

## Healthy Pine River

July 11, 2024

7:00pm

Call to Order: Brittany Summerville

Approval of June Minutes: Gary/Doug

Financial: Opening balance \$28,887.81      Debit: \$496.25

Closing balance: \$28,599.07

Guest Speaker: Joe Butcher, Butcher Excavating LLC. He is involved in the tiling of farm fields – fixing and repairing. As tiling has become part of recent farming practices, Joe will help HPR understand the mechanics. Joe is a working farmer. He tiles his own fields as needed. Other farms he will fix and repair tiles not installing new ones. On his farms, grass filter strips are on banks to contain chemicals and fertilizer. Joe does not use cow manure on fields. In the past he used dairy manure- results showed compaction without much gain. He pointed out that soil and soil needs are very different depending on which part of Gratiot County the farm is in. His soil is “heavy” containing moisture, rather than readily draining. One of the issues Gratiot County is faced with is the infrastructure. Many of the older rural homes have septic systems which would dump directly into tiles or drains. This was standard and acceptable practice- documented as far back as the 1920’s. Newer houses have drain fields identified for septic or a septic system. In the past five or ten years, Gratiot County as a whole has cleaned up. However, there are still a number of older homes tied into these. When identified, they can be cut off and the home owner can decide what to do. (Note: this is what happened in Riverdale. HPR has been funding and assisting with identification. Local businesses are assisting homeowners with updating or installation of new septic’s.) Another current issue- the amount of livestock. How many cows are too many? (Side note: Alma College did a study showing livestock in Gratiot County equals 1.3 million people added to the county without additional sewer systems.) Audience discussion: on the influx of farmers from abroad whose countries have limited livestock numbers in a given area. In addition to rural problems, the City of Alma had a problem with sewer drains. Historically a house would have two or three lines which connected to a drain that was a combination sewer, storm. Approx. ten years ago the city began a project and hired contractors from Detroit, to separate lines. They did not use cameras to detect the number of lines running from a house. Lines were missed thinking there was only one. Currently, with cameras, these connections are being identified and corrected. As a whole, areas are being cleaned – example Riverdale. Discussion on tiling practices. As mentioned earlier, it depends on soil type (heavy vs sand) and terrain (hilly or level). Problem with algae in tile – needs to be blown out. Wild animals also contribute –quantity of geese, deer (deer also break down fence allowing cow’s access). Discussion on regulatory agencies-roadblocks vs enforcement, the increasing cost of supplies, labor, food, greed, digesters.

Update: Applying for EGLE Environmental Justice Grant. Alma has a number of impoverished families. Their ability for recreation is limited. Alma has five parks which abut the Pine River. The river presents a health hazard due to pollution. Looking for funding a feasibility study on the cleanup of the impoundment (to restore the recreation health of the river). Or if not, what are other options.

Summer water testing (river, tributaries, drainage ditches) by Alma College - \$8,000 from HPR

July 18, 2024 is Rural Urban Days. HPR is sponsor.

Advisory Board (Representative from health department, Gratiot Conservation district, Road Commissioner) discussed septic’s and meeting with townships ahead of Septic Smart Week (Sept). An opportunity to talk about illicit connections- how to identify, why it needs to be fixed. Mikie continues to work with rural communities on septic.

Meeting adjourned: Joe/Gary

Next meeting  
August 8, 2024  
Alma Public Library

