

**Rouge River Advisory Council (RRAC)  
Draft Meeting Summary  
July 16, 2024, at 11:30 a.m. via Hybrid**



**List of Attendees:**

**Voting Members:**

Marie McCormick, Chair - *Present*  
Dan Ballnik, Vice Chair- *Present*  
Bill Craig, Holliday Nature Preserve Association- *Absent*  
John Gundry, WCP - *Present*  
Trisha Gabriel, Livonia  
Jacy Garrison, Oakland County- *Absent*  
Erma Leaphart, Sierra Club - *Present*  
John O'Meara, ECT – *Present*  
Sally Petrella, Friends of Rouge Park - *Present*  
Brandy Siedlaczek, Southfield- *Absent*  
Tyler Sonoga, Farmington Hills- *Present*  
Dean Tuomari, Citizen – *Present*  
Don Carpenter, LTU - *Present*  
Shawn Duke, Stantec – *Present*

**Others Present:**

Chris O'Meara, ARC  
Tennille Newsome, ARC  
Ashley Allen, HRC  
Eric Wahrman, DWSD  
Noel Mullett, ARC  
Ashley Flintoff, FOTR  
Sam Davis, FOTR  
Lauren Eaton, FOTR  
Donna Kashian, Wayne State  
Greg Bajuk, HRC  
Stephanie Petriello, OCWRC  
Chris Raschke, City of Dearborn  
Heather Rice, Washtenaw Co. WRC Office

**Introductions**

Chris O'Meara in place of Marie McCormick completed roll call by calling on voting member attendees first, then attendees listed in the Teams chat. Attendees gave their name, affiliation. Introductions were completed.

Marie McCormick arrived in the meeting and called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Meeting Summary**

Marie McCormick reviewed the meeting summary from April 30, 2024. Marie asked if there was any discussion, there was none. The motion to approve the meeting summary was made by Sally Petrella, Friends of Rouge Park and seconded by Dean Tuomari, Citizen and passed unanimously by voting members.

**Old Business**

Marie McCormick reported there is an EJ-DEI Gatekeeping training is scheduled for September 5, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. and reminded the RRAC that the training is an hour and a half long. This training is also open for voting members and non-voting members. Marie encourages everyone on the meeting to attend.

**PAC Business**

**Marie Representative Status**

Marie McCormick reported that since she is no longer with FOTR, she will now be representing herself as a Citizen for the RRAC. Marie stated her options to represent were for a business as she is in masonry and construction or she is involved with two other non-profits. If at any time there is an opening or need for these categories, she is happy to change from Citizen representation to them.

There was some discussion on the minimum requirements under the Bylaws and Chris O'Meara shared the voting members which showed all minimum requirements are met, so Marie representing as a Citizen is fine.

Erma Leaphart wanted to state that she feels every business should be interested and practice in a way and being mindful of watershed protection.

### **Voting Members**

Marie McCormick reported that she is excited to state that there are two individuals who are interested and eligible to become voting members. Those individuals are Donna Kashian, Wayne State University and Lauren Eaton, Friends of the Rouge.

Marie mentioned every voting member should have received their bios and resumes. Marie asked for a motion to approve Donna Kashian and Lauren Eaton as new voting members of the RRAC. The motion was made by Dean Tuomari, Citizen and seconded by Don Carpenter, LTU and passed unanimously by voting members. Marie asked if there was any discussion. Erma Leaphart stated she had an opportunity to work with Donna Kashian at Wayne State and also Lauren Eaton at FOTR and believes it is an honor to have them both as a part of the group. Marie thanked Erma for her kind words and welcomed Donna and Lauren as voting members. Marie stated since they are now voting members, they can vote on anything from this point forward.

### **SPAC Alternate**

Marie McCormick stated that when Erma is not available, an alternate is needed to step in when Erma cannot. Marie wanted Erma to advise the group on what it means to be an SPAC representative and that the SPAC alternate would be by appointment by Marie.

Erma advised the RRAC that the SPAC is the State Public Advisory Council for all Michigan AOCs.

- AOCs attend the meetings
- Meetings are quarterly
- Travel to meetings that are in person and some are virtual; next meeting the Clinton River Watershed Council is hosting
- Each AOC gives a report on activities; John O'Meara also attends and Erma takes his report that he provides on all projects in the Rouge and shares it
- From the SPAC meetings, the representative will bring back information to the RRAC

John O'Meara stated the meetings are quarterly and only one meeting a year is in person, all others are virtual.

Sally Petrella asked if the person that is appointed to be the SPAC representative alternate have to be a voting member. Marie stated, yes – they would need to be a voting member. Lauren Eaton stated she was interested in being the SPAC representative alternate. Marie asked if there was anyone else, there was none. Marie appointed Lauren as the SPAC Alternate and thanked her for volunteering.

### **Recruitment Package**

Marie McCormick reported that as part of the PAC support grant, the Friends of the Rouge received some funding to support the RRAC in developing a recruitment package. Marie stated this was the first year for it to begin with continued development in future years. Marie reported that FOTR is in the middle of the transition with a new leader, Ashley Flintoff. Marie asked if FOTR didn't have anything to share today, then Lauren could give an update in a couple of weeks. Lauren indicated her understanding was FOTR would focus on the recruitment package in the fall. Sally stated an updated would be given at the next RRAC meeting in October.

Marie asked if there were any comments, there were none.

## **SPAC Report**

### **SPAC Meeting**

Erma Leaphart reported the SPAC meeting was held on June 5, 2024. Some highlights were:

- New AOC Coordinator, Weston Hillier – he will have St. Mary's, Detroit and St. Clair AOCs. Erma reported on his background.
- Mike Alexander who had been working with the PAC is now with MDARD as a division director. They will be hiring a new section manager to replace him
- There is a new unit; Great Lakes Management Unit that will be working on sediment and invasive species so they are looking into hiring a section manager for that role.
- Jen Tewkesbury will represent Kalamazoo, Rouge and Clinton
- Samantha Todaro will represent Saginaw, Manistique and River Raisin
- The Action Plan 4 for FY25-29 will be finalized before end of the fiscal year; some changes within the action plan include more focus on environmental justice and access, definition of DAC (disadvantaged communities), meaningful involvement and metrics
- SPAC Habitat Committee has a new chair, John O'Meara and their next meeting will be July 22, 2024. There are a couple of areas of focus which are trying to do a depository of information for monitoring maintenance and templates, encouraging and identifying funding for the maintenance activities.
- USFWS is doing a mapping project of all coastal wetlands
- SPAC elections are in Fall 2024. Brian Egan from River Raisin is currently the Chair of SPAC, Eric is the Vice Chair and will be stepping down so that position will be available.
- Clint River will host the fall SPAC meeting is, date to be determined.
- The minutes of the last meeting will be shared as soon as they are received.

Marie thanked Erma for the updated. Sally Petrella asked Erma if she had an interest in the Vice Chair positions, Erma stated no.

### **SPAC Habitat Subcommittee**

John O'Meara reported the Habitat Subcommittee will have a location for its information and will be on the Alliance of Rouge Communities and RRAC websites. New links will be set up for those sites and are currently being developed.

### **SPAC EJ-DEI Subcommittee**

Some highlights were:

- One of the goals of the subcommittee is trying to identify the different DEI-J activities that each PAC is involved in. A survey was done and a report was generated summarizing those activities.
- They are currently looking into some metrics that may be useful and are not difficult but meaningful. That will help the subcommittee to say yes that they are seeing progress in terms of increasing access and increasing the diversity of being more inclusive within the PAC.
- Melanie Foose is now the statewide director for the SPAC and is hiring a consultant that will help the PAC with the initiative.
- They will use AI a little bit and use the resources of the entire internet to help as well.

Marie thanked Erma for the update. Marie asked if there were any questions for Erma. There were none. Marie stated if anyone has an interest in attending the subcommittee and SPAC meetings, it is open to everyone.

## **EGLE Update**

John O'Meara provided an update on Jen's behalf. Some highlights were:

- With the AOC coordinator staff restructure, Jen now has fewer responsibilities of more PACs and will have more time to focus on the Rouge.

- EGLE was asked by the Governor's office to provide estimates for the sediment cleanups in Rouge and Detroit Rivers as part of the new State budget. The numbers were provided and, as part of the funding request, were not approved by the Legislature.

Sally Petrella asked if there was a draft example letter that could be sent to the elective officials. Marie mentioned the Michigan Environmental Council has been working with the legislature through John Hartig and that there has been a letter that FOTR and RRAC signed onto.

John mentioned yes as the organizational letter but as a citizen to not do it as a letter, but an email or call to the legislature office. Sally stated RRAC members have relationship with some officials with talking points. Marie put the letter in the chat for the members to review with all the information. Marie also included an article by Planet Detroit that also details some history and background, link here: <https://planetdetroit.org/2023/06/michigan-executives-renew-call-for-accelerated-fed-state-clean-up-of-toxic-sediment-in-the-detroit-river/>

### **EPA Update**

John O'Meara provided a brief update on Leah's behalf: EPA is currently going through their quarterly funding cycle the Rouge has a couple in the process and the next one will be in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter leading to October, the Rouge doesn't have anything in the works for that period. The next time period would be when the Rouge may have funding outside of any support for the sediment work.

Marie asked if there were any questions. There were none.

### **Rouge AOC Grants Update**

#### Status of Projects

John O'Meara reported the following: *Grant update sheet is in the RRAC Agenda packet that was provided in the meeting invite.*

- 19 recently completed or ongoing projects
- 8 are in vegetation maintenance that wraps this year
- 5 are in process of construction
- Fire Fighters Park received their bids in Troy; will begin construction later this year

Sally Petrella asked about the Sprague project and wanted to verify that the project is in-stream work and that no meanders or ripples are installed. John O'Meara stated he gave her the contact information for the designer. Sally stated there is some concern about the project because of the amount of trees that were being removed as well as the mussel population removed from there. She hopes the project will have a positive impact since mussels will not be reintroduced. John stated that it went through permitting and with trees, most communities/counties have a tree ordinance.

Erma Leaphart asked about Riverview and if there is a wetland or wetlands. John responded there is both, wetlands there and restoring to connect to a bigger wetland system. Erma asked about monitoring the wetlands for performance and if it is done as part of the work. John stated they are not mitigation projects but on all projects most have received two years of monitoring and maintenance for establishment under the construction contract.

Marie thanked John for the update and asked if there were any comments or questions. Sally Petrella asked if there was an update on whether the EGLE permit was approved for the Johnson Intercounty Drain project and FOTR has been working with Trout Unlimited. John responded that it is still in the permitting process and there is no determination as to when.

Erma Leaphart asked which county the Johnson Intercounty Drain project was in and John stated it is in Washtenaw and Wayne County, but they have their own drain board. John indicated Washtenaw County

is the fiduciary for the project and it is GLRI funded. Marie stated Evan Pratt mentioned to her that there was some challenges with the project and Marie asked if they were being worked out. John said they were being worked on and it is permit related.

Marie McCormick asked about Phoenix Lake and what the barges are being used for. John mentioned placement of sand. Marie asked what kind of animals use sand for habitat. John responded, fish primarily and a lot of burrowers in near shore or in the vicinity.

Marie asked if there were any questions, there were none.

### **Other Related Watershed Projects**

#### Other Related Projects

Marie McCormick stated if any members have any other projects that are not related to John O'Meara's list and they want to bring up that might be related to the AOC work or overall watershed restoration.

Trisha Gabriel reported that the Denmar drain has an underdrain that leads into the golf course. They had some streambank restoration stabilization in the area with some tree planting. It went from the residential area to the Idlewild Golf Course and was completed last year. Further upstream, they also did another golf course Whispering Willows where there was streambank stabilization also and was completed last year. Currently, they are working at Greenwood Park where they are going to be doing some additional work.

Sally Petrella asked Trisha if one of the projects they are doing is one of the daylighting projects. Trisha responded yes, the Idlewild Golf Course. Sally asked if it was EPA funding. Trisha and John O'Meara stated no – that it was mostly City of Livonia funds.

Marie thanked Trisha for the update.

Marie McCormick gave a brief update on Northville Downs:

- 49 acre parcel redevelopment led by Hunter Pasteur; has a ¼ mile of Walled Lake Branch that is going to be daylight
- Continuing demolition of the Downs clubhouse
- Large structure on south side to be taken down
- When demolishing small stables, some gallons of kerosene and motor oil leaked into the Rouge River.
- Will be dredging a new channel for the river between River Street and the existing river

Marie stated there is a redevelopment update page if any members wanted to watch updates. You can view the page here: [https://www.ci.northville.mi.us/community/northville\\_downs\\_redevelopment](https://www.ci.northville.mi.us/community/northville_downs_redevelopment)

Don Carpenter stated DWSD is working on several larger scale green storm water structure in the Brightmoor neighborhood that are going to eventually direct drain into the Rouge River. One of the projects they are focusing on is going to construction this fall and there is a deep paving of block and reforestation of a couple blocks of land. The other three projects include 20 rain gardens that are going to be built next year.

Dan Ballnik asked if there were any ordinances in the Rouge watershed that are sustainable landscape friendly. If not, then he will write one and use Ann Arbor's as a template. Don stated Northville was going through the process. Marie asked if they were going to have an external consultant support them or being done internally. Don stated they will use an external consultant, Beth Heinz.

Marie asked if there were any other projects. There were none.

## **New Business**

### Future Meetings

Marie McCormick reported

- **RRAC:** October 15, 2024 (hybrid) – Friends of the Rouge offered up their conference room for the hybrid dates.

## **Comments**

### Members

Marie McCormick asked if there were any comments. Sally Petrella wanted to share the news that with their Rouge fish surveys, they found five redbreast sunfish in Johnson Creek in Salem Twp. Sally stated they haven't seen them there since 2012.

Marie McCormick wanted to allow Ashley Flintoff who as of July 8, 2024 is the new Executive Director of the Friends of the Rouge. Ashley thanked Marie and she was excited to see all the work being done. She also gave some background about herself.

### General Public

Marie McCormick asked if there were any comments or questions. There were none.

## **Review of Action Items**

- Approved the April 30, 2024 meeting summary
- Marie McCormick changing representation status to Citizen
- Approved to vote Donna Kashian and Lauren Eaton as voting members of the RRAC
- Lauren Eaton volunteered to be the SPAC alternate
- Friends of the Rouge to give an update on recruitment package at October meeting

Erma Leaphart made the motion to adjourn the meeting, Donna Kashian seconded the Motion. The meeting was adjourned.