

Notes from the June 16, 2010

Elkhart River Restoration Association Flood Focus Committee Meeting

Rome City Elementary School, Rome City, Indiana

In attendance: Gene Lightner, Mike Shellman, Bill and Lynn Reynolds, Joy Y. LeCount, Patty Fisel, Rick Smigielski, David Wick, Scott Zigler, John Richardson, Dave Abbott, Wayne Fox, and Nancy Brown.

Gene began the meeting by handing out copies of the agenda. The committee agreed to accept the Silver Jackets Report.

A discussion was held on who needs to be added to the committee as we move forward. It was suggested that we need representation from LaGrange County, Sylvan Lake, Kendallville, and Indian Lakes. Dona Hunter, who is with the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District, has offered to assist in finding representation from LaGrange County. Dave Abbott can represent both the Conservancy District and the Sylvan Lake Association. Someone needs to talk to Mayor Hanshew, Dave Abbott and Dave Wick agreed to do that. Jack Dold has retired from the LaGrange County Lake Association, but he might be willing to serve on this committee. Lyn Reynolds will ask Jack.

Joy suggested we need representatives from the agricultural community (Bob Allen and Greg Cunningham were suggested) and maybe a LaGrange County Commissioner. Mike Shellman talked to John Metskger, but he is on the South Branch. It was suggested we go to the SWCD or Farm Bureau for representation from the ag community. Gene summarized that we need someone from LaGrange County (Jack Dold or someone Dona Hunter suggests), someone from Kendallville, and representation from the ag community (from Farm Bureau or SWCD). Joy suggested that if the Kendallville Mayor cannot, maybe the MS4 Operator could represent Kendallville.

Gene, Mike, Rick and John all attended the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) meeting last Tuesday and they reported that their goals are more oriented to water quality than quantity issues, whereas the Maumee Basin Commission concentrates on flooding and quantity issues. The Maumee Commission is believed to be funded by member counties on a per acre basis, and by grants.

Dave Wick mentioned that state legislators are writing legislation now, and that several of them seem sensitive to the issues. Yard, Meeks, and Stutzman were all mentioned as being supportive of some kind of action. Dave mentioned that the \$400,000 is frozen, and we need a plan if we want to free it up for action.

The discussion then moved to include many topics. Following is a summary of remarks by topic:

The Maumee Basin Commission: Gene said the Maumee gets funds from the counties and some grants, and that he thinks Rod is the only employee.

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission: The St. Joseph River Basin Commission gets funds from the state and on a volunteer basis from the counties. John suggested that they want us to come up with a plan before they offer to assist.

Forming an Elkhart River Basin Commission: Do we try to form our own commission? The trend is to get away from commissions.

Elkhart River Restoration Association: Scott says the problem with ERRA is you will always have to fight the perception that restoration implies taking the river back to a completely natural state, that we want to restore it as a swamp.

Other Comments: We need wetland restoration and preservation. What about a sewer district? A conservancy district has taxing authority.

Region 3A: How could they fit in? Scott is working with them for FEMA funds, it is a possibility. Rome City is going after 302 funding for the conservancy district. You must be a government entity to use Region 3A. Until we have a master plan we cannot apply.

A Master Plan: Scott says we will have to have one. Two counties can form an alliance, but they cannot expect any funding from the state. The SJRBC has a Master Plan – a hazard plan. Rick said they don't have the people to help. Joy asked if we could hire a consultant. Rick suggested they each have a special interest, we need to work with the plan commission and MS4 compliance. We need to find out who wants what part and glue the pieces together. We need to see who does what and see what we become. We say we need someone, but exactly what do we want them to do? John suggested our plan can begin as a bullet list of what we want and how we think we can get there. We don't have to write the whole plan to get started.

A few suggestions for focus included the transition area, wetlands maintenance, and FEMA grants; as well as farm community, education, and communication.

As we discussed needing legitimacy, Mike reminded us that we are legitimate.

Gene suggested we look to see if the SJRBC would consider supporting our efforts. Mike suggested the SWCD. There are grants out there, but it takes dollars to get someone to seek the grants. Maumee has commitment. We need a sustainable flow of dollars to keep this going. Gene suggested a someone who is a communicator, grant writer, and website designer, and mentioned that the Friends of the St. Joseph River have a part time person who could potentially help us.

Gene suggested that we have several options: do nothing; work with the Conservation

District, form a conservancy district, continue as a part of the Elkhart River Restoration Association, work with the St. Joseph River Basin Commission; form our own 501 (c) (3) organization; or combine some of our options.

Regarding goals, it was agreed to follow John's suggestion that we develop a bullet list of goals and decide how we think we can achieve them. We can use that as the beginning of a plan to present to SJRBC if our choice is to move in that direction.

Everyone needs to look through the report and develop priority bullet points and submit them to the group by email by July 6. We are to put our bullet points in priority order and then they will be combined. We will try to come to agreement on priorities by using this list at our next meeting.

Our next meeting will be Thursday, July 15 at 7 PM, at the Ligonier Police Station. The meeting was adjourned to help the Silver Jackets prepare for the public meeting.