

**FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES  
MARCH 10, 2020**

**PRESENT:** Committee members - L. Moreno, K. Swanson, D. Cremeens, A. Normoyle, R. Simmer, K. Maranda, E. Sowards.

**ABSENT:**

**ALSO PRESENT:** Jeff Craver, District Director; Ben Mills, Loud Thunder Ranger; Mike Petersen, Illiniwek Ranger; April Palmer, Auditor; Louisa Ewert, Treasurer; Cheryl Jenkins, Treasurer's Office.

President Swanson called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 8:05 AM on Tuesday, March 10, 2020, in the Rock Island County Building on the second floor Rock Island, Illinois.

President Swanson called for a motion approving the February Committee meeting minutes.

**MOTION:** Mr. Maranda moved to approve the February Committee meeting minutes. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

No request for public comment was submitted.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the Forest Preserve claims and Treasurer's Disbursements in the amount of \$730,016.82.

**MOTION:** Dr. Simmer moved to approve the claims and Treasurer's Disbursements. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the purchase of a John Deere ProGator 2020A and a 1200 Hydro Rake for Indian Bluff Golf Course in the amount of \$42,289.70.

**MOTION:** Mr. Maranda moved to approve the purchase of a John Deere ProGator 2020A and a 1200 Hydro Rake for Indian Bluff Golf Course in the amount of \$42,289.70. Mr. Cremeens seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the low bid for Audit Services from RSM US LLP.

**MOTION:** Dr. Simmer moved to approve the low bid for Audit Services from RSM US LLP. Ms. Normoyle seconded the motion.

Mr. Craver stated that the RFP went out in January, and was sent to about fifteen firms in addition to be placed in the newspaper and on the District's website. The District received two proposals. For over fifteen years Carpentier, Mitchel, Goddard and Associates have done the audit. Every few years the District sends out requests for proposals, and Carpentier has come back with the low bid. This year RSM US LLP, who have done the County's audit for the past several years, is the low bid. Ms. Palmer has worked closely with both firms over her career. Staff is very comfortable with both firms, and is recommending the low bid from RSM.

Ms. Normoyle stated that it was also best practices to change firms every so often in order to get a fresh set of eyes.

Ms. Palmer stated that it was, and that, having worked with both firms in the past, there was no reason not to go with the lower bid and save on expenses.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver reminded the Committee that the month of April begins the four-month stretch of holding meetings in the afternoon at the preserves. Next month the meeting will be held at Niabi Zoo at 3:30pm. May will be at Indian Bluff. June will be held at Illiniwek, and July will be at Loud Thunder. In August the meetings will revert to the County Building at 8:00am.

President Swanson asked Ms. Ewert if there was anything she would like to bring attention to from the report.

Ms. Ewert stated that the Federal Reserve met and lowered interest rates, which will affect the interest earned on the District's investments.

President Swanson called on Ms. Palmer for the Auditor's Reports.

Ms. Palmer drew attention to the Fund Balance Report, stating that most look very good. The exception being Niabi Zoo. The zoo is typically of concern at this time of year as they are not open and taking in much in the way of revenues. In recent years past Niabi has consistently out spent their revenues, and the fund balance is notably lower. There will be a better picture of that next month as the cost study payment came out a month earlier than last year. There is also the POS system that the District has purchased which is a greater expense this year than in years past. Even taking those things into account, if this spending continues to trend the way it has been, Niabi will need a cash loan. There will definitely be problems next winter as the problem expounds. Am happy to answer any questions.

President Swanson stated that the Committee has been having some concerns in seeing these trends, but Mr. Craver has been trying to work with Mr. Jackson to identify some ways to address that trend.

Mr. Craver stated that the zoo is looking to begin seeking funds from the community even before the Foundation is officially started. Will also be working with staff to go over the remaining budget, and coming up with a realistic three to five-year goal. Have been waiting until April first to see what the District's IMRF statement is going to be. From there will hopefully be able to make a shift in some of the District's levy allocations for the upcoming years. That way the District can save some money and keep the tax levy relatively flat. Hopefully the weather and the coronavirus will not greatly affect the attendance at any of the facilities as people may wish to avoid crowded venues. There is excitement about the invertebrate exhibit. Also, the eagle owl and the binturong exhibits, and the finch fox and colobus births. Those have had a very positive response from the general public.

President Swanson encouraged the Committee members to go out and be ambassadors for Niabi. The opening is Easter weekend, April eleventh, and it's important that we all do our part to reach out to people and garner support for Niabi.

Ms. Normoyle asked what the money had been put towards. Ms. Palmer mentioned a few things that would account for some, but was the rest just the small repairs that we've been seeing?

President Swanson stated that was correct.

Ms. Palmer briefly went through how she looks at past and present trends to see what concerns may come up in the future.

President Swanson asked Mr. Craver if there was anything to bring attention to in the Indian Bluff reports.

Mr. Craver stated that the course had been able to open a few times already. There have already been one hundred sixty rounds played over the weekend. It's always nice to see an early start to the season to help bring in revenue. The playground at Indian Bluff will be removed due to safety concerns and non-use. Have been working with Mr. Verstraete on ideas of how to utilize that area going forward.

President Swanson asked Mr. Petersen if there was anything he'd like to bring attention to in his report.

Mr. Petersen stated that staff is finishing up winter projects and getting ready for camping season to open. There are already sixteen scheduled dates for education outreach. Arbor Day, which is during Earth Week, staff will be planting trees.

President Swanson asked Mr. Mills if there was anything he'd like to bring attention to in his report.

Mr. Mills stated that staff has also been finishing up winter projects and preparing for the opening of the camping season. Reservations are already being made. The bee hives that were purchased with donated funds have been assembled, painted, and are ready to be

placed in prairies. Those hives will likely be placed at the Marvin Martin Conservation Area, where it will not endanger patrons of the preserve. Construction on the new Deer Haven sites is going well. The water has been completed, and the electrical should be completed soon.

President Swanson stated that the Committee should have received an email yesterday from a group stating that they didn't like ZAA, they preferred AZA. The District has been very vocal in the intent to gain reaccreditation with the AZA, and have come very close to that goal. What this group in Chicago doesn't seem to understand is that this facility needs to do a lot to increase public engagement. That means that every time Niabi, or the District in general, has a win, we are going to celebrate it. I made a response to that gentlemen. Due to not wanting to worry about FOIA and OMA, I only included a few people in the reply instead of doing a "reply all." Want to encourage Mr. Jackson and Mr. Craver in sending something conveying the same message, so that it goes to all the Commissioners. Are there any questions regarding the communication from the Chicago group?

Dr. Simmer stated that he had been rather upset in reading the letter. Niabi has had AZA accreditation, and it's close to ninety percent in getting it back. To lump Niabi in with that was uncalled for.

President Swanson directed Mr. Craver to send something out to the Commission that put the criticism in context.

Mr. Craver stated that he would.

Ms. Normoyle stated that the letter compared Niabi to private and for-profit entities. That's trying to compare two different classifications.

The Committee moved on to going through the Niabi report.

Mr. Craver stated that, with regards to the expenses that we're seeing, many of the repairs are due to the fact that Niabi is dealing with many aging infrastructures and equipment. Trying to balance maintaining the old infrastructure and bringing in new things to see at Niabi is rather difficult, and staff is doing what they can.

President Swanson asked Mr. Craver if there was anything from his report that he wanted to bring attention to.

Mr. Craver stated that he'd been working with Mr. Mills on the cabin structures. Currently trying to get the sprinkler setup from the sprinkler company so the architect firm can finalize plans so the District can get started on the process of building the cabins. Several attempts have been made to contact the sprinkler firm, and as yet the District has not received anything. The new POS system is taking a lot of time from staff to do training and work out the kinks in the system before the District hits its busy season.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve all routine reports for the District.

**MOTION:** Dr. Simmer moved to approve all routine reports for the District. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Adjourned the meeting at 8:55 AM.

Submitted by:  
Cassie Sullivan  
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant