1.0 CALL TO ORDER
The Special Call Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the McHenry County Conservation District was called to order at 3:10 p.m. by President Kranz on the afternoon of Thursday, December 6, 2018 at the Brookdale Administrative Offices, 18410 US Highway 14, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

2.0 ROLL CALL
2.1 Roll Call
Trustees Present: Dave Kranz, President
Vern Scacci, Vice President
Dave Brandt, Secretary
John Henning, Trustee
Carolyn Campbell, Trustee
Benjamin Washow, Trustee

Trustee Absent: Pete Merkel, Treasurer

Staff Present: Elizabeth S. Kessler, Executive Director
Anne Basten, Executive Assistant

3.0 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
President Kranz led the Pledge of Allegiance.

4.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS
There were no public comments made.

5.0 BOARD DISCUSSION
5.1 Strategic Planning
President Kranz and Executive Director Kessler provided an overview of the proposed discussion and expected outcomes for the Strategic Planning workshop.

The Board of Trustees were asked to review the existing Mission and Vision Statement as the first step of the strategic planning process to determine if any changes were necessary. The consensus of the Board of Trustees was to keep the mission and vision statements the same.

Executive Director Kessler then reviewed the key historical planning documents available and currently in use: Conceptual Framework - Long Range Planning document (2010-2030) and the Strategic Plan FY 2016 - FY 2020. She also explained the differences with the strategic plan containing the steps to reach the overarching goals contained within the Conceptual Framework - Long Range Planning document.

There was discussion about where historical structures belong as they were not specifically identified in the Long Range Planning document. Executive Director Kessler noted that there was a legislative change in 2015 that added language specific to historic structures to allow for funding opportunities for their preservation. It was noted that the FY 2016- FY 2020 Strategic Plan identified cultural heritage items under
Preservation and adding them to the Conceptual Framework – Long Range Planning Document would require an amendment to the adopted plan.

The discussion continued regarding the various protection statuses available to structures and their related pros and cons noting that the higher level of protection, the higher level of commitment is required. The word “structure” will be included in revisions to the strategic plan moving forward to be more explicit.

The discussion then moved to critical issues which started with financial considerations. Topics included refinancing all or a portion of outstanding debt, legislatively changing the tax structure rather than paying interest on any future debt if it were to be considered, and long-term versus short-term funding strategies.

The discussion was then directed back to other critical issues to determine current and future funding needs. The talk was about the role of land acquisition which had been our main focus for many years in order to save the best of the rest. Based on current trends, there was discussion on adding well-being, recreation, water and other issues that sustain human health as a critical factor tied to land preservation goals versus just a total acreage goal. The consensus was not to stop buying land but to keep in mind the ongoing costs when accepting property and to promote all land protection including that by others and sharing the story on the human health supported by new acres and focusing on smaller projects.

The conversation returned to being responsive to McHenry County taxpayers through abatements and holding levies level over the years which has increased the gap between our taxing capacity and our current taxing level, and being good stewards of the funds we collect. In planning for the presentation of the FY 2020 budget, the capital needs list should be included which identifies the outstanding projects while noting that delay in needed maintenance increases the cost to repair in the future and therefore, it is urgent that the maintenance be done on schedule. There was a brief discussion on the budget approval process and the role the County Board plays in accepting the budget and what would occur if the County Board did not accept the budget. Executive Director Kessler provided an overview of the statutory language within the Conservation District Act and the differences between the District and the other four Illinois Conservation Districts and Illinois Forest Preserve Districts.

It was noted that there is still a need to keep and add to reserves to fund the long-term capital assets through the Capital Asset Management Plan and we need to refocus internal human capital to get the projects out for bid or otherwise outsourced to prevent reaching a critical breaking point where they cost more.

The consensus was that our number one priority is to preserve the natural resources to mitigate climate change induced weather events on human sustainability and to include more information on how what we do makes a difference in this area.

Another priority would be to update our databases to improve our efficiencies such as reviewing if there is a need to update the INAI or MnNAI and include them in our GIS database. This is a long-term goal as is connecting the core land holdings through corridors (greenways, blueways, etc.) over the next 10-50 years. Discussion was had on the adaptive management strategies that need to occur for climate resiliency such as revising the seed mixes for trails because they are not working well or do we settle for a different level of maintenance, etc.

Water has become one of the biggest issues and will likely continue to be one and we will need strategies to support how we can be climate resilient. We need to focus on telling the story of where the water goes and how much. This will impact
future drinking water availability, flood water storage capacity, and infrastructure damage control.

Human Capital management planning is underway with internal succession planning exercises being reviewed. Also, current vacancies and announced retirements are being discussed with the possibility of reorganizations being included to cover the necessary work and redistribute responsibilities. Use of part time and seasonal employees is also included in the discussion, making sure there is room for advancement and including costs for professional development and training. Staff is working on replacing manual timecards with a time management program to streamline the processing time. This project has been carried over for several years while technologies caught up and is now in the final stages of implementation and expected to be launched in early 2019. There was also a discussion of having a staff member dedicated to recreational programming to facilitate/steward user group partnerships such as paddling, cycling, equestrian, snowmobiling, angling, etc.

Another tool that would be helpful to the Board of Trustees regarding assessment would be a list of stages of land management status and their hierarchy such as is agricultural land at a higher or lower level than an unmanaged site. Is it possible to create a list of sites by stage and what are the costs of maintaining land at each stage? This would also show us if we are making any headway moving land from one stage to another or are we falling behind, as well as the associated costs to move forward.

There was just a brief break while the board members grabbed their dinners and the conversation was then continued.

The topic changed to the proposed Strategic Planning process and timeline and the consensus was to bring in a third neutral party so that the Executive Director can be included in the discussions without being limited to directing them. The intent is to use focus groups from internal staff and board members and reach out to get the external pulse from municipal leaders and the public with the hope of completing the project before the 2020 Conservation Congress and to be used for launching the 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2021. The end game is to amend the Long Range Framework Plan and to create a new short term 3-Year Strategic Plan for FY 2021, FY 2022 and FY 2023. The Board of Trustees would like to see the next strategic plan cover only three years with less tactics so that the agency can be a little nimbler so as to be able to react to opportunities as they come up. The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to identify the destination/target of where the agency is to arrive on the map. The specific tactical approach or the how to get there can change throughout the course of the plan and may need to adapt based on external factors and available resources. The staff work to identify the specific tactics or work plan that is used to work towards moving the agency towards the identified and agreed upon destination/target.

The conversation then moved to discuss strategic communications and using the information collected by the Nature Conservancy for a national perspective; the Conservation Foundation for a regional/local perspective which the District is planning to support through a cost share of $1,000; and fact-based science to develop our local strategy which will include a call to action. The working group comprised of President Kranz, Trustee Campbell, Executive Director Kessler and Marketing & Communications Manager Kummerer during previous discussions, identified the following message points: 5Rs: We are (the District) Responsive, Responsible,
Resilient, Resourceful and Respected; 3Ws: We (the District) will focus our efforts on preserving and protecting water, wildlife and way of life in McHenry County. To accomplish this, McHenry County will need to stand up for conservation and take action to conserve our natural areas: water, wildlife and way of life - believe in, get involved in and invest in. The proposed strategy is a direct result of input from the 2018 Conservation Congress attendees and will be unveiled as part of the State of Conservation on February 7, 2019 and continue through the 2020 Conservation Congress. It is proposed that a “Bill of Rights” our Conservation Pledge be drafted as a complimentary document to the Declaration of Fundamental Conservation Principles adopted at the first Conservation Congress in 2016.

Executive Director Kessler then led a brief discussion on the envisioned destination at the end of the next 3-Year Strategic Plan and what success, or arriving at that destination, would look like. The Board discussed that the measurement of success will be additional attendance to the sites but also by the number of sites being moved from no maintenance to the next level of management, which may include maintaining agricultural lands by increasing conservation practices on these areas to improve the health of the soils for humans and wildlife. There was discussion on the role of education and the current audience reached by our programs. It was reported that our education outreach extends from children to adults but much of our focus is with elementary students and retention through the years would be an outcome of success. With a changing demographic, bilingual outreach through strategic hiring and marketing should also be a priority.

The consensus of the board was that they would like a few more of these meetings with deep discussions and that there will be some requests that the District should pass on participating in if they do not help us reach the 5Rs and or support the 3Ws.

6.0 ADJOURN
A motion was made by Trustee Washow, seconded by Trustee Henning, to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote resulted in all ayes.
Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m. December 6, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,
Dave Brandt, Secretary

Date 12/26/18