

**FOREST PRESERVE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 9, 2025**

PRESENT: Committee members –L. Moreno, J. Woods, E. Sowards, D. Mielke, R. Simmer, K. Swanson.

ABSENT: C. Layer.

ALSO PRESENT: Jeff Craver, District Director; Mike Petersen, Illiniwek Ranger; Ellen Anderson, Internal Auditor.

President Swanson called the monthly meeting of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee to order at 3:32 PM on Tuesday, September 09, 2025, in the Shelter at Illiniwek Forest Preserve in Hampton, Illinois.

E. Sowards, D. Mielke, L. Moreno, J. Woods, R. Simmer, K. Swanson.

TOTAL PRESENT 6

C. Layer.

TOTAL ABSENT 1

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

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the August Committee meeting minutes. Dr. Simmer seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the old year and new year claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$324,289.89.

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the claims and treasurer's disbursements in the amount of \$324,289.89. Ms. Sowards seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the old year and new year transfers of appropriation.

MOTION: Dr. Simmer moved to approve the old year and new year transfers of appropriation. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the resolutions regarding the Niabi Zoo Fund additional FY 26 appropriations, FY25 IMRF Fund additional appropriations, FY 25

Liability Fund additional appropriations, and Niabi Zoo Educational and Recreation Enhancements.

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the resolutions regarding the Niabi Zoo Fund additional FY 26 appropriations, FY25 IMRF Fund additional appropriations, FY 25 Liability Fund additional appropriations, and Niabi Zoo Educational and Recreation Enhancements. Dr. Simmer seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson made three calls for public comment.

There were no requests for public comment.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the purchase of a Ford F-150 for Niabi Zoo in the amount of \$39,307.00.

MOTION: Mr. Mielke moved to approve the purchase of a Ford F-150 for Niabi Zoo in the amount of \$39,307.00. Dr. Simmer seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the changes to the District's Purchase Policy.

MOTION: Ms. Woods moved to approve the changes to the District's Purchase Policy. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Dr. Simmer stated that we had two heads right here. I understand that prices go up. I mean were talking a sixty percent minimal increase. From ten grand to sixteen grand, right? What are your guys' thoughts?

Mr. Petersen stated that with inflation and tariffs and all that, I haven't noted how much prices have increased. I'll have to look closer at that to see how much the operations budget is going to have to increase, but there aren't exact numbers right now.

President Swanson stated that a couple questions that Commissioners could pose are: When was the last time that increased? It should increase to keep pace with inflation. Another question is, how frequently are these purchases having to be put to the Committee for approval?

Mr. Craver stated that this was changed in the Downstate Forest Preserve Act. This was an IAPD initiative to get goods, materials, and projects; getting that public threshold to where the District must advertise in the newspaper. The threshold for board action is still \$30,000.00, however, materials and supplies was bumped up to \$60,000.00. In this instance, if we adopt this as we are statutorily allowed to do, and staff puts in, and you adopt funds for, let's say the

truck for Niabi Zoo, staff would be able to purchase that according to our policy without board action. It could lower back down to \$30,000.00, if you'd like, but \$60,000.00 is when a public bid is required.

Dr. Simmer stated that Mr. Mielke brought this up, so let's give him full credit. What concerns me is that the District just got a handle on the budget. Line item budgeting is what it's for; to keep it under. Right now there's a great staff that has earned trust, but there is concern that it will be abused in future.

Mr. Craver stated that the change is meant to streamline the process of already budgeted purchases.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the changes to the District's Benefits Policy.

MOTION: Ms. Sowards moved to approve the changes to the District's Benefits Policy. Dr. Moreno seconded the motion.

Mr. Craver stated these changes are made to mirror the County's changes to the benefits going along with the insurance policy. I try to make note of the changes that the County makes at their meetings, and add them to the District's agenda the following month.

Motion carried.

President Swanson called for a motion to approve the revisions to the District's Park Plan.

MOTION: Dr. Moreno moved to approve the revisions to the District's Park Plan. Mr. Mielke seconded the motion.

Dr. Moreno asked that the only change is the addition of the construction of water feature and splash pad?

Mr. Craver stated that that is correct. It was recommended by Bi-State to add that, and they are assisting with the application for the OSLAD grant for this project.

Motion carried.

President Swanson asked if there were any questions on the routine reports?

There were no questions.

President Swanson stated, "Before I turn things over to Mike. If you look at the activity across the District, it's looking really good. Revenue is great, and that won't always be the case. Weather will be different. Mike's had some challenges this year with forces beyond his control. But I would like for a future Executive Committee and Commission agenda, I would like for us

to consider the addition of evening hours at Niabi. Lot of working families, they can't go because it closes at five. A lot of other instances have proven that if you give the patrons one night a week, or a couple nights a month or something like that, you can get people that you're not getting otherwise. But we do need to do some number crunching, and we need to make sure that it works. And it's not that you could work our employees more, but see if we could explore a shift in times. I'd like to put that on a future agenda. And now, if I don't see any other questions at this point, Mike, it's great that you're hosting us. Everything looks great. The shelter looks fantastic. Recently painted?"

Mr. Petersen stated that it was. That was part of the work the volunteers who stayed at the park for two weeks early this year accomplished. There were approximately twenty people. They also repainted the outside of the shower buildings, the camp office, and they installed a bridge over here. [Indicated an area to the east of the shelter.] Camping has been down this year. I have verified that camping is on a downward trend here in the Quad Cities area. It may also be regionally and/or nationally.

Dr. Moreno stated that camping had been seeing a waning interest nationally as well.

Dr. Simmer asked if the weather was a factor in that?

Mr. Petersen stated that it is more likely that people are finding themselves with less disposable income.

Mr. Craver confirmed that camping has been going out of trend all over the country.

President Swanson asked how long the camping season ran?

Mr. Craver answered that it runs the first weekend in April through the last weekend in October every year.

Mr. Petersen went on to state that staff was almost finished with the trail construction out at Amôwa East. Mileage still needs to be calculated, but it is estimated between two and three miles. The Bike Path project was finished on August 29th. Staff is also working on turning the prairie that went in where the ball diamonds were into a savannah.

President Swanson reminded the Committee that the Committee will be back to meeting at the County Building in the morning next month, then called for a motion to approve all routine reports from the Director and Department Heads as presented.

MOTION: Dr. Moreno moved to approve all routine reports from the Director and Department Heads as presented. Ms. Sowards seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Mr. Craver stated that he was able to attend the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission meeting in Byron Forest Preserve this morning. You'll remember last month the Committee approved

the agreement to classify the hill prairie and buffer area at Indian Bluff Golf Course as a nature preserve. The District has officially been registered in the Nature Preserve Commission. The other thing to bring to the Committee's attention is that it was recommended by Bi-State for the OSLAD grant application for the District to have a public hearing regarding the project. That short public hearing will be next Tuesday. The grant won't cover the entire project, but it will be very close.

President Swanson called the meeting adjourned at 4:13 PM.

Submitted by: Cassie Sullivan
Forest Preserve Administrative Assistant