

MISSION To restore, protect, and enhance the Rouge River watershed through stewardship, education, and collaboration.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Executive Director, Ashley Flintoff, called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM.

2. ROLL CALL**a. Directors Present:**

Erma Leaphart (EL), Dave Norwood (DN), Carol Snodgrass (CS), Myra Tetteh (MT), Susan Thompson (ST), Gerry VanAcker (GVA) (6 total)

b. Directors Not Present:

Jessica Eiland Anders (JEA), Alice Bailey (AB), Paul Draus (PD), Samra'a Luqman (SL), Madelin Maher (MM), Mike McNulty (MMN), Brandy Siedlaczek (BS), Jeremiah Steen (JS) (8 total)

c. Staff Members Present:

Lara Edwards (LE), Allison Eder (AE), Ashley Flintoff (AF), Karen Hanna (KH), Nicole Wilson (NW)

d. Guests Present:

Evelyn Ontaneda (EO), Emalee Rodriguez (ER)

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- a. A quorum was not present.

4. APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES

- a. A quorum was not present. The March 12, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes will be moved and voted on at the next board meeting.

5. STRATEGIC PLANNING

- a. FOTR has successfully come through the Visioning phase of the strategic planning process. There were two very productive meetings with the visioning working group. Thank you to Herman, Lauren, Cyndi, Ashley, Lara, Sally, Sam, Erma, and Myra for providing your time, work, and experience to this task.
- b. EO and ER from Together Together presented the findings of the Visioning phase.
 - i. The working group provided insight and clarity on vision, FOTR's role, and reimagined core activities. This was used to create a Mission, Vision, and Identity Statement that can be used to provide clarity on all that we do, why we do it, and what is the central purpose for our work.
 - ii. Another takeaway from this phase was how FOTR defines stewardship. The group defined stewardship as responsibly, ethically, and sustainably supervising and caring for something.
 - iii. One more outcome from the visioning phase is the development of Decision Criteria, which will be used as a tool that can help us analyze and make decisions moving forward.

- iv. EL asked about an edit to the identity statement. The original statement read, “By serving the river and communities within the watershed.” EL recommended adding “biodiversity” to the statement.
- v. Please see board meeting materials for more information on these findings.
- c. Next Steps: Strategy Development:
 - i. The goal of this phase will be to define strategy for each core area of work: Restore, Protect, Enhance, and fundraising. There will be multiple working sessions based on topic throughout May and June. The four working groups will have a mix of board and staff participation.
 - ii. In July, FOTR will move to the Implementation Phase, which will set immediate goals and create operational plans for implementing the new strategy.
 - iii. The goal is to present the final strategic plan at the September board meeting.
- d. AF thanked EO and ER for the amount of time, care, and intentionality they have put into this work for FOTR.

6. BEST FRIENDS OF THE ROUGE AWARDS

- a. The Best Friends of the Rouge Award will be given out at the Celebrate with Friends event on June 18th at Inkster Park.
- b. The staff came up with 4 nominations for the Best Friends of the Rouge Awards, including a nomination for the Julie Rose Friendship Award.
- c. The nominations for the Best Friends of the Rouge Award are Friends of Rouge Park, Jessica Eiland Anders, and John Buszkiewicz.
- d. The nomination for the Julie Rose Fentrup Outstanding Volunteer Award is Phil Crookshank (posthumous).

7. BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS/STAFF REPORTS

- a. **Executive Director** AF reported
 - i. Thank you to everyone who supported the “May Day” fundraising campaign. The response to this campaign exceeded our expectations. Huge thanks to MMN and ITC for providing \$10,000 in matching funds. The funds will be used to further develop strategy plans in response to funding and political uncertainties.
 - ii. The Bosch Community Fund awarded FOTR a general operating support grant for \$50,000. These funds will be used to support capacity building and training for the Monitoring team for fish surveying, expanding rain garden educational opportunities, supporting Dry Dock Pop Up™ events, and re-invigorating Education programming.
 - iii. Ford Philanthropy 20th Anniversary Volunteer Event: FOTR was one of the first organizations that Ford Philanthropy worked with when they started. In honor of their 20th anniversary, 60 Ford employees joined FOTR at Jane Addams Elementary in Redford to install a pathway through the mini-forest FOTR planted in fall 2024.
 - iv. Fort Street Bridge Park Phase II and Rouge Gateway Greenway Phase II
 - 1. Construction RFP released with proposals due next week. Selection of a general contractor is in progress.
 - 2. Construction is anticipated to start on Fort Street Bridge Park in July. Construction for the Rouge Gateway Greenway is not expected until

October, due to permitting.

- v. The FOTR team has welcomed Nicole Wilson as Development Coordinator, Sidney Calloway and May Gulley as Trails Assistants, and Adele Hawkins and Emmanuel Adjuman (Obi) as Restoration Seasonal Assistants

- vi. Recognition

- 1. Herman featured on WJBK Fox 2 Detroit talking about Paddling trips.
 - 2. FOTR awarded 2025 Special Recognition Award from the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
 - 3. The Detroit Green Task Force recognized Herman with a Community Leadership Award at its annual Earth Day Celebration on April 26, 2025

- b. **Finance Committee** KH reported

- i. It was recommended that FOTR change auditors every 3 years. The Finance Committee put together an RFP and received 5 responses. The top three firms will present at the next Finance Committee meeting. The Finance Committee will then make a final decision from these presentations.

- c. **Fund Development** LE reported

- i. The Rouge Cruise is our fundraising event for 2025. It is scheduled for Tuesday, August 5 from 6 - 8 pm. Sally will be the captain and storyteller again. It is anticipated to sell out as the boat can only hold 150 people.

- d. **Report Out Only** - See Board Materials for updates on the

- i. Advocacy Committee, Education Program Report, Grants and Funding Report, Monitoring Program Report Report, PR/Marketing/Media Board Committee Reports, Restoration Program Report, Water Trail Leadership Committee/Water Trail Program Reports

8. NEW BUSINESS

- a. None to Report

9. REMINDERS

- a. **Upcoming Board Meetings:**

- i. **June 11, 2025, 5:30 - 7:00 PM [In Person]**
 - ii. September 10, 2025, 5 - 6:30 PM [Virtual]

- b. **Upcoming Organizational Events:**

- i. May 17 - Spring Native Plant and Rain Barrel Sale (Livonia DPW)
 - ii. **June 18 - Celebrate with Friends: Annual Meeting and Gathering on the Rouge (Inkster Park)**

10. ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 6:04 PM.