

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES OF JUNE 8, 2017

Present: Agnes Wojnarski, Chairperson Jill E. Moskal, Recording Secretary
 Peter Hahn Dana Sievertsen
 John Kamysz

Attendees: Peter Falcone, Assistant to the City Administrator
 Christina Ferraro, Executive Director, Prospect Heights Park District

OPENING ITEMS

Call to Order

Agnes Wojnarski, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. CDT.

Roll Call

Roll Call proceeded. All Commissioners except Ed Madden were in attendance, and a quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of May 11, 2017

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of May 11, 2017 were noted with no corrections. Upon motion made and seconded, the meeting minutes of May 11, 2017 were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Update: Work Day Schedules for the Summer

Agnes stated that we have a lot of prairie plants.

We have placed bonnets on 50% of the Wild Geraniums to capture their seeds when they pop open. The bonnets allow sun and air to filter through to the plant, but collects the seed from early spring plants before they propagate.

Volunteers have attended the extra workdays, such as the Special Wednesday Workday with the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards on May 31, 2017.

The next PHNRC Volunteer Workdays will be at Morava Nature Center and Heron Pond.

Special Workday with Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards (May 31, 2017)

We held a second Special Workday with the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards on May 31, 2017. We had just as many people (six of us and 13 PCPS volunteers) as the first special workday. PCPS and PHNRC volunteers planted thousands of native seedlings were transplanted for the Greenhouse Program.

Lunch was provided after a walk along the Slough.

PCPS asked to be invited back.

Prospect Heights Community Day (June 3, 2017)

Jill reported that the Prospect Heights Community Day was held on Saturday, June 3, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 12 Noon. Our tented table was situated between the Police Department's Canine Unit and the Park District.

Jill observed that most attendees to Community Day were parents with their children.

Attendees were to collect a stamped postcard from each booth or table and then turn in the postcards at the Fire Station for a prize. This action generated people to come to our table, but only about half stayed to take a copy of our brochure, review our native plant book and admire our prairie plants.

Some asked questions about our project sites. Most were aware of our mission and complimented us on our work, such as neighbors of the Morava Nature Center. One attendee is new to the area and has background in environmental policy and planning.

People did sign up to receive the PHNRC Journal via e:mail.

We had prairie plants and a few native trees to distribute, and attendees that were gardeners or have an interest in the environment were glad to receive them.

Jill felt that our presence is important at Community Day and provides exposure.

PHNRC Signage

At the last meeting, Dana presented examples of trail markers. We have additional work signs stating: "No Mow," "Prescribed Burn," and "Herbicide."

Permanent signage for our project sites, which will include volunteer information and ordinances, are being produced. As an interim step, the City and the Park District are working together to design temporary signs that state "Prairie Restoration Project in Progress" with ordinances in effect and enforceable. The signs are blue and carry both the Park District and City logos.

This in conjunction with the flagging to re-establish where the prairie is supposed to be, and along with "No Mow" sign, vandalism has stopped. This is great news. The signs are already effective because they have communicated our message.

We have spoken with Sarah Race at ComEd, and we will soon install ComEd naturalizing signs at the seeded prairie and the Slough in selected areas. We marked all the locations with site maps and flags.

We owe a great deal of thanks to Christina and Peter for their professional assistance and efforts with producing PHNRC signage. You are the best and make a difference. Agnes is particularly pleased that the signs state this is a multi-year project.

PHNRC Slough Presentation for Nature Speaks (September 19, 2017)

We have booked a full year of speakers for the Library Program of Nature Speaks in advance. Our website will be updated this weekend with current information.

We just secured Gerould Wilhelm for the summer of 2018. He had a rate, but made some concessions. Mr. Wilhelm is *the premiere* author of the book Flora of the Chicagoland Region, which is the "bible of botany" in Chicago. It took 17 years in the making!

Dana enjoyed a great conversation with Mr. Wilhelm when he purchased his book at the Crabtree Nature Center. Gerould said he has read the PHNRC Journals and is impressed.

Dr. Abigail Derby-Lewis is our next speaker on July 10 regarding Climate Change followed by our own presentation on the Slough on September 19 and during the show of paintings of the Slough by Didier Nolet. Next is Rachel Goad of Plants of Concern. Steven Packard is scheduled for January 23, 2018. Allison Sacerdote-Velat, a curator of herpetology at the Peggy Notebaert Museum, will be presenting her important research on the green snake.

NEW BUSINESS

Summer Interns

Jeremy Shultz, who started his internship with us on May 13, is intelligent, a hard worker and has a thirst for knowledge. We couldn't be more pleased with his assistance. Agnes conducts a botany class in the morning for 1.5 hours, and Jeremy studies this information at home after the workday. During our May 31 PCPS workday, Jeremy answered ecological restoration questions posed to him and was a testament to his desire to learn and as an effective intern.

We are looking forward to Aaron Phalin starting his internship on June 12, 2017. Aaron is also very intelligent and has his herbicide license. We will be able to accomplish a lot of work with both Jeremy and Aaron on staff this summer.

Morava Nature Center and Eagle Scout Project

Morava Nature Center

Agnes received an e:mail communication from ComEd that they want to photograph and do a site visit for a past grant recipient. They wish to visit all three of our grant projects. It is an initiative for them to celebrate the projects.

Eagle Scout Project

Dana met with Chipman Design to inform them we cannot afford to build any of the bridge designs they presented due to the cost. A discussion ensued on building a suspension bridge and whether they can assist us with this project. Chipman requested we speak with the PHPD and make sure they will approve this type of project before they proceed.

Christina Ferraro, Executive Director of the PHPD, said as long as the architect and engineer approve a suspension bridge, we can proceed. The insurance company needs receipt of approval of both the architect and engineer. We will touch base with Sam since he arranged the initial meetings with Chipman Design.

Is there a budget for the suspension bridge? A lot of information is available on line and reflects a cost of anywhere between \$500 to \$2,400 for building a suspension bridge. What is built is dependent on information received from the engineer. At the low side of the creek, four posts and cables must be installed.

A suspension bridge can be a project for the Scouts to do with supervision. Our budget can also manage the cost. We will develop the plans ourselves. The next step is communication from Chipman on whether they are willing to pursue a suspension bridge project with us.

Kids' Work Days

MacArthur Middle School

On June 7, 2017, twenty-eight (28) 6th Grade students and their science teacher, Stephanie Ritter, from MacArthur Middle School visited the PHNRC at the Sough for a morning of community service. The idea grew during the PHNRC's presentation on invasive plants at MacArthur on Friday, February 3, 2017. Our presentation generated interest from the students. We're pleased that this is a continued learning experience.

The students arrived at the site on Hillside by bus and quickly were immersed in the landscape. After a brief history and planting demonstration, the students were fast and efficient in planting 700 plants! They accomplished this feat in 10 minutes. A great service was done for PHNRC, and the students were exposed to restoration, the nature trails and the idea of giving back to their community. The students can also return to see the results of their labor.

Upon conclusion of the planting, Agnes led the students on a highly-informative tour of the nature trail, identifying emerging natives, rare species and invasives. At the end of a wonderful morning, several students inquired about volunteering and how to stay involved.

Prospect Heights Kids Care

On June 25, the Prospect Heights Kids Care will visit the Morava Nature Preserve Project to plant plugs. We are unsure of how many children will be present, but we will prep the area for planting plugs. The area is where we planted the grasses last year.

The schedule is lunch from 12-1 pm followed by introductions, a talk about plants, what they will be doing and then one hour of planting. We will also provide an educational and informational hike along the path. Agnes will particularly talk about soil erosion because the area where they will be planting is very dry.

This effort is arranged with Meighan Newhouse, one of the founders of Kids' Care.

PHPD Block Party

PHNRC will participate in the Prospect Heights Park District Block Party on Saturday, June 24, 2017 from 3:00 – 10:30 p.m. All Commissioners are requested to be present.

We have also invited our interns to stop by. Dana said we have been adamant about having our interns involved with all aspects of our organization and projects, as well as discussions with the City, Park District, residents, etc., so that they see first-hand what it takes to run an organization. They do not have to stay the entire time, but at least four hours. Every conversation is a good experience.

We need tents for our tables, decorations, Dana's laptop for signing-up interested community members, examples of our tools and equipment, native plant books, signage, copies of our Journal and brochure, photos of birds present at the Slough and Hillcrest Lake, etc. Like last year, we will give away a free six-pack of native plants for anyone signing up for the Journal.

Dana is working on producing PHNRC magnets.

PHNRC Projects Update

ComEd Seeded Prairie

The ComEd Seeded Prairie is not as perfect as it should be, but it is doing well. A lot of native plants are growing, and we have a flush of *Pestinum* this year. It's taken three years for this to happen. We recently herbicided thistle and teasel, and got it all, thanks to Peter's diligence and dedicated work.

As a third-year prairie restoration project, we are seeing early successional disturbances going away. They have been replaced by the Eurasian grasses, but that manageable. We are cutting off the seed heads of the Eurasian grasses to discourage seeding and spreading. A tremendous amount of native plants is right there competing with the grasses. This is truly encouraging.

The whole section was once just a giant bed of clover. Now, 65% of it has changed (for the better).

For points of reference, we heavily seeded the West side with the Fermilab mix of forbes and native grasses. The East side was not seeded. We are cutting off the clover heads to discourage re-propagation.

We do not have many competitive species yet. The ideal situation is for Com Ed to conduct a prescribed burn in the fall, and we could then seed the area.

The West side looks great, except for the area that was mowed.

Morava Nature Center

We formed a path then successfully seeded this area quite heavily last fall with native plants. More native plants are growing than weeds, so limited maintenance is necessary. Pure native plants showcase this area. This is essentially first year.

The area by the bleachers is pristine. Not a weed in sight. It doesn't need to be watered because the native plants are deep rooted. It is a good example of what a mature prairie will look like.

The Isaak Walton area of the Slough is becoming mature. This is an example of where we plugged and not seeded. For a first year after plugging a small area, it is beautiful. You can plug small areas, but not five acres. A larger area requires different management techniques.

Dana has examined the work done with erosion control on the low side of the creek at Morava, and it was well done. The plants have rooted and grown. However, the tall bank where we plugged into that wall is a mix bag of things. A lot worked and a lot was either washed away or didn't work. It could also be the soil. We also did not regrade the tall bank because grading is very expensive. In summary, it was a tough call because the bank is steep. We will re-evaluate this area.

Agnes thought about planting very aggressive prairie grasses, such as Switch grass and prairie cord grass.

Half of the high bank area is doing well.

The woodland area of the lower section has a lot of successive weeds. The upper section in the woodland area, too, has a lot of weeds, but they are different weeds. The soil is also different. The upper section is like the Slough's woodland area. The lower section has Garlic Mustard, is less degraded, and has less soil disturbance. A lot of work is needed in the woodland area.

Slough

The effects of the prescribed burn in the spring are evident and encouraging. Tremendous development of Woodland Fescue, Bottle Brush and other grasses that did not burn in the spring will assist to get the fire through the woodland area in the fall.

We have a large area of mature buckthorn and will be removing it this summer. The larger shrubs are unaffected by a burn, but buckthorn resprouts can be eradicated by fire.

A lot of plants are in good shape and made it through the winter.

Agnes said we don't have a lot of early spring species. Things are happening now in June and July and not in May. We have Geraniums, a few Shooting Stars and a little bit of Phlox. We will be collecting their seeds now and hope to grow them so we don't have to wait until June and July to see these flowering natives.

Heron Pond

The erosion blankets made it through the winter. Things are coming up through the blankets as expected. We will be monitoring it, and if invasive, eradicate.

The company hired by the Park District removed all the buckthorn and honeysuckle, but they do not herbicide afterwards, so it flushes back. Therefore, Agnes, Peter and the interns went back with the brush cutters and then herbicided the area.

Bird Walks

The spring bird walks were great. We observed Baltimore Orioles, Tree Sparrows and Wood Ducks. Lee and Mary Lou were great, as usual.

The fall Bird Walks are scheduled for September 9 and 23, 2017.

As part of the monitoring process, we are always looking for what is there. We are seeing a lot of insects we have never seen before, like turtle beetle and crane fly, and a lot of birds, such as the Hooded Warbler. Mary Lou has only seen a hooded Warbler a few times in her life. Turtles are also reappearing. We are monitoring these things because it is an indication of how well our restoration project is going, so we are headed in the right direction.

The Nature Trail is now complete. The Nature Trail begins at Hillside and wraps all the way around through Izaak Walton Park to where Maple and Hillside Streets transition. We cleared out the trail and made it walkable. However, we are still working on removal of a few stumps and fallen debris.

Dana asked Christina Ferraro if we have a resolution on the Trail Markers. The Trail Markers are small (4' x 6' signs) and can either simply state Slough Trail, Nature Trail or Trail. Christina asked if Agnes and Dana would meet with her on Monday afternoon, June 12, to discuss this item further.

PHNRC Work Site Status Report 2017

Members received a copy of the above-entitled report from Dana, which is an update to the report that was presented to the City Council in 2016 and consists of a summary of our restoration areas.

The Status Report is several pages and centers on the ComEd Prairie Restoration, the Slough, Morava Nature Center, Heron Pond, Tully Park, Nature Speaks program, and the Greenhouse Program.

A .pdf copy of our Status Report will be sent to the City Council, Joe Wade, Peter Falcone and Christina Ferraro.

Dana referenced this Status Report back to the management plan that is part of our original 2016 presentation. Also present are references to the appendix which state where each of these documents can be found, so it provides guidelines on our restoration techniques, etc. The report will also be posted to our website. Go to "Presentations – 2016."

4th of July Parade

We will be utilizing John's 1965 Volkswagen Beetle Bus as our "float" and will decorate it patriotically, as well as our own decals.

Jill will complete the City of Prospect Heights Registration Form and submit to Karen Schulthesis.

Commissioners, volunteers and friends will walk in the parade and distribute PHNRC brochures, and candy.

Journal Articles

The June 2017 PHNRC Journal was just published and contains the next chapter of Dr. Hilty, the projects with MacArthur Middle School and Kids' Care, What's New at the Slough, our participation in the PHPD Annual Block Party, and the Nature Speaks Program.

Dana requested assistance from Commissioners on writing and/or providing topics and quotes for future Journal articles. The articles need to be nature-minded. John would like to do a book review.

Visitor's Comments

No comments were generated by our audience.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is scheduled for Thursday, July 13, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. at City Hall.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the Commissioners, and the meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
Recording Secretary
Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission