elkhart County Leadership Summit to promote investments in sewer connections and better agricultural land management practices.

Matt then presented an opportunity to support the City of Kendallville with their MS4 educational programs. Sue McGee explained that funding for the programs was significantly reduced in Kendallville's budget. Matt said that he would like to provide \$5,000.00 of financial support for the programs, which technically does not require the Commission's approval, but he would prefer to have the Commission formalize the decision together. He explained that the funding would come from the partner support portion of the Commission's budget.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO APPROVE \$5,000.00 FOR THE CITY OF KENDALLVILLE'S MS4 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. JIM HESS SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

The next opportunity Matt presented was helping Steuben County with better stormwater and drainage policies and programs. As Lynne Leichty discussed during the March SJRBC meeting, Steuben County does not have enough funding to maintain their existing stormwater and drainage systems. They need a strategy that addresses maintenance of the current system and the need for expanded capacity. Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County Surveyor, said the approval of housing developments without adequate stormwater retention is creating flooding and capacity issues. Matt proposed hiring Burke Engineering for up to \$10,000.00 to complete a water management audit that includes the review of existing drainage, stormwater, and floodplain management policies, creating a flood resilience checklist, and a list of recommendations with examples. The findings would be reviewed in a small group including local officials and the Maumee River Basin Commission. After the feedback is incorporated the information would be presented to the County Commissioners. The funding would come from planning/resource development and would not be billed until next fiscal year.

RANDY SEXTON MOVED TO APPROVE HIRING BURKE ENGINEERING FOR UP TO \$10,000.00 FOR A WATER MANAGEMENT AUDIT FOR STEUBEN COUNTY. ADAM BOWDEN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

### **Drainage Benefit Apportionment**

Matt stated he has continued work on the LaGrange County drainage benefit apportionment. The land cover and soil types help the County Surveyor's office determine how landowners benefit from drain maintenance. Matt assisted the LaGrange County Surveyor and Drainage Board with apportionment and flow modeling of the J. W. Knight Drain. He also accompanied the County Surveyor on an inspection of Little Elkhart Creek from Cree Lake to Witmer Lake. Deputy Surveyor Steve Vaughn said the benefit apportionment helps alleviate the cost burden on some farmers and redistribute it more fairly. The traditional method of apportionment is still used for tile systems. Apportionment using the new method must be updated regularly due to changes in land use and management. The update will require a public notice and hearing process.

### **Water Monitoring Program**

Kate Barrett introduced Brandon Bowman, a new intern for SJRBC, who has been assisting her with the water monitoring program. Brandon is a Biology major at Holy Cross College with minors in Public Health and Environmental Science. Kate stated the data analysis from the Midwest Biodiversity Institute in Ohio has been completed. Based on the biological monitoring results, five sites were rated as very good/exceptional, three sites were rated good, and three sites were rated fair. Ray Hoover asked where the Pigeon River sampling site was due to the fair rating. Kate said the sampling was completed from the public access site near Scott, IN. Ray asked if sewage or lawn fertilizer would lead to the less than good rating. Kate explained that it is hard to identify any particular source at this point. She would like to look at the data collected over time to see if changes in water quality could be related to changes in land use.

Kate discussed other water monitoring projects she has been working on. She has been helping the Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership interpret previously collected data from nearly 60 sites. Kate shared an example of the types of figures that will be generated in a forthcoming report that will be made available to the public. The figures showed the levels of dissolved oxygen from numerous sites, and Kate explained that dissolved oxygen was important for aquatic life. Kate is also assisting the Pokagon Band DNR and Elkhart Aquatics Program in their study of legacy contaminants, and she has been analyzing long-term *E. coli* trends in the St. Joe River. She is working on putting all the information together in graphs and interactive web maps and sharing it with the public for education and outreach. John Law said there should be data available from Project WILD and Aquatic WILD that might be useful. Kate will follow up to see if that data is available.

Martin Franke said four monitoring sites have been reestablished in LaGrange County through Hoosier Riverwatch. He asked if Matt and Kate would come to a board meeting to reenergize the water management efforts with the County Commissioners. Kate will reach out to Martin after the meeting to discuss further.

Matt stated the ToltHawk devices have not been purchased yet, but he plans to before the end of the fiscal year. He said the devices only tell the height of the water and he would like to get discharge estimates as well. Matt said state-discharge curves need to be created to understand the regional detention needs in Phillips Ditch. Matt said there is not capacity to do this in-house and suggested using Tritium, a local hydrogeologic consulting service. Tritium would create the state-discharge curves with a total of five field visits to each of the five gauging stations for less

than \$10,000.00. Additional analysis would include streambed conductivity testing for \$2,425.00 and a final summary report for \$3,300.00. Matt said this option would be less expensive than USGS gauges. The field work and measurements would be necessary to quantify stream discharge in Phillips Ditch. Matt asked the Commission for approval to hire Titrium for the field work in Phillips Ditch.

JOHN LAW MOVED TO APPROVE SPENDING UP TO \$15,600.00 ON FIELD WORK IN PHILLIPS DITCH. DAN LASH SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Matt followed up on the idea of creating an advisory committee to help guide the water monitoring strategy. He would like to engage Commission members who represent different interests and suggested the involvement of the following members: Daragh Deegan, Alicia Walsh, Adam Bowden, and Randy Sexton. Matt's goal is to better understand and predict the impact of change on water infrastructure. Matt said he had discussed requirements for special meetings with the Commission's attorney and said this effort would be subject to Indiana's Open Door Law. Matt will continue to update the Commission as he works with the Commission's attorney to determine how to proceed.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **FY 23 Work Plan & Budget Adoption**

#### *Work Plan*

A proposed FY23 Work Plan was provided prior to the meeting. Matt said the drainage projects are now included under Member/Partner Support. He also noted Planning/Resource Development includes drainage, stormwater, and floodplain management audits for members. Matt explained these small changes in the work plan will help support the budget.

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY23 WORK PLAN. JANEL MEYER SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

#### *Budget*

A proposed budget for FY23 was provided prior to the meeting. Matt said the Total Revenue budgeted is slightly less than last year because there is no expected grant income. He also commented that the Total Basic Operating Expenses are slightly higher than last year due to increased IT costs. Matt explained there will be a 2.35% increase in member apportionment requests for FY24. He noted it has been three years since the last increase. Martin asked if the budget was realistic and was concerned that if the Director position ever needed to be filled, there would not be enough budgeted to attract potential candidates. Ray Hoover agreed that the budget needs to account for price increases and employee pay. Matt said it is difficult to ask for an increase from communities, and he is trying to leverage money. After further discussion, Matt asked for approval of the FY23 budget.

DAN LASH MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY23 BUDGET. ALICIA WALSH SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

### **Notre Dame CIVIC Grant Collaboration**

Matt shared that the SJRBC partnered with the University of Notre Dame on their proposal to the National Science Foundation for a CIVIC Planning grant. The goal of the project is to develop a decision support tool that helps visualize and quantify the impact of different land and water management scenarios as well as the development of new watershed learning networks. The tool and process would be piloted in the Elkhart River Watershed above the City of Goshen to facilitate more resilient water management strategies. One of the strategies includes creating financial incentives for more water storage and infiltration on private property, which would lower the burden on public water infrastructure.

### **Other Business/Updates**

#### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Matt informed everyone that he completed numerous administrative tasks this past quarter. He has made FY23 budget requests from members, hired an intern for the summer, and managed invoicing throughout the quarter. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Symposium was held virtually on May 6<sup>th</sup>, which brought in a lot of people. Matt said he has also participated in the Upper Elkhart River Watershed Management Plan development process. Kate has continued to provide water monitoring assistance to LaGrange and Steuben County Lakes Councils. She has also participated in the Syracuse tree planting project. Matt said he provided wetland data for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, hosted a Juday Creek Task Force meeting and assisted Steuben County Natural Resources Conservation Service with project ideas. He also reviewed IDNR permit notices and correspondence regarding LaGrange and Noble County floodplain ordinances.

#### **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

Alicia Walsh stated the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Smithsonian Water/Ways exhibit was last night. The exhibit will be on display at the Carnegie Public Library in Angola until July 17<sup>th</sup>, and she encouraged everyone to visit.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Kris Thomas called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. ADAM BOWDEN  
SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

---

Kris Thomas, SJRBC Chair