



DATE: March 1, 2021

Agenda Item# 10.4

MEMO TO: Terry Wilke, Chair
Planning Committee

FROM: Randall L. Seebach
Director of Planning and Land Preservation

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a Resolution approving the Master Plan for Public Access Improvements and Habitat Restoration at Oriole Grove Forest Preserve.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SUPPORTED: Public Access and Connections; Conservation.

FINANCIAL DATA: Currently the Oriole Grove Master Plan improvements and the long term operating costs are not funded. The attached resolution would not authorize the expenditure of any funds. At a later date, and when funding is secured, the Board of Commissioners would approve the expenditure of specific design and construction contracts to implement the Master Plan.

BACKGROUND: Oriole Grove Forest Preserve is an 86-acres preserve located in southeast Lake County within portions of both Lake Bluff and Lake Forest. In 1980, the preserve was acquired jointly by the State of Illinois and the District as a potential stormwater flood storage facility. Several years later, an engineering study determined that the site was not feasible for stormwater storage. In 2015, the District began extensive negotiations to acquire sole ownership from the State. The District eventually took full ownership of the preserve in September of 2019.

Oriole Grove is a keystone preserve within a much larger landscape of 282 acres of preserved natural areas within the immediate Skokie River Corridor. Lake Bluff Openlands maintains 35 acres to the north and Lake Forest Openlands owns 119 acres to the south. Currently, there are approximately 1.3 miles of existing foot trails within the preserve with surface materials that vary from broken-up asphalt (from previous roads) to natural surface. Many of the trails are deteriorating and susceptible to periodic flooding. Historically there was a loop trail used by local residents which was lost when the property to the east was developed. The two existing foot bridges that cross the Skokie River are deteriorating and currently closed to public use. Much of the site has become overgrown with invasive plants such as buckthorn and honeysuckle. The site has significant restoration potential, with a few key components to build off, including: (i) significant hydrology present on site providing a strong foundation for the restoration of a sedge meadow and prairie similar to Lake Forest Openlands' Shaw Prairie to the south; (ii) a small mesic prairie remnant in the southeast part of the site (currently referred to as the "Birch Prairie"); (iii) a 4.4-acre pond with higher quality water that supports a State-identified threatened fish species; and (iv) three areas of remnant and/or partially restored oak savanna and woodlands.

The Master Plan process began in the summer 2019 with a team of District staff from three different departments assembled to provide input. The team developed four main goals that have guided the preparation of the Master Plan including: (i) provide an improved public access and recreation experience that is ADA-compliant and reduces short and long term operation costs; (ii) create ways for the public to view and enjoy the cultural landscape feature along Jensen Pond; (iii) continue restoration efforts and dedicate new areas for improving the natural landscape that are consistent with the District's 100-year vision and landscape-scale conservation goals; and (iv) restore much of the original hydrology, with the goals of creating a high-quality sedge meadow, controlling invasive species and installing aquatic, wetland and savanna plants. Commissioners, staff and the public participated in the planning process. Several opportunities were available for the public, key stakeholders and adjacent municipalities to provide feedback including an in-person open house on September 22, 2020 at the Greenbelt Cultural Center, a Special Planning Committee Meeting held virtually on October 26, 2020 and a six-week online comment period that followed the open house and concluded on November 9, 2020. The District ultimately received more than 80 written comments during the planning process.

The Master Plan that would be approved by the attached resolution is consistent with the four main goals identified above by providing improved public access that is ADA-compliant, is easy to maintain, is respectful of the preserve's sensitive natural resources and strikes the appropriate balance between competing interests. Based on the feedback from staff, commissioners, stakeholders, and the public, the planning team was able to prepare the proposed Master Plan, which it believes is best for Oriole Grove Forest Preserve and strikes the appropriate balance between the master plan goals and competing interests. The plan includes:

- 1.3 miles of new crushed stone trails with a one-mile loop
- two timber boardwalks
- a scenic overlook with a potential donor recognition opportunity and
- replacement of one Skokie River bridge.

The proposed Master Plan also identifies significant habitat restoration improvements including:

- removal and control of invasive woody and herbaceous plant species,
- rehydrating the historical wetlands through drain tile removal and/or disablement,
- creation of a sedge meadow within the eastern portion of the preserve,
- installation of aquatic and wetland plants in and around the pond,
- reforestation and enhancement of the existing woodland areas,
- stream enhancement along the river and
- installation of native seed throughout the preserve.

When the Master Plan improvements are complete, the preserve will have 21 acres of restored prairie, 25 acres of restored woodlands and 33 acres of restored wetlands.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Finance, Corporate Counsel.

STATE OF ILLINOIS)
) SS
COUNTY OF LAKE)

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
REGULAR MARCH MEETING
MARCH 9, 2021**

MISTER PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

Your **PLANNING COMMITTEE** presents herewith “A Resolution Approving the Master Plan for Public Access Improvements and Habitat Restoration at Oriole Grove Forest Preserve” and requests its approval.

PLANNING COMMITTEE:

Date: 3-1-2021 Roll Call Vote: Ayes: 9 Nays: 0

Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: _____

**LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE MASTER PLAN
FOR PUBLIC ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS AND HABITAT RESTORATION
AT ORIOLE GROVE FOREST PRESERVE**

WHEREAS, the Lake County Forest Preserve District (the “District”) owns the 86-acre Oriole Grove Forest Preserve (the “Preserve”); and

WHEREAS, on September 22, 2020, the District held a public open house and on October 26, 2020 the District held a Special Planning Committee for public input regarding uses of the Preserve, including uses depicted within two concept plans for the Preserve; and

WHEREAS, on February 1, 2021, the Planning Committee reviewed a preliminary master plan for the Preserve (the “Preliminary Plan”); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the District’s Rules of Order and Operational Procedures, the Planning Committee sent the Preliminary Plan to the other District Standing Committees for their review and on February 4, 2021 and March 1, 2021, the Finance Committee and Operations Committee, respectively, reviewed and recommended approval of the Preliminary Plan for the Preserve; and

WHEREAS, the District staff has revised the Preliminary Plan, based on comments from the District’s Standing Committees, and converted such revised Preliminary Plan to the master plan master plan for the Preserve attached hereto (the “Master Plan”); and

WHEREAS, the Master Plan includes (i) 1.3 miles of new crushed stone trails with a one-mile loop, (ii) two timber boardwalks, (iii) a scenic overlook with a potential donor recognition opportunity, and (iv) replacement of one of the existing Skokie River bridges; and

WHEREAS, the Master Plan identifies significant habitat restoration improvements including (i) removal and control of invasive woody and herbaceous plant species, (ii) rehydrating the historical wetlands through drain tile removal and/or disablement, (iii) creation of a sedge meadow within the eastern portion of the preserve, (iv) installation of aquatic and wetland plants in and around the pond, (v) reforestation and enhancement of the existing woodland areas, (vi) stream enhancement along the Skokie River, and (vii) installation of native seed throughout the preserve; and

WHEREAS, currently the Oriole Grove Master Plan improvements and the long term operating costs are not funded;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of the Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake County, Illinois **THAT**:

Section 1: Recitals. The recitals set forth above are incorporated as a part of this Resolution by this reference.

Section 2: Approval of Master Plan. The Master Plan is hereby approved in the form attached hereto. The Master Plan will serve as a guide for the implementation of future uses, improvements, and projects within the Preserve. Nothing in the Resolution limits the District's Board of Commissioners' ability to allow uses, improvements, and projects different from those depicted in the Master Plan.

Section 3: Effective Date. This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and approval in the manner provided by law.

PASSED this _____ day of _____, 2021

AYES:

NAYS:

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2021

Angelo D. Kyle, President
Lake County Forest Preserve District

ATTEST:

Julie Gragnani, Secretary
Lake County Forest Preserve District

Exhibit No. _____

Oriole Grove Forest Preserve: Master Plan



LEGEND

	Property Line		Open Water
	Woodland		Wetland
	Prairie		Floodway
	Former Agricultural		River Corridor
	Planting Buffer		Railroad
	Bridge		Underpass
	Boardwalk		Overlook
	Proposed Crushed Stone Trail		
	Existing Offsite Trail		
	Skokie Valley Bike Path		
	Lake Bluff/Lake Forest Openlands		

SUMMARY

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION of this preserve is of key importance to return it to a high quality mosaic of prairies, open wetlands and oak groves. The site has been divided into 7 restoration units based primarily on land use history and current conditions:

- Unit A: Remnant Oak Savanna/Woodland and Prairie**
 - Clearing and control of invasive woody species
 - Control of herbaceous invasive species
 - Reforestation
- Unit B: Jensen Pond**
 - Control of herbaceous invasive species
 - Installation of aquatic and wetland plants
- Unit C: Remnant Oak Savanna/Woodland**
 - Control of woody/herbaceous invasive species
 - Replace deteriorating access bridge
 - Reforestation
- Unit D: Remnant Oak Woodland**
 - Clearing and control of invasive woody species
 - Control of herbaceous invasive species
 - Reforestation
 - Installation of native seed
- Unit E: Birch Prairie**
 - Control of woody/herbaceous invasive species
- Unit F: Remaining Areas/Former Agriculture**
 - Clearing and control of invasive woody species
 - Control of herbaceous invasive species
 - Removal of drain tiles
 - Reforestation
 - Installation of native seed and wetland plants
- Unit G: Skokie River Corridor**
 - Clearing and control of invasive woody species
 - Control of herbaceous invasive species
 - Reforestation
 - Installation of wetland plants and native seed

PUBLIC ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS for this preserve are being proposed for the first time and include:

- Trails**
 - Reconfigure the trail network (1-mile loop trail and south river extension) with a new crushed stone surface
 - Replace steel bridge over the Skokie River
 - Add new timber boardwalks
- Jensen Pond Overlook**
 - Create a scenic destination spot where visitors can experience the cultural history of the site
 - Place a marker that acknowledges private donors
- Underpass**
 - Restore the trail connection to Lake Forest Openlands
- Maintenance Lane**
 - Provide access lane for District crews and contractors
- Buffer Plantings**
 - Add woody plants to create a buffer at the overlook