

This board meeting was conducted virtually, via Zoom, on the evening of Thursday, July 23, 2020. Officers and directors in attendance were President Mike Yuhas, Vice President Keith Schmidt, Treasurer Tara Grudzielanek, and Directors Dan Grudzielanek, Andrew Roach, and Neal and Cathy Wegner. Secretary Tom Marcussen and Director Ralph McClure were not able to participate in real time. We had seven out of nine present. That met the quorum requirement of six out of nine. Therefore the meeting could proceed.

Secretary Tom Marcussen prepared these minutes, on Monday, July 27, 2020, from a video record of the meeting.

Topic 1—Mike Yuhas opened the meeting with a report on Secretary Tom Marcussen. He is getting better slowly. (That is standard for his situation. No serious long-term complications are expected.) He was not in attendance to take the minutes directly. He has only a low-level computer without Zoom capability, a smart phone, or a tablet. (Tom is working on fixing that. It may soon be possible to at least receive Zoom in real time. He also has a “dumb” cell phone to call in any urgent input.) He and his wife Karen appreciate the flowers that the board sent after his May 20 surgery.

Topic 2—was the rescheduled 2020 Chapter banquet. All agreed with giving up the attempt to reschedule it for Saturday, October 10. There are multiple risks. The corona virus pandemic is hard to predict. Many of our members are at high risk due to age. We could have very few sign up or show up. That would cause the Chapter to lose significant money. Ralph McClure thinks that Pallas Restaurant will not declare our \$100.00 deposit forfeited if we agree to sign up for an as-yet unscheduled date in 2021. That would work for us. They have always given us good food and service. Mike Yuhas will ask Ralph to inquire.

Topic 3—what should we do with our regular meetings? Going in-person is risky, for the same reasons as the banquet above. A mask mandate is likely. We would have to do social distancing, and very probably also pre- and post-meeting sanitizing. The two Zoom meetings to date have worked out well.

The first Friday in September is only 6 weeks away. That is not much time for the pandemic to decrease. Right now it is increasing. We usually watch what the schools are doing for snow closings. They are sending us mixed messages. This time our situation is not the same as theirs. Keith Schmidt volunteered that he is currently under 14-day quarantine because a co-worker tested positive. If any of us were to test positive following a meeting, everybody who attended that meeting could be in the same situation. So far Keith has not gotten sick. The other attendees wished for his continued good health.

It was decided, by consensus, to keep our regular meetings virtual indefinitely. We will watch the news and make a decision on returning to in-person meetings when doing so is reliably safe.

We also have to consider presentations. There were two that were pending before the mid-March lockdown. Dave Nelson and Chris Barney (spelling?) have not yet finished their presentation on railroad grade crossing tragedies. How much further they have left to go is unknown. Dave Sima was going to talk about FRA (Federal Railroad Administration, which is primarily responsible for safety) regulation of current steam operations. Some presenters may not be able to do virtual meetings. We are actively looking for presentations that can be done virtually.

Topic 4—should we proceed with doing additional slide shows that are presented virtually / electronically only? Mike Yuhas volunteered that his annual family “Yuhasapalooza” summer event, which was forced to go virtual this year, attracted 18 or 19 presenters. All of the presentations went ahead with no problems. Those shows would be a good opportunity to engage non-local members. We signed up at least 3 new members, one of them from South Carolina, during our 2 months of virtual-meetings-only in May and June.

Dates and times have to be decided. Most felt that we should offer something different from our regular meetings. We considered multiple options. The consensus decision was to go for the 3rd Tuesday of each even-numbered month, starting with October 20. The 2nd supplemental slide show would then be on December 15. Continuing into 2021 would depend on attendance / demand and the public health situation. Start time will be 7:30 pm. That is the same as our regular meetings (easy to remember). It should be workable for attendees from all US mainland time zones.

There will not be a virtual slide show in August. Limited opportunity to let interested people know that it is coming would likely cause low attendance. Waiting would let us promote the new events through Sparks & Cinders, which is on hiatus for the summer.

Topic 5—we will do our usual “Favorite Slide Night” in September. That will be on Friday, September 11 (instead of September 4) due to the Labor Day holiday. Participants will not be able to present traditional film slides. They will have to present digitized images only.

Topic 6—is the 2021 National NRHS Convention in Milwaukee. It is not yet formally announced because they are still exploring possible venues and dates. The desired time is in late August. National said that they have been doing site selection and running their own conventions since 2012. That was the last time that a Chapter volunteered to take on that task (and risk). Their first choice was Portland, Maine. That was ruled out because of high hotel costs during the desired time frame. Milwaukee was their 2nd choice. Other specifics are still being worked out.

We have said that we will do what we can to help make it a success. We are just getting into exchange-of-ideas mode. How many attendees should we plan for? Neal and Cathy Wegner said they estimated 200-300 at Cedar Rapids, Iowa (year?) and over 300 at Tacoma, Washington (year?). We have some good museums within bus-trip range. Trips over main lines have always been popular. We do not have many options for that locally. We do have Soo Line 2-8-2 #1003. Watco recently bought Wisconsin & Southern. Their view of passenger trains (as opposed to photo freight trains seen to date) is unknown. Neither Wisconsin & Southern nor the owners of #1003 own any passenger cars.

Topic 7—is the September issue of Sparks & Cinders. It will be the first one sent in envelopes. We were able to obtain them (with our printed return address on each one) at a very reasonable cost. That will mean an additional half-page (now used for outward-facing address labels) that we can use for added content. Dan Grudzielanek plans a story on Amtrak service, with photos of substitute buses, and Empire Builder trains 7 and 8 stopped at corridor stations. Mike Yuhas plans a story on Canadian National’s plans to offer secondary lines for sale—if they announce which lines will be for sale. Dave Nelson has written some good articles on little-known local railroad history. We think he is working on more (he was not available to inquire). There will be no shortage of good-quality material to use the added space.

Mike Yuhas asked how many copies we currently print. Neal Wegner said we usually send out 80 to 90 per month by mail. We had been cutting back on printing because we had so many copies left over. We usually go for 100 now. The last run was 90 copies. We had 10 copies left over. Mike Yuhas said we now have 91 on our mailing list, including the new members who have signed up. Therefore he would like to see us print 100 to 110 copies.

When does input have to be provided to interim editor Keith Schmidt? Keith said that even though the September meeting is moved back to Friday, September 11, because of the Labor Day holiday, he would like to make sure everybody gets their copy before the “normal date” of September 4, 2020. That way everyone is aware of the delay, and that we are staying virtual, and no one shows up looking for an in-person meeting that is not there. That has happened in the past. We cannot rely on e-mail and our Web site alone. Not all of our members have e-mail, computers, and Internet access. Therefore he would like to go to the printer no later than Wednesday, August 26. Mike Yuhas suggested that we try for Monday, August 24, instead. Because the unpredictability of current events, almost anything could happen. We should put some margin in the schedule. Therefore we should try to get all input material to Keith Schmidt by Monday, August 17.

Topic 8—was our pre-pandemic plan to have remote meetings elsewhere in the State of Wisconsin to reach members who have trouble getting to Fox Point. That is obviously now on hold because of the corona virus pandemic. The thinking on how to do those has changed some because of the new technology we have become aware of. We could have (probably temporary or one-time?) remote sites connected to our main meeting. These would have to have good two-way video and especially audio to work well and be accepted. That would mean some investment in technology. Expanding our membership might be worth it.

Mike Yuhas said he tried to get notices of our virtual meetings into the National NRHS News. Then more people outside of Wisconsin would become aware of them and their opportunity to attend / participate. Nothing has shown up there yet. We should all be proud of what we are doing to keep going. The Philadelphia Chapter, which he is also a member of, has shut down except for publishing their newsletter. They are not the only ones. Some other Chapters have just about given up.

Topic 9—Mike Yuhas had checked the Chapter by-laws prior to tonight’s meeting. It is a legal meeting. It counts toward our required minimum of two board meetings per year. There was a physical in-person Chapter board meeting on Saturday, February 15, 2020, at Neal and Cathy Wegner’s home in Brookfield. We have therefore met our two-meeting minimum for the year of 2020. We will not be required to meet again in 2020. We are free to meet again if other issues needing our attention come up. The usual protocols for calling a meeting would be followed.

Mike Yuhas will keep a video copy of this meeting for our records. He will also ask Secretary Tom Marcussen to prepare written minutes, suitable for publication, from it.