THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS
Board Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 22, 2009
7:00 pm
via Teleconference

ACTION ITEMS IN RED

The meeting of the Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by President Evanne Hunt.

1. Roll Call

ATTENDEES:
Directors: Evanne Hunt, Jack Kussmaul, Nick Faessler, Clarence Malick, Bill Hogseth, Jim Rogala, Richard Henderson, Paul Rode, Ann Woldt, Jim Sime, Brad Glass

Staff: Carol Winge, Victoria Oberle
Guests: Ed Strenski
Directors Absent: Richard Oberle

2. Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Jack Kussmaul and seconded by Rich Henderson to approve the minutes of the August 11, 2009 Special Board meeting as presented. Motion carried.

3. Treasurer's Report

a. Statement of Financial Position August 31, 2009: Nick Faessler reported that as of August 31, 2009, total TPE cash on hand, which includes all chapter and central funds, is $409,198.07. This represents $252,712.99 in savings and $156,485.08 in checking. Rich Henderson noted that we are on track with our budget year-to-date.

b. Grants Summary Report: A new report for the Board, this spreadsheet provides the Board with information on all grants that Chapters have, total grant awards, along with activity on the grants. The Board welcomed receiving this report and commented how helpful it is.

c. Repurchase Agreement Report: In follow up to our last Board meeting, Nick Faessler reported that Carol Winge had checked with Summit Credit Union. They do not offer a repurchase agreement program. Therefore, to address the Board's concern that our cash balance exceeds FDIC insurance coverage of $250,000 at Summit Credit Union, Carol recommended that we move monies from the Prairie Bluff and Empire-Sauk Chapters to the State Bank of Cross Plains. These monies were placed in two 13-month Certificate of Deposits per the chapters' approval. In addition, we move monies from central's savings to the State Bank of Cross Plains, placing that in a MMA in case central would need to access it. The recommendation was approved by Nick Faessler and Evanne Hunt as well as the Chapters' leadership. With the transfer of these monies, our balance at Summit Credit Union is now under the $250,000 insured amount and all monies at the State Bank of Cross Plains are earning more interest than they were at Summit. Our balance remains under $250,000 at the State Bank of Cross Plains. All monies are now secured.

4. Endowment Fund Financial Reports

Rich Henderson reported that we are getting close to getting back to cost. We are doing well. Jack Kussmaul noted that we are still doing better with our investments than the S&P Index.

5. Prairie Enthusiasts Trust Financial Report

Jack Kussmaul noted that the performance report was included with the endowment fund report under Item 4. He was pleased to announce that the IRS has now approved our application for tax exempt status for the Trust.

6. Membership Report

Victoria Oberle presented the membership report dated September 22, 2009. She noted that 2009 new members are the highest number we've had in five years (113). TPE has 1,023 total members. Included with this membership report is a graph charting the different membership categories. The graph reflects that our Individual membership level is the highest category of membership. She also stated that last year January-September 22 we had 71 new members. This year January-September 22 we have 85 new members so new membership is up. Evanne Hunt asked if we could get a year-to-year comparison membership report. Victoria will start to include this with her next report in November. Rich Henderson asked if Victoria could add a column for percentage of chapter membership levels for each chapter membership. Victoria will also add this to the membership report she prepares for our November Board meeting.

134 members have been dropped but this is because she has been working on the database clean up. Many of these members have been inactive for a long time. She sent letters to all of them and those she did not hear back from, along with former complimentary members that chapters did not renew resulted in the 134 dropped memberships. Jim Sime asked to see a graph of membership growth since the beginning. He would like to see a graph of new members going back as far as we can. A motion was made by Rich Henderson and seconded by Bill Hogseth to accept the membership report. Motion carried.

ACTION: Victoria will prepare a year-to-year membership comparison and will include a column reflecting chapter membership percentages for our November report.

7. Chapter Reports

All Board members representing the Chapters provided an update on chapter activities.

St. Croix Chapter: Clarence Malick reported the chapter is on the verge of making an ATV and trailer purchase under a grant. The chapter is working on strategic planning. They are working to quantify how much work each of their managed sites will require in the future so they know how many people they need to carry out the work.

Chippewa Savannas Chapter: Bill Hogseth reported the chapter is working to engage the members that they have. They continue to work on getting the word out that the chapter is active in hopes of building up their membership base. He asked that Victoria encourage renewing members to transfer to the chapter.

Prairie Sands Chapter: Ann Woldt was delighted to report that 16 of the chapter's 25 members attended their annual meeting—excellent attendance! The chapter conducts formal quarterly meetings; the next one is scheduled to be held in January. The chapter has several activities planned for next year, usually having an activity going on once a month during the growing season.

Prairie Bluff Chapter: Nick Faessler shared that the chapter has three fall burns scheduled. The chapter members continue to work on the Greens Prairie Cemetery battle to not mow it. And Nick reminded the Board members that the Prairie Bluff Chapter is very busy planning our TPE Annual Banquet to be held in Monroe, WI on Saturday, February 27, 2010.

Empire-Sauk Chapter: Rich Henderson shared that the chapter has several protection projects in the works. They are doing lots of management work and there is a major lumber removal project going on 30 acres of land. He noted that they really need help to find a volunteer coordinator and if any chapter has any suggestions, please contact him.

Southwest Chapter: Jim Sime reported the chapter has regular monthly meetings. They are working with Iowa County to purchase 90 acres on Sylvan Road. They just completed a joint fundraising effort regarding the Borah Creek Prairie and they had an introductory field trip last weekend at the Prairie. Forty-two people attended. Rose Sime and others from the Southwest Chapter met with Walter Lancaster. Walter is interested in donating an easement. The chapter is negotiating with him on this. Mr. Lancaster is getting an appraisal done and hopes to get this deal completed yet this year.

Coulee Region Chapter: Jim Rogala noted that the chapter has just completed an outreach project. The chapter is meeting this Saturday followed by a work party at Decorah.

NIPE: Paul Rode reported they are at the height of seed picking season. They plan to seed about 20 acres this year. The chapter is also participating in a "Green Fair" this Saturday.

8. Board Development Committee

Evanne Hunt reported they had received eight resumes in response to the ad for a Development Director. After reviewing the resumes, four candidates were selected to interview. The Committee will be conducting interviews of the four candidates this week. They look like excellent candidates. Start date for the position will be as soon as possible.

9. Finance Committee

Nick Faessler reported that the Finance Committee had been charged with researching group exemption status with the IRS. The Finance Committee discussed this proposal and recommended that the Board proceed with filing for group exempt status. Rich Henderson noted that it was not a unanimous recommendation. The Finance Committee directed Central to meet with an attorney to get answers to questions they submitted to learn more about the proposal. Members of the committee met with Attorney Johanna Allex concerning this proposal and to learn what is involved with both applying for the status and restructuring the organization to qualify. The results of that meeting were distributed to the Finance Committee members and the Board.

Clarence Malick noted that given Attorney Allex did not recommend that TPE apply for group exemption, for the reasons given, there would be no way he could support such action. A motion was made by Clarence Malick and seconded by Bill Hogseth that we not pursue applying for group exemption status with the IRS.

Rich Henderson noted that we would still be required to comply with reporting. We would not be streamlining anything. It would also cost money to do all the things necessary to reorganize to comply with group exemption. And he believes it would ultimately weaken the organization. Bill Hogseth expressed his concern that it could also hurt our ability to get Land Trust Alliance accreditation and may hurt us participating in the legal defense program being created by the Land Trust Alliance as well.

Jim Sime reported that the recommendation had been presented to the Southwest Chapter. On his motion, they voted to withdraw their support for group exemption status.

The motion was voted on and passed unanimously.

10. New Business

Evanne Hunt reminded Board members that the Board will be reviewing Chapter budgets at its January, 2010 meeting. Be sure to include details for expenditures in your chapter budget.

Evanne Hunt talked about TPE seeking accreditation. Rich Henderson noted that there are many policies we need to get in place before we can get accreditation. Evanne noted it will be a time consuming and expensive project. Leadership has to come from the Board. There is a land trust in her area that has gone through the process and if the Board is interested, she would line up a speaker to address our November Board meeting on this subject. Ann Woldt thought this would be better done in a face-to-face meeting. Clarence Malick proposed that he and Evanne meet with the Land Trust and put together a summary for the Board's information. We will try to arrange for a speaker to attend our February board meeting where we will be meeting as a group, rather than by phone.

ACTION: Jack Kussmaul will forward Land Trust Alliance accreditation program Standards and Practices to Carol Winge to mail out to the Board.

Evanne Hunt and Clarence Malick will meet with the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust to learn about their process in receiving accreditation and prepare a summary for the Board.

Invite a speaker to our February Board meeting to discuss the accreditation program. Perhaps the speaker could come from Gathering Waters.

11. Other Business

Clarence Malick asked when our prescribed burn insurance was up for renewal. He remembered that we had some work to do before that date to get our burn policies up to date before that insurance expires.

Rich Henderson noted it will expire in March, 2010. He has it on the top of his list to get the policies updated.

ACTION: Rich will get a draft to the Land Management Committee members by November 1, 2009 and a product to the Board for review at the January 19, 2010 Board meeting.

Nick Faessler updated the Board on plans to-date for our February 27, 2010 Annual Banquet. The chapter has agreed to partner with central for the conference and will split revenue and expenses with central 50/50. This does not include any income from the silent auction/raffle. We hope to continue this partnership for future annual banquets. Steve Apfelbaum will be the speaker at our Banquet. Nick talked about other speakers and sessions that are planned during the day.

ACTION: Evanne Hunt challenged all Board members to come up with something to contribute to the raffle with proceeds designated for central.

Evanne Hunt reminded all Board members to sign the Board Member Job Description and mail it to Carol Winge for central's files.

ACTION: All Board members who have not yet signed the Board Member Job Description, do so and mail to Carol Winge within a month (by October 22, 2009).

Carol Winge will send an email to those who have not yet turned in the signed Board Member Job Description.

12. Set Next Board Meeting Date

It was agreed that our next Board meeting will be held on Thursday, November 12, 2009, at 7:00 pm via telephone conference call.

The Board will meet again on Tuesday, January 19, 2010, at 7:00 pm via telephone conference call.

In February, we will meet in person on Friday evening, February 26, 2010. Carol will make arrangements for a meeting space.

A motion was made by Paul Rode and seconded by Jack Kussmaul to adjourn. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol A. Winge
TPE Business Manager
Clarence Malick
Corporate Secretary