

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**September 1, 2022**

The third quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2022 was held on September 1<sup>st</sup>, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://youtu.be/WzqIXeg0JRY>

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	Ray Hoover, Town of LaGrange
<i>Vice-Chair:</i> Alicia Walsh, Steuben County	Dan Lash, Noble County
<i>Treasurer:</i> Jim Hess, Elkhart County	John Law, St. Joseph County
Phil Barker, Elkhart County	Sarah Longenecker, St. Joseph County
Peter Cook, LaGrange County	Janel Meyer, Steuben County
Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart	Jarod Nisley, LaGrange County
Rod Edgell, Indiana DNR	Brad Rogers, Elkhart County
Martin Franke, LaGrange County	Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County	Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Todd Clark, Elkhart SWCD	Kate Barrett, MACOG
Matt Horsley, Indiana DNR Fisheries	Brandon Bowman, MACOG
Greg Knauer, Steuben Co. Surveyor's Office	Ashley Matthews, MACOG
Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik	Matt Meersman, MACOG

**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 – June 2, 2022**

Kris asked the Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes of the June 2, 2022, 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 fourth and final quarter of Fiscal Year 2022 (04/01/22 – 06/30/22). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting. Matt noted that the Fiscal Year End (FYE) was on June 30.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities (Profit & Loss). He noted the General Fund budget reserve was reduced to 1%. Matt explained that accounting service expenses were reduced due to handling the financial reporting and invoicing himself. Additional expenses were reduced due to the efficiency of staff support.

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 FYE was \$335,360.38.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and mentioned that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 06/30/22. 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. He also explained that the appropriation from Kendallville had not been received until July.

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 \$42,044.75 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included invoices from MACOG for April, May, and June expenses, and Thorne Grodnik for quarterly legal services. There were also invoices for the City of Kendallville’s MS4 Educational Program Support, eight water level monitoring devices, and web development and data processing. 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.  
JANEL MEYER 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. The fifth and final meeting is in two weeks and Task Force members will be approving the final report. Matt said he had submitted suggestions and comments related to creating incentives for voluntary wetland restoration and the preservation of existing wetlands during development. He suggested one way to create such an incentive is to consider land cover and other factors when determining fees for drainage water management.

Daragh Deegan asked what the next step would be after the final meeting for the Wetland Task Force. Matt said ideally the report would be used by state legislators to improve wetland related regulations and programs. At the very least, he thinks it will provide support and advice to conservation partners and local governments who advocate for wetlands.

### **Member/Partner Support**

Matt said Sue McGee was unable to attend today's meeting but wanted to thank the Commission for supporting Kendallville's MS4 Educational Program. He said the support was used in part for an outreach event, which was well attended and highlighted in the local Kendallville newspaper.

Matt stated Christopher Burke Engineering has been engaged to perform a water management audit or needs assessment for Steuben County. They will review the County's stormwater, drainage, and floodplain policies and explore how to fund enforcement. Christopher Burke will present recommendations and alternatives to Steuben County once the audit is completed.

Matt reported that he has been working with John Law at the St. Joseph County Surveyor's Office on the installation of water level monitoring devices for a regional detention study of Phillips Ditch. He said he also plans to install three of the devices in the North Branch of the Elkhart River. Dan Lash asked if there were plans to replace the water level monitoring device on Waldron Lake. Matt said the Flood Risk Management Plan recommended keeping the USGS device that is already in place at that location. Daragh asked who will be monitoring the data from the water level monitoring devices. Matt said the data will be available in real time online and will also be incorporated into the web map hosted on the SJRBC website.

### **Drainage Benefit Apportionment**

Matt stated he has continued work with the LaGrange County Surveyor's Office on determining drainage benefit apportionment. By analyzing the land cover and soil characteristics of their drainage watersheds he has been able to better determine how much each landowner benefits from drain maintenance. Matt said the maintenance funds being collected in many parts of LaGrange County are insufficient, so they are raising maintenance fees. Nobody likes paying more, but the new method of benefit apportionment is perceived as fair, so landowners seem more agreeable to it. Matt said he participated in Farm Bureau's Drainage School with the LaGrange County Surveyor. They discussed the benefit apportionment technique, and how it could be used to mitigate the impact of increasing rainfall on drains. He also spoke about the technique at the Cultivating Resilience Field Day, which promoted soil health to farmers.

### **Water Monitoring Program**

Kate Barrett stated the second year of water monitoring has been completed. There was a 100% retrieval rate of the samplers placed throughout the St. Joseph River Basin. Kate reviewed some of the species she observed at various water monitoring sites which indicated good water quality and healthy levels of dissolved oxygen. She also said Daragh initiated rapid trash assessments which were completed at all monitoring sites this year. Matt added that this data could be helpful to determine priority clean-up sites across the basin.

Kate then discussed other water monitoring projects she has been working on. The Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership data analysis and report are now available on the SJRBC website. She has continued assisting the Elkhart Aquatics Program with long-term analysis of IBI/ICI scores and legacy contaminants as well as analyzing *E. coli* trends in the St. Joseph River. Kate is also helping Steuben County with their water data analysis. The data from these projects, along with other existing and historic data, will be added to the interactive web map for

education and outreach use. Kate informed the Commission she will be meeting with the consultant on the SJRBC web map tomorrow to review progress and determine next steps.

Matt said there was a request from a homeowner on Indiana Lake for cost sharing on water monitoring for *E. coli*. They provided a cost estimate for a couple of different monitoring options and asked the Commission to consider providing financial assistance. Matt said there are not enough funds in the water monitoring item of the budget for this request, but it could be considered partner support. He also wanted to be mindful of how potential future requests would be addressed. There was discussion concerning water quality, efforts to secure sewer service, and the lake's ability to support cisco, a rare cold-water species of fish. Brandie Ecker suggested asking the Indiana Lake Association to send a formal letter or present the request at the next SJRBC meeting before making any decision. The Commission agreed and Matt will follow-up with the homeowner.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **2023 Meeting Schedule**

Matt presented the 2023 SJRBC meeting schedule with the first Thursday in March, June, September and December. He was able to reserve the Schrock Pavilion for the morning on each of those dates in 2023. Matt said there is a possibility the June meeting will be held at the Rieth Interpretive Center if there is a scheduling conflict with the summer camp held at the Schrock Pavilion.

DARAGH DEEGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2023 MEETING SCHEDULE.  
RAY HOOVER SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

### **Watershed Leadership Academy**

Matt explained that Purdue University hosts a Watershed Leadership Academy and SJRBC typically provides financial support for 1-2 individuals from the basin to attend. Participants who complete all requirements earn a Purdue University Continuing Education Professional Certificate in Watershed Management. Matt asked for approval to send up to two people in 2023.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO APPROVE SENDING UP TO TWO PEOPLE TO  
THE WATERSHED LEADERSHIP ACADEMY. DAN LASH SECONDED. ALL IN  
FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

### **Other Business/Updates**

John Law announced that John McNamara, St. Joseph County Surveyor, will be retiring at the end of the year.

Martin Franke said the LaGrange County Lakes Council recently hired an Executive Director. The Council has met three times this year and Martin noted attendance and enthusiasm seems to be improving.

Janel Myer reported that Steuben County SWCD was awarded a Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) grant for the Fawn River and Pigeon Creek. She thanked the DNR for their support of the project which will help agricultural producers improve management practices on their land.

Matt stated Representative Mike Aylesworth plans to reintroduce a bill to allow for the creation of Watershed Development Commissions. The bill would give counties the ability to form Watershed Development Commissions and levy a tax against landowners to fund drainage and flood control activities. The bill is being sponsored by Representative David Abbott. The two Representatives will be on a panel at the Indiana Water Summit next week along with Daragh Deegan to provide insight into how the SJRBC functions.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Matt informed everyone that he completed numerous administrative tasks this past quarter. He submitted the biennial budget request to the State Budget Agency and sent appropriation requests for FY 23. Matt also noted that Brandon Bowman will continue his internship until next spring through the AmeriCorps program.

### **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

Alicia Walsh inquired about the SJRBC becoming a regional water planning entity as proposed by Jack Wittman during his presentation to the SJRBC last year. She described concerns about the impact of potential large water withdrawals on the aquifer in her area. Matt reported that he had a reassuring call with Mark Basch from the Indiana DNR about the subject and recommended contacting him for more information.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

RAY HOOVER MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. ALICIA WALSH  
SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

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Kris Thomas, SJRBC Chair

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