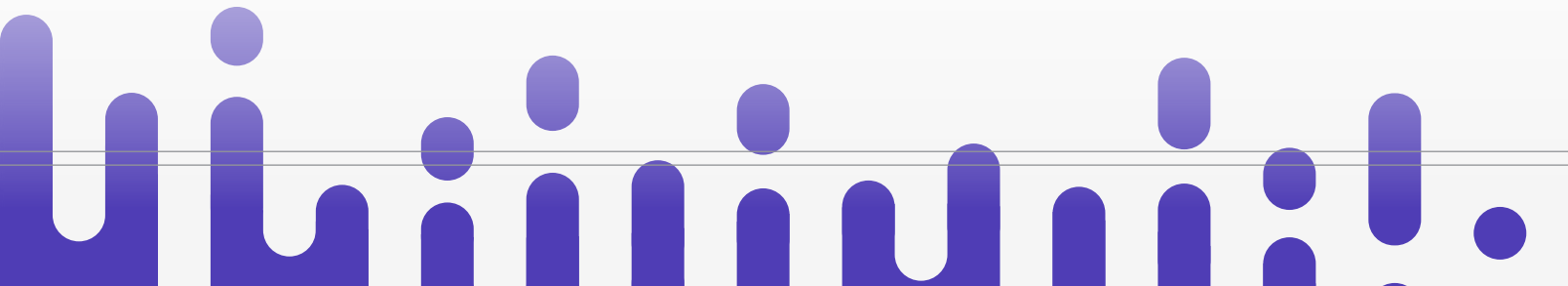
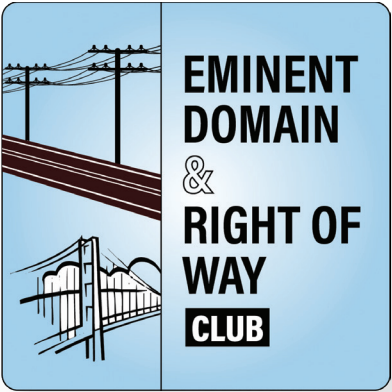


Introducing the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club

The virtual chatroom for the right of way industry

BY VIVIAN NGUYEN

This summer, Patrick McCallister, SR/WA, and Beth Smith, SR/WA, launched the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club, a space dedicated for conversations related to the right of way industry. The club is run via the Clubhouse mobile app, which allows members to sign on, listen and participate in live conversations. Both Patrick and Beth are seasoned professionals in their own right: Patrick has been in the right of way industry for almost 30 years, with experience in engineering and managing the acquisitions process for transportation projects and currently works for WSP USA, while Beth co-founded a consulting firm and currently works for the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District. Their unquestionable passion for the right of way industry inspired the idea for the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club. As such, we invited them to tell our readers about the club, which is currently open to all IRWA members and right of way professionals.



What inspired the idea of the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club?

P: I had actually approached Beth with the idea of doing a podcast focused on right of way, really with the thought being of bringing more exposure to our industry. We couldn't get things worked out for the podcast, and then Beth talked to me about the Clubhouse app. After I looked into it, I thought it was a very interesting platform that suited our needs well. For both of us, some of our favorite memories are Chapter meetings, forums and education conferences where we can talk with our peers about projects and situations. We both thought about starting a club on the app so we could have people join from all over the world participate in live conversations about industry topics.

B: I really liked Pat's idea of a podcast, but it also seemed like a lot of work with production and equipment, etc. As we kept discussing ways we could collaborate, I thought maybe Clubhouse could give us that opportunity. When I was Region 5 chair and Pat was Chapter 10 president, he coordinated a monthly Chapter call for the presidents in Region 5 — I would sit in on as often as I could. I really liked the exchange of ideas and information in those calls — I felt like everyone contributed. As Region chair, I got to know this group better than I would have otherwise because before then, we would only consistently meet at forums and the annual conference. It occurred to me that Clubhouse events might recreate those kinds of conversations. We encourage you to talk to us, bring us your questions, your successes, your failures. This is going to sound cheesy (I come by it honestly, Wisconsin is the dairy state), but we're all in this together — and "this" can be defined however a listener would like. Our specialties, the industry as a whole, the workforce, life, you name it. Oh, and all that equipment I thought I wouldn't have to buy? Yes, I ended up buying it anyway.

How does the Clubhouse app work?

B: It's a virtual clubhouse, so at any given time, there are rooms you can listen in on. Depending on the kind of club and/or room, you can raise your hand and speak if you have something you want to say. To join the club, you'll need to download the Clubhouse app — look for the one that has "social audio" in its name. Once you've downloaded Clubhouse, create an account (you'll have to give them your phone number to register), and then search for "eminent domain" or "right of way," and The Eminent Domain and Right of Way Club should be the first result in the "clubs" tab. Click on it, and you can either follow us or join as a member. Then keep an eye out for when we have our events.



How are meetings generally structured?

P: So we call our clubroom the Eminent Domain & Right of Way Club Lounge and have Lounge Events. Each Lounge Event has a planned topic, and some include special guests. Generally as the co-hosts, Beth and I will get the event started by discussing the planned topic and our related experiences. Then we will look to get those in attendance involved in the conversation. We really want to hear from participants because we have a very diverse club membership with a wide range of experience. However, we also want this to be a networking opportunity, too, so we take time to welcome first-time attendees and let them introduce themselves and what their backgrounds are.

B: We try to keep things casual. We're still new to doing this, so if anyone who has been on with us has any recommendations for how we can do things better, we'd love to hear your feedback.

How do you decide on the topics you'll cover?

P: When we first started prepping for launching the club, we brainstormed topic ideas and came up with a pretty good list. But really, we are just scheduling a couple of events at a time because we want to have flexibility. We are asking for people in the club to send us ideas for topics that they would like to discuss; we want to be open to ideas others pass on to us. Plus, we are both followers of the Pendulum Land Podcast (now known as Infrastructure Junkies) with Dave Arnold, SR/WA, and Kristen Bennett, SR/WA, and have had conversations with them about possibly having Lounge Events based on their podcast episodes to give people the ability to have follow-up conversations about their episodes. We did this for our event on September 1, where we had a recap about their "Revenge of the Appraisers" podcast episode.

Can you share some of your favorite clubhouse moments so far?

P: I have really enjoyed meeting new people in the industry from all over. We have had some great conversations, and I am always interested in hearing others experiences and thoughts on various topics. So far, my favorite event has been the Eminent Domain in Hollywood Lounge Event, where we discussed how TV and movies portray eminent domain and what effect that has on the general public's perception of what we do.

B: I really enjoyed the "Revenge of the Appraisers" event that Patrick mentioned. We had a discussion about the Infrastructure Junkies podcast of the same name. Hosts David Arnold, SR/WA, and Kristen Bennett, SR/WA, agreed to join us and provided some history and commentary about how it all came about. I was having some technical issues, so I wasn't able to join in as much as I had hoped, but Patrick did a great job of running that event. We had some great back and forth with Ross Greene, SR/WA, and David Burgoyne, SR/WA. That episode was the first one we recorded and is available on our SoundCloud page.

Do you find that members usually stay on topic, or do conversations sometimes go off on tangents?

P: We for sure go off on tangents sometimes, and really, we are good with that because that is how our in-person conversations usually go. I always find it interesting to see where our conversations end up from where they start. In the club, it's our jobs as co-hosts to stoke the conversation at times and maybe try to send it down another path or to bring it back to topic. We want this to just be a free-flowing conversation, and if different topics spawn off from the original topic, so be it.

B: I think that for the most part, we stay on track, but there are inevitable tangents. I'm guessing that if we go off on a really interesting tangent, that will tell us it might be a good topic to explore for a future event.

What are the benefits of joining the club?

P: For me, it's being able to be exposed to people with different experiences and backgrounds and hearing their thoughts on industry topics. I absolutely love talking about this amazing industry we are in, so anytime I can be involved in those conversations, I feel I come away better off.

B: One of the things I love about my job is how varied it can be from day to day. This can be a double-edged sword, though, as I have to be knowledgeable about many different roles. Sometimes I encounter situations where the solution isn't very straightforward, and I don't always know who to call to get good advice. I'm hoping that with time, Clubhouse might expand to serve as a way of connecting with others who might be able to help with such sticky wickets.

How many members does the club currently consist of?

P: As of mid-October, we have 122 members.

How often does the club meet?

B: Right now, we have events on the first and third Wednesdays of the month. For the time being, only Patrick and I can start rooms in the club, but if others were to express interest in starting rooms, we'd be open to discussing that — just give one of us a call or drop us an email and let us know what you're thinking.

How can people join and get involved?

B: In addition to within the app itself, you can find information about the club on all the major social media outlets — LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook. Patrick does a really good job of marketing our events, I'm a bit more comfortable doing things behind the scenes. I do want to take a minute here to reach out to our Young Professionals, anyone who is new to the industry or anyone who is feeling a little burned out. One of our first events focused on how to get more people to join right of way — I believe that a closely related topic is how to get people not to leave the industry once they're in it. Right of way work can be overwhelming at times, and I think these groups are the most at risk for leaving, so I'd like to reach out to them. Come join us and let's help each other succeed. ✨

Clubhouse: clubhouse.com/club/eminent-domain-row-club

Facebook: facebook.com/eminentdomainRWClub

Twitter: twitter.com/domain_way

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/eminent-domain-right-of-way-club

SoundCloud: soundcloud.com/user-100007115