

MEETING OF PELICAN RIVER FOREST COMMITTEE
APRIL 3, 2023
Minutes

Committee members present: Chairman Robert Briggs, Supervisors Roach and Winkler.

Committee members absent: Supervisors Ryden and Almekinder.

Call to order: Chairman Briggs called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. in the County Board Room of the Oneida County Courthouse. The meeting has been properly posted and mailed in accordance with the Wisconsin Open Meeting law and the facility is handicap accessible.

Approve agenda: Motion by Winkler/Roach to approve today's agenda with the order of items at the Chair's discretion. All aye; motion carried.

Approve Minutes: Motion by Roach/Winkler to approve the minutes from the March 6, 2023 meeting. All aye; motion carried.

Public comment:

Lenore Lopez – Lake Tomahawk Resident - Spoke in support of the Pelican River Forest Easement. Lopez spoke about increased tourism.

Ron Eckstein – Pelican Resident – Spoke in favor of the Pelican River Forest Easement and encouraged the committee to do their due diligence with gathering information about the easement.

Resolution #25-2023 Resolution to Object to the State Removing Future Taxable Land by Purchasing Conservation and Access Easements.

- a. Supervisor Ryden – Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund Research – Ryden submitted a written report to the committee. Clerk Hartman read it to the committee.
- b. Supervisor Winkler – Conservation and Access Easements Research. Winkler gave an oral report to the committee. Winkler reported that when land is in MFL the taxes are \$.56 to \$.88 per acre for taxes and typical land is \$15/acre. Winkler stated that MFL and Easement properties get a tax break. Winkler spoke about the ramifications of putting this property in easement for future generations and the inability of future generations to remove the land from the easement. Winkler stated that he has received a number of emails and phone calls from residents unable to attend meetings that are against the easement. Winkler stated that he received an email from a constituent recommending that the DNR look at land in the southern counties for future easements. Winkler reported that Forest County only has 11% of its land that is taxable and due to that they are unable to raise their taxes enough to pay competitive wages and to provide the necessary services.
- c. Supervisor Almekinder – Proposed Snowmobile and ATV/UTV trails – Almekinder was not present, however, provided a map created by the Forestry Department with potential snowmobile/ATV trails through the easement. Paul Fiene reported that this was created as a conceptual plan.
- d. Supervisor Roach – County and Towns affected and Comprehensive plans. Supervisor Roach reported that he spoke with a few towns regarding their comprehensive plans and the towns he spoke with stated that they want to be in control of what happens with the land in their towns. Roach stated that he has received a number of phone calls from residents in favor of the easement, however, after speaking and hearing details of what

an easement entails many residents express disagreement with the easement. Roach spoke about the easement being in perpetuity and that this board doesn't know what the future holds. Roach spoke about the statutory requirement of the DNR to work with the local government on the easements and following the towns comprehensive plan. Holewinski stated that Phase 1 occurred in 2021 and he isn't aware if the county received notification of Phase 1. Holewinski stated that comprehensive plans are supposed to look out 20 years to plan for future projects, however, this land is in MFL for the next 25 years and therefore, this wouldn't have been looked at in the last comprehensive plan. Briggs reported that the DNR didn't look at the Monico Comprehensive plan when this was first presented and it was only looked at once opposition to the easement starting being expressed.

- e. Supervisor Briggs – Economic Impact to the Towns and County – Briggs stated that when this property was in forest crop they would receive a severance tax, however, that was taken away and is no longer received. Briggs stated that currently the property in question pays \$20,717.00 in property taxes and if it weren't in MFL the taxes would be \$393,077.00 which is a difference of \$372,000.00. Briggs spoke to the town assessor and was told that a conservation easement will decrease the land value by 30%. Briggs reported that this land encompasses 81% of land in Monico. Briggs spoke with the previous managers of the land and they are both against the easement and have stated that MFL land has outlived its usefulness.

Winkler encouraged the committee to listen to the Natural Resource Board hearings regarding the conservation easement and expressed concern with the hearings and possible red flags. Briggs reported that on phase 1 the roads that were supposed to be opened have not been opened during the last year.

Holewinski reported that under the Knowles Nelson Funds statutes it states that they will contact the impacted municipalities not that they will try to notify the municipalities. Holewinski stated that there were no comments submitted to the Natural Resource Board in opposition to the easement, however, there were resolutions submitted to the DNR within the required timeline.

Winkler stated that he has worked with conservation groups in both Minnesota and Wisconsin and typically those groups are against motorized vehicles on the conservation property. Winkler expressed concern with the assertion that there would be UTV/ATV trails on the easement. Holewinski stated that the recorded easement does not show any ATV trails, it states that ATV trails are listed as an option to be decided by the land owner. Discussion regarding the cost of creating ATV trails and maintaining ATV trails on the property.

Briggs presented a resolution that was passed by the Town of Sugar Camp to “modify federal and state practices, policies and regulations to protect future taxable base and future development potential of legislatively limited communities (oppose Pelican River Conservation Easement)”. Briggs reported that this is for future discussions. Discussion regarding what the committee will bring back to the County Board and if the committee can bring back a new resolution. Fugle stated that the committee can bring back a corrected, updated or replacement resolution to the county board for approval.

Dates and items for future agenda/meetings: Motion Roach/Winkler that the next Pelican River Forest committee meeting will be held on May 1st at 10:00 a.m. All aye; motion carried.
Future topics: Resolution # 25-2023

Adjourn – Briggs adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Tracy Hartman, Recording Secretary
Oneida County Clerk

DRAFT