

**FRIENDS OF THE CASEY JONES TRAIL ASSOCIATION
OCTOBER 15, 2020
MEETING MINUTES**

The Friends of the Casey Jones Trail Association convened regular session on October 15, 2020 at 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. Members present: Mick Myers, Deb Nelson, Dan Wildermuth, Colleen Tollefson, Jim Jens, Elicia Kordas, Chris Hollingsworth and Jakob Etrheim. Others present: SRDC Representative Jessica Welu and Department of Natural Resources Representative Kent Skaar.

Mick Myers called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m.

APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

Motion was made by Dan, seconded by Jim and unanimously carried to approve the September 17, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes.

TREASURER AND MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Jakob stated since our last meeting, two bills were received, both to Kindel Nelson for mowing. Income was also received from membership dues and Amazon Smiles. There is now \$10,465.34 in the checking account.

Deb stated there is one final bill for mowing that came in and she received the bill for spraying in the amount of \$110.00 from Mark Carlson, TLC Lawncare, which was approved at the last meeting.

Motion was made by Colleen, seconded by Chris and unanimously carried to pay the final mowing invoice.

EXTEND SRDC CONTRACT

Mick stated that at the last meeting in September, the Board had approved an extension to the SRDC contract until October 31, 2020. Because of this, it will be necessary to extend the contract again if the Board wishes to continue with the help of SRDC. He shared the importance of working with SRDC on public relations, marketing, building memberships and social media and is recommending that we extend the SRDC contract for a year.

Dan stated he would certainly be in favor of extending the contract but was wondering when the first contract ended.

Deb said the contract with SRDC had ended in August and we extended it to the end of October. She shared her and Mick had talked about extending the contract to assist with PR and Communications which includes promotional materials, website, social media, media relations, speaking, resolutions, etc. and that they are recommending extending the contract for a year if it was agreeable with everyone.

Dan then asked what the dollar amount of this extension would be.

Jessica responded that the original contract was set up with six months up to \$3,000. There is \$1,600 left of original contract amount. We can have a set amount or set it as an open account depending upon the wishes of the group.

Deb suggested extending the contract for another six months at \$3,000 and reevaluate at that time.

Jim asked if we would be adding \$1,400 on to the \$1,600 to make 3,000 or adding another \$3,000? Jessica stated it could be set up by adding the \$1,400 to make the \$3,000 and then leave it as an open contract.

Colleen asked if this gives us access to Michael. Jessica stated Michael is not on the contract but his services can be added. Michael was added as an Economic Resiliency Specialist to help the region respond to COVID-19. Jessica will talk with the Executive Director regarding Michael.

Dan said he would like to set this contract up to line up with our fiscal year.

Motion was made by Jim, seconded by Dan and unanimously carried to extend the contract to December 31, 2020 with no additional dollar amount.

Dan added for discussion sake that if we should use up the \$1,600 before the end of December, we can bring this issue back up again for discussion.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION – KENT SKAAR AND CHRIS INGEBRETSEN

Mick stated we are trying to develop an active trail program and felt we needed some input from Kent on how to keep moving forward with the trail.

Kent Skaar, Parks and Trails Division out of St. Paul, then asked Colleen how she would like to proceed with this conversation.

Colleen stated she felt it would be good to get an overview of the trail along with some possible funding sources that DNR and other Friends groups used to continue their trails.

Kent stated even though DNR's main focus at this time is maintaining existing trails versus acquisition, with the almost completed corridor to Woodstock, the little bit of corridor beyond Woodstock and the piece west of Lake Wilson, DNR is seriously looking at the advancement of connecting these pieces together. He has spent hours driving gravel roads trying to find a corridor to fill in the gap. He said the Currie Loop Trail will be top priority next year for funding since it did not receive any funding as DNR had requested through LCCMR.

DNR has had to look at other ways to complete trail projects such as highway right-of-way and utility corridors. Kent is currently working on two projects that are using MnDOT's road right-of-way instead of land acquisition. He felt the focus for the Casey Jones trail would be where is construction and where are opportunities to move the trail forward. Lands cannot be leased for

trails anymore so land acquisition or easements is the preferred way to acquire land. Kent suggested that as we look at appropriation scheduling, we should look at preliminary engineering and design first and then move the acquisition of the land forward.

Kent then shared how the Harmony Trail was able to get funding for their most recent constructed segment. Part of the Harmony Trail consists of an approximate 10-mile segment that extends from Harmony to the Iowa border. There is no corridor. Most of the trail coming up to Harmony was an old railroad grade developed 20 years ago. The community determined that there was a need at this time to pursue a corridor to make a connection to the Iowa border with anticipated Iowa trails coming up from the south. They, as a community, not as a large trail group, went out and followed a fence line to determine a trail corridor. Once the corridor was found, they met with property owners and secured letters of intent to sell from each property owner. An application was then submitted to LCCMR by the community for trail acquisition for a state trail. It was approved. Once Harmony had secured the funds to acquire the land, they immediately went to the legislators for bonding dollars for trail construction.

Colleen asked Kent if he could touch on sources of engineering and other funding opportunities like Transportation Enhancement funding, federal trails grants and other things we might look at for funding, more specifically the in-kind or engineering option.

Kent stated counties and cities have provided engineering themselves. It works quite well for the most part as county and city engineers are very adaptive at building roads. In some cases, the city or county have been able to advance a project using their staff.

Kent then talked about how the City of Detroit Lakes developed a large section of the Heartland Trail in town adjacent to roads. They designed it but a complicating factor in doing this is it's hard to take a plan set developed by the county engineer and hand it over to the DNR to construct. The problem with this is there are always issues with plans so DNR staff is not enthusiastic to accept plans that were developed by others with the intent that DNR construct it. Where it has worked well with other communities is there is a lull in activity for whatever reason and DNR has been able to use city or county staff. Once the plan is in place, they can then support an appropriation. Another way a community could help is to think more about preliminary engineering and not construction.

Federal trail grants and Transportation Enhancement funding were then discussed. Kent did say the number one funding source always has been and remains capital bonding. He stated DNR doesn't do large segments of trails as costs are too high to complete it. The last large segment of trail they did was six miles of the Luce Line Trail.

Kent then shared another scenario on how multiple cities helped realize construction on the Luce Line Trail. The cities of Silver Lake, Hutchinson, a couple of other cities, and McLeod County wanted to see a paved corridor on the Luce Line Trail connecting the communities together. They met with local legislators and DNR Parks and Trails Division to see what needed to be done. The legislators told them they like trails however they needed the communities to demonstrate their interest in the trail first. They wanted each community to provide the seed money to move ahead and when that was done, they would support future legislation to finish the construction. Each

community did what they were asked and the legislators then secured the funding to finish that last 23 plus miles of trail.

Utilizing Transportation Alternatives funding is a challenge as this year's proposal is for year 2024. This can be difficult for the department because DNR's funding cycle is only two years long. In the case with TA funding – a match is asked for and DNR cannot say they have the funds four years out. They can only share the funding sources they could use when the time comes if the application would be approved.

Colleen asked if it was realistic to get the Letter of Intent submitted in time to be considered for a full funding application with Kent stating it would require division approval first.

A lengthy discussion then followed with a recommendation from the Friends to have Kent ask for division approval to submit the Letter of Intent for Transportation Alternatives funding.

Motion was made by Deb, seconded by James and unanimously carried to have SRDC write the Letter of Intent for Transportation Alternatives funding for the piece to Woodstock and send it to Kent for division approval prior to the deadline date of October 30, 2020.

POTENTIAL TASK FORCES FOR THE CASEY JONES TRAIL

Funding Task Force - SRDC, Deb, Colleen, and Jakob

Acquisition Task Force – this was created at the August 6th meeting and consists of Mike Zinnel, Colleen Tollefson, Elicia Kordas, Stephanie Korver and Bruce Johnson

PR and Communications – Jessica with SRDC

Deb suggested since there are not a lot of members present at the meeting, maybe it would be best to put this on the November agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Deb Nelson
Secretary