I. Call to Order

President Wehrli called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Kendall County Board Room.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Gilmour, Gryder, Koukol, Prochaska, Shaw, and Wehrli all were present.

III. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Gryder made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Commissioner Prochaska. All, aye. Opposed, none.

IV. Citizens to be Heard

No public comments offered.

V. Director’s Report

Director Guritz reported that efforts were underway to publish the spring newsletter, address safety issues associated with emerald ash borer impacts, and establish the Fox River Bluffs forest preserve. President Wehrli called attention to the Director’s Report, highlighting reservation reports submitted by Rebecca Antrim, Tina Villarreal and Laura McCoy for public programs and facility reservations at Hoover, Ellis, and the Historic Courthouse.

Director Guritz reported that January activities focused on getting the business of the forest preserve on track, with efforts underway to address the marketing plan, and needed repairs and maintenance in preserves and facilities, recognizing staff member contributions in covering the day-to-day operations and supporting new initiatives.

President Wehrli highlighted volunteer contributions report submitted by Jody Strohm. In 2014, volunteers contributed 1,762 hours representing $39,738 of in-kind support, with 107 volunteer hours contributed in January 2015. President Wehrli recognized the value of these contributions and fantastic work taking place in the preserves. Staff is working on nominations for volunteer awards for presentation to Commission.
President Wehrli recognized educational and special event programming including full enrollment in Natural Beginnings, weddings planned for 2015, the Murder Mystery fundraiser at Meadowhawk, and the 5k Reindeer Run, drawing attention grounds and maintenance activities reported by Mike Pierson, including efforts to reopen preserves during the larger snow events in January.

VI. HR Green Proposal – Millbrook Bridge Inspection

Director Guritz reported that the HR Green 2009 inspection report was distributed at the last Commission meeting. A new proposal from HR Green was provided in the meeting packet for re-inspection of Millbrook Bridge at a cost of $6,164.10.

Director Guritz requested Board direction for next steps, including any requested changes for additional inspections or reporting for the HR Green proposal.

Commissioner Koukol noted that the HR Green proposal did not include an underwater inspection of piers and abutments, expressing that the main concern with the bridge is what may be taking place underwater.

Director Guritz stated that in the proposal submitted HR Green would conduct a preliminary assessment of scouring that may be occurring underwater to determine whether an underwater inspection is needed.

Director Guritz stated concern over the amount of time since the last inspection, stating that there may be new issues with the overall infrastructure that would need to be addressed.

Commissioner Gryder concurred that the underwater inspection is needed, but would support the overall inspection proposal so long as this was included.

Commissioner Gilmour inquired into whether the District had received additional proposals. Director Guritz stated that HR Green was the only firm contacted because of their familiarity with the structure.

President Wehrli stated that the last inspection revealed that shifting of one of the piers had occurred that impacted bridge support infrastructure that should be reexamined in order to confirm that the bridge is safe for the public.

Commission instructed staff to secure a second proposal from HR Green that included an underwater inspection of piers and abutments.
VII. American Competitive Trail Horse Challenge

Director Guritz stated that Ellis House and Equestrian Center had been approached by the American Competitive Trail Horse Association to host two challenge events in 2015. The events would take place during two weekends with no planned wedding events. Hosting costs would be minimal, and achieve net revenues comparable to weekend wedding rentals. At this point, direction was requested from the Board on whether to move ahead with planning the events and developing an agreement with the Association, understanding that District staff members are conducting due diligence with determining whether the Association will enter into a signed agreement, with sufficient insurance extension coverage.

Commissioner Gryder inquired into the location of the challenge trails, and whether Baker Woods trails would be used. Director Guritz stated that this would be determined when laying out the course. In addition to trail challenges, the indoor arena would be set up for a separate obstacle event for each of the two weekends hosted.

Additional revenue may be generated from overnight trailer camping, concessions, and catered meals.

Commissioner Koukol inquired into the financial accounting for the event. Director Guritz stated that the Association would collect the registration cost, and that payment provisions to the District would be included as part of the agreement.

VIII. Registration Program Overview & Discussion (RecPro)

Director Guritz reported that the District has budgeted $6,000.00 for the purchase of the RecPro program registration software, and this proposal has been reviewed by the Programming and Events Committee. District staff members have researched registration software available in the marketplace, determining that RecPro is the best fit and solution to meet District needs. Director Guritz stated that RecPro is a comprehensive software solution, and includes a $1,500.00 annual cost for software support. Director Guritz stated that the baseline software proposal will not initially include on-line registration, but an additional software module is available within the RecPro software suite for additional cost when the District is able to support and afford this opportunity. Initially, the goal is to migrate from the existing, unsupported software to the new RecPro basic registration system. Beyond this issue, the District is exploring whether the system will allow for registrations to be entered at Ellis and Hoover through wireless connections, as these sites are not currently connected to the network.
In terms of on-line registration, there will be additional costs for credit card processing, with the recommendation that the District establish a convenience fee to offset processing charges.

Commissioner Prochaska inquired into whether the District already charges a credit card processing convenience fee. Director Guritz stated that he would need to look into whether this has been implemented.

Commissioner Koukol inquired into what the $6,000.00 software purchase would cover. Director Guritz stated that the base system will allow us to enter all program and facility rental participant information after first building the registration framework for the District’s programs into the system. The base system will allow for managing and tracking participant payments, tracking of program performance, e-marketing for upcoming programs, and generation of participation rosters and usage reports.

Commissioner Shaw inquired into the tech support needed for the system. Director Guritz stated that as part of the review process, District staff discussed the software application with County Information Technology staff to verify compatibility for hosting the software on County servers. District staff is exploring the feasibility of wireless access to the registration system for Ellis and Hoover, both remote locations that do not have access to the County network.

Commissioner Gryder inquired into the costs for achieving on-line registration. Director Guritz stated that the updated proposal shows an initial payment of $12,500.00 for the software purchase, with a payment plan available to spread this cost over three years, resulting in an annual payment for the software, web-hosting and annual licensing of $8,050.00 per year.

Commissioner Prochaska inquired into whether the software could be cloud hosted. Director Guritz stated that this would need to be explored with the company and department of Information Technology.

Commissioner Koukol inquired into whether additional staff would be needed to run the system. Director Guritz stated that he did not anticipate the need for additional staff. Additional support may be needed if registrations cannot be directly entered into the system by Ellis desk staff. Regardless, the recommendation is to move forward with the initial software purchase.

Director Guritz stated that questions posed during the meeting would be addressed with the company. Based on response, a final proposal would be brought back for approval.
IX. E-Newsletter Discussion (Constant Contact)

Director Guritz stated that the District is in process of transitioning to an electronic newsletter. The District has been receiving e-mails from the public requesting enrollment in the electronic newsletter. The proposed subscription to Constant Contact would allow for an automated process for newsletter registration, fully complies with anti-spam laws, and will support efforts to grow our list of subscribers and program marketing capabilities.

Commissioner Prochaska inquired into the number of subscribers. Director Guritz stated that current subscribers are under 2,500.

Commissioner Wehrli stated that the next edition would be the last paper edition of the Newsletter.

Commissioner Koukol inquired into whether a paper newsletter option would still be available. Director Guritz stated that once the District transitions to an e-newsletter, the format of the current newsletter will change, requiring that a separate document be designed and published for a paper version. District staff will need to explore how we can reach out to other agencies to promote the eNewsletter.

Commissioner Prochaska suggested that MailChimp could be a more cost effective service for the eNewsletter.

Commissioner Gryder stated that the current budget includes $2,800.00 for publication of the newsletter, and that switching to the new electronic form would reduce this cost and actual expenditures for publication.

Commissioner Gilmour noted that paper copies are currently distributed to local libraries and other public agencies, and questioned whether this would still continue. Director Guritz stated that this issue would need to be explored to determine how or if this could still be accomplished, the interest being to avoid the need to layout and publish a separate document, and reduce costs for publication.

Commissioner Gryder requested that District staff provide updates on the total number of subscribers. Director Guritz stated that the new eNewsletter could result in an initial attrition of subscribers, suggesting that the current subscribers be mailed a postcard with a link to the new system after publication of the final paper version of the newsletter.

X. Meadowhawk Lodge High Speed Internet

Director Guritz stated that the Events and Programs Committee, as part of the marketing plan, has been working to determine costs for high-speed internet connectivity for
Meadowhawk Lodge. In October 2014, Comcast provided a proposal for high-speed internet that included a $49.00 installation cost and $112.90 monthly charge. Currently, the District also maintains three AT&T monthly wireless subscriptions at Hoover. Director Guritz stated that in order to reduce total costs for internet services, the District is exploring what equipment would be needed to establish a hot-zone for Hoover to eliminate the other wireless contracts that amount to approximately $140.00 per month. In order to create a hot zone, a high-speed internet connection needs to be established at Meadowhawk that could be tapped into for expansion of connectivity to other buildings at the site. Director Guritz stated that he would be looking into whether there are other high-speed internet options for the site.

Commissioner Prochaska inquired into what download speed would be achieved within the Comcast proposal. Director Guritz stated he would need to follow-up with Comcast to provide this information.

Commissioner Shaw stated that during a recent business retreat he attended, many of the attendees were utilizing the high-speed internet access to conduct business during the conference.

Commissioner Prochaska suggested that the current proposal may not provide the bandwidth necessary to accommodate the total number of users accessing the site, and to make sure that the routers used are wireless AC to insure bandwidth speed is sustained across the site. Director Guritz stated that he would explore these questions, and return to Commission with a formal recommendation and contract.

XI. ComEd Green Region Grant Application

Director Guritz stated that the due date for the application is March 6, 2015. The goal of the application is to leverage the Green Region grant to develop and begin implementation of restoration plans at the District’s dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve areas at Tucker’s Fen and Maramech Forest Preserve. The District will need to provide matching funds, but District funding budgeted will leverage support for restoration activities, offsetting initial costs for restoration supplies and consulting activities.

The Commission discussed the proposal with consensus generated to bring forward a motion to approve the District’s application to the program.
Other Items of Business

a. Speer Financial Bond Refund Updates

The Board discussed setting a minimum threshold for the sale of bonds as part of the bond refunding proposal. All professional service fees and charges associated with the refunding proposal will be rolled into the closing costs for the reissued bonds, provided that Speer Financial is able to close on the sale when the bonds are brought to market. Speer Financial, Inc. is requesting that the Board establish the minimum threshold and resulting net savings that will be passed onto the taxpayers. Director Guritz stated that President Wehrli noted that the professional service fees and charges are significant, and wanted to make the Board aware of the closing costs that would be assigned within the overall refunding effort.

Commissioner Koukol requested confirmation that the bond refund calculation spreadsheet presented shows a $300,000 of savings over a 12-year period (representing approximately $25,000 per year). President Wehrli clarified that the actual amount saved within the bond refund proposal is $440,500, from which the assigned professional service fees totaling $140,500 is deducted, resulting in a net $300,000 savings distributed over the 12-year period.

President Wehrli stated that because the District and County are considered as a collective unit for this particular bond refund opportunity, this year represents the closest window of opportunity for the District to pursue this refund.

Consensus of the Board was to move forward with the bond refund proposal by establishing a minimum savings threshold to insure the transaction. The 3% minimum savings threshold will be inserted into a District ordinance for approval in March.

Director Guritz stated that while a higher savings is anticipated, 3% was recommended by Speer based on their confidence that the refund opportunity will achieve this savings even if the District’s bond rating is reduced to BBB.

b. Emerald Ash Borer – Tree Removal Project Presentation and Updates

Director Guritz provided a short overview and PowerPoint presentation covering the impact on ash trees in Hoover Forest Preserve. This is the first year the District is seeing widespread die-offs of ash trees within the preserves. However, 2015 is likely the peak year for the District in terms of need to address the issue from the standpoint of cost for removal of trees in and around areas of high public visitation.
Director Guritz reported that because of the high-volume of trees that need to be taken down at Hoover, the District will need to bid the removal project, with costs estimated to exceed the $20,000 threshold required for competitive bidding.

Kim Olson confirmed that this is the first year we are seeing widespread devastation, with 25-35% of the trees within the District’s forested areas consisting of ash trees, including the areas of high public visitation at Hoover Forest Preserve. Essentially, ash trees are at this density throughout our preserves, and the issue of tree deaths will be widespread beyond core activity areas. Because of this, and the associated liability issues, the District will need to move quickly to establish a management plan for addressing public safety within core activity areas and along preserve trails where dead ash trees pose the highest risk to public safety. This will insure the District is conducting its due diligence to address this problem.

Kim Olson confirmed that the widespread impacts are beyond the scope of what District staff is able to address in the short amount of time available before preserve activity begins to increase within our high activity areas. Beyond this issue, the dead ash trees have a tendency to fall quickly.

The presentation concluded with an overview of tree removals needed around the Hoover lodges, campsites, and buildings.

Commissioner Koukol inquired into the quarantine provisions. Director Guritz stated that our approach will be to contain the trees and related materials generated at Hoover.

Beyond this initial removal, District staff members will be looking into grant opportunities that may be available to address this issue beyond this initial project.

**XII. Executive Session**

Commissioner Prochaska made a motion to enter into Executive Session under 2.c.(1) of the Open Meetings Act to discuss the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee of the public body or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity; and under 2.c.(5) of the Open Meetings Act to discuss the purchase or lease of real property for the use of the public body, including meetings held for the purpose of discussing whether a particular parcel should be acquired. Seconded by Commissioner Koukol. Roll call: Commissioners Koukol, Gilmour, Shaw, Prochaska, Gryder, and Wehrli, aye. Opposed, none. Commission entered Executive Session at 7:07 p.m.

Commission reconvened the regular meeting at p.m. 7:53 p.m.
XIII. Adjournment

Commissioner Gryder made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Prochaska. All, aye. Meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David Guritz
Director, Kendall County Forest Preserve District