

FRIENDS of the MANCHAC GREENWAY (FMG) MEETING MINUTES, Wednesday, March 23, 2022 @ Sunset Stop/Gator's Den, Galva, LA

ATTENDANCE:

Tara Lambeth (St. John Parish Office of Permits and Planning), Lisa Williams, Ben Taylor, Frank Neelis (Contractor), Dr. James Nelson (South Tangipahoa Parish Port Commission), Dwight Williams (Pontchartrain Conservancy), Galen Schum, Za Maurin, Robert Arcuri (St. John Parish Council District 5), George Coxen (Chief, Manchac Fire Department) and Eva Hillman

APPROVAL of 2/24/22 MEETING MINUTES

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Treasurer Galen Schum reported a current bank balance of \$10,276.88. He also noted a nice Corporate donation from Middendorfs Seafood Restaurant, for which we are grateful.

CONTRACTOR REPORT

- Frank Neelis reported on his research on possible ownership and right-of-way franchise agreements for the 1920s **New Orleans - Hammond Highway**. He found no franchise agreements and as far as the Real Estate Office of the Louisiana Dept. of Transportation and Development could determine, only they had title to the road (except for a 300 ft. section just south of the Pass Manchac Bridge, where the Beacon Lakeside/Gator's Den/Sunset Stop are). Plans were set to visit the LA DOTD District 62 Administrator in Hammond to confirm this. This information will be used to request Entergy's assistance in turning the unused road into a bicycle/pedestrian path.

- Grants - Frank's inquiry of FMG's previous grant request to NALCO/Ecolab is pending.

- **Ring Around the Lake/Louisiana Bootlace Trail** - Bike Easy, the New Orleans-based cycling advocacy organization recently conducted a three hour Zoom Meeting with approximately thirty parties concerned with these projects. A comprehensive guide of upwards of fifty different sources of funding for such projects was made available. One of the presenters, Jennifer Ruley with the City of New Orleans Dept. Public Works, expressed a keen interest in the Ring Around the Lake Bike Trail and agreed to a meeting with FMG representatives to discuss coordination for this six parish project. Another presenter, Sam Buckley of the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (NORPC), described his research on the Judge Thomas Daley/Za Maurin bike route from the Mississippi River Levee-top Trail, through Laplace to the foot of the Manchac Greenway, bridge crossings at Pass Manchac and North Pass and other Manchac Greenway matters. He has agreed to attend an upcoming planning meeting with FMG and the Tangipahoa Parish Office of Planning. Mr. Williams made note that initial plans for creating a bike trail on the old Hammond Hwy. in Tangipahoa Parish date from 1993 when the parish signed an agreement for this with the LA DOTD for a Rails to Trails Program.

MASTER PLANS

- **St. John Parish** - Ms. Lambeth reported her parish's Master Plan for the Manchac Greenway is currently undergoing a feasibility study with the NORPC. She also reported that funding for repairs for Hurricane Ida damage at Sunset Park on the Greenway are being sought from the Rotary Foundation and AARP.

- **Tangipahoa Parish** - Ben reported the Tangipahoa Parish Master Plan for the Manchac Greenway will be revisited in an upcoming meeting with the two Tangipahoa Parish Council representatives on the Greenway, the Parish Planning Office, FMG and Sam Buckley of NORPC. The agenda planned for the meeting will concentrate on the "squeeze" encountered where the Greenway must make a mile and a half jump from Selsers Canal to Southwest Railroad Ave. in Ponchatoula through a narrow gap between the CN Railroad and the Ponchatoula Wastewater plant. In the meantime, Frank and Ben are researching the right-of-way of the City of Hammond's Wetland Assimilation treated wastewater pipeline through this area as a possible pathway.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

- **Cypress planting** - Eva reported that in six years of planting, the Pontchartrain Conservancy has put over 40,000 trees in the ground on Jones Island and other nearby locations. Though the growth rate of these trees tend to be

relatively slow, they have an 83% survival rate, which is very encouraging. This week, Marathon Oil Corp. will be planting 500 trees on Cecils Canal, which is the next major waterway into Pass Manchac east of Galva Canal.

- Mr. Coxen made note of large berms of rolled-up marsh grass left by Hurricane Ida across the **Manchac Marsh**. There was a discussion how these would be ideal places to plant trees in order to establish "speed-bumps" to slow hurricane storm surge as well as wildlife habitat, similar to how discarded Christmas tree projects work.

- **Sunset Park** - FMG's contribution to Hurricane Ida cleanup at this park was with the help of ten students from the Michigan State University's Alternative Spartan Breaks program, Steve Lawless of Further Along bus tours who brought them and the Pontchartrain Conservancy, who lined it all up. Clumps of marsh grass, litter and debris were removed from the park's picnic area. Lisa Williams gave the area a good mowing and FMG member Joe Sparacello's fabrication shop has designed five all-metal picnic shelter replacements.

Councilman Arcuri conveyed that Parish President Hotard has pledged full Parish support for the park's rehabilitation. He further stated that with his current membership on the advisory board for NORPC he should be able to help promote our collaboration with them. The FMG wishes to thank him for his Lifetime Membership in our organization.

- **Shell Bank** canoe launch on the Greenway saw an abrupt and short-lived change this past month. The much-used entryway into the beautiful Maurepas Swamp Wildlife Management Area was temporarily blocked-off by wooden fencing, denying hundreds of paying eco-tourists access by water. It did not take long for the Louisiana Dept. of Transportation and Development to determine this area was, in fact, their property and posted a demand notice on the fence. The fence was removed shortly afterward.

- The Louisiana National Estuarine Research Reserve (**LaNERR**) - Eva reported proposals for all three sites (Pontchartrain, Atchafalaya and Barataria) have been submitted, comments will be solicited and a final recommendation will be made by the State by the end of the month and submitted to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration for their final decision. If the Pontchartrain Basin is selected, several locations in the basin are candidates for this facility.

- Ben noted two more Mississippi River diversions are being planned in the area. They are to help relieve pressure on the Bonnet Carre Spillway during flood stages as well as provide much needed fresh water and sediments to adjoining wetlands. One will be at Union on the other side of the river into the Barataria Basin and the other at Ama just upstream from the planned Hope Canal Diversion into the Maurepas Basin.

- **Port Manchac** - Dr. Nelson reported Port Manchac attorneys are examining a lease with Air Products, Inc. for as much space at the port as possible for a questionable project to store "blue" hydrogen under Lake Maurepas. In the meantime, he and others on the Port Commission desire to see at least part of the port be used for education, offices, a museum, boardwalks, etc. to more directly benefit the public. It sounds like the port has grown two heads.

NEXT MEETING:

- 2:00, Wednesday, April, 20, 2022 @ Sunset Spot by the Gator's Den in Galva, LA

