

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 15, 2018

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

Attendees: Peter Falcone, Assistant to the City Administrator

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 were in attendance. A quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of February 8, 2018

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of February 8, 2018 were approved. No corrections were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

Update: Workday Schedules

Dana provided an update on workday schedules.

Our last workday was at Heron Pond, and we had a good turnout of volunteers, which meant we accomplished a lot. We are making progress.

A resident from one of the homes on the Pond spent a lot of time with us. He was interested in what we were doing, so we provided him with project information.

The path is completely lined out from where it will start and end.

Agnes mentioned that she met with Dino Squiers, Superintendent of Facilities and Parks of PHPD. The issue: We have been working on that site, and an area we seeded was mowed, so the seeds did not survive. Unfortunately, this happens frequently. Therefore, Agnes reviewed the site with Dino. The PHPD will line a wood chip trail in the section between the creek and pond and have a mow line through the rest. The only part of this section that will be mowed is the mow line.

The idea is PHPD would not mow if they could not get in there to mow. This gives us both sides. It narrows where it comes into the shoreline, so we have more land to stabilize the shoreline.

We will continue with the work at the Slough, which includes more invasives and trail blazing. Currently, there are no more seed to put down, but we are slowly shifting into the things that are seasonal, such as working with the seedlings located in the Greenhouse.

John asked if wood chips could be placed on the trail at the Slough. It is muddy to walk through. Parts of the trail would do fine, but much of the trail goes under water during heavy rains. The wood chips would then float away. Ed suggested placing the plastic “honeycomb” mesh on the ground. It embeds itself into the terrain and is a sustainable surface. Agnes liked the idea of lining the trail, but the logs could also float away.

In the future, it would be ideal to get a Grant or have a Boy Scout project to build a boardwalk, especially through marshy areas. A board walk would provide access to all residents, especially those with handicaps.

The bridge is a bit off-kilter and should be fixed.

The location for the workday on Sunday, March 25 has not been determined. Upon inquiry, we learned that a workday at the Seeded Prairie would not be for a while, perhaps in May. The work at the Seeded Prairie would be mostly herbiciding the invasives in that area.

Status: Seed/Greenhouse Program

Agnes said we have thousands of seedlings growing in the Greenhouse. They are growing wonderfully. Agnes has determined that the best way to stratify seed is outside. Plants that Agnes has not been able to grow, such as native wild geraniums and early spring ephemerals, grow by placing the seed in soil right after collecting the seed in the spring and sitting there for the last year. The successful germination rate is 99%.

Through use of a Greenhouse, we will not have to spend a lot of time transplanting and can instead focus on invasive control.

We have been growing seedlings for Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards. PCPS will do a lot of transplanting and complete it in three hours with 20.

Agnes purchased a new Greenhouse (12' x 12" with plexiglass) and is putting it together with volunteers Seth, Angelica and Jill.

Library/Park District Program: Nature Speaks Program

The equipment utilized at the Library for speaking engagements presents a struggle to work properly. The Library said that they will replace it. In the meantime, Dana will utilize a projector from his office to work with his laptop so that we can be assured that the presentations we host will run smoothly.

The next Nature Speaks Program is scheduled for April 19, 2018. The host speaker is Allison Sacerdote-Velat. Her presentation is entitled "Smooth Green Snake – Conservation in Northern Illinois." Dr. Sacerdote-Velat is one of the leading authorities on Green Snakes. Her presentation will focus on the known threats to conservation of smooth Green Snakes, their ecology, her research, and applied conservation techniques being used to aid the persistence of the species in the region.

Dana asked Ald. Larry Rosenthal if it was possible to reschedule the Strategic Directives Meeting from April 19 so that Patrick could be available to videotape Allison's presentation. We have two previous presentations videotaped, and it would be nice to continue to do so, especially the presentation by Dr. Wilhelm on June 28. The videotaped presentations are available on both the City's and PHNRC's websites.

Ed asked if we should be cognizant of the City meetings schedule when planning the Nature Speaks Program. Dana said it is the Library that drives the schedule. They are booked solid, sometimes three years in advance.

The summer Nature Speaks Program is scheduled for June 28, 2018. The host speaker is Dr. Gerould Wilhelm, Director of Research at the Conservation Research Institute in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. Dr. Wilhelm's presentation is on "Consilience, Concinnity, and the Way." Consilience means "jumping together" and is typified when all the elements of an ecosystem were working in harmony. The health of an ecosystem is directly related to consilience.

Dr. Wilhelm is world-renowned, and he wrote the bible on "Plants of the Chicago Region."

Dana requested Commissioners' assistance in identifying new speakers for the Nature Speaks Program. Jill has provided a few suggested speakers. Doug Talmey (sp?) is a speaker that Dana desires to enlist for the Nature Speaks Program.

The only programs currently scheduled with the Park District are the Bird Walks, and they are gaining in popularity.

Nature Preserve – Interpretative Signage

We have five of the interpretative signs displayed. Dana incorporated suggestions by Jill. Christina also provided modifications, which Dana needs to discuss them with her. We will not have all of the interpretative signs ready for display by March 31, the opening of the trail system in the Nature Preserve.

Upon inquiry, we learned that we should contact Dan Peterson, Director of Building and Development, to see if there is anything we may need to provide. The property where the interpretative signs will be displayed is Park District property, but as a courtesy, we should contact Dan.

Earth Day – Sunday, April 22, 2018 and Earth Week Structure – April 19 – 22, 2018

The proposed schedule of events for Earth Week are the Nature Speaks Program with Allison Sacerdote-Velat's presentation on April 19, 2018; the Special Bird Walk provided by Bird Conservation Network on Saturday, April 21, and a fun, Super PHNRC Workday on Sunday, April 22 (Earth Day).

Members discussed inviting the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards and McDonald Creek Commission to join us on April 22. We would also open the day to the public. We could have 40 or more people available to transplant seedlings, plant trees, participate in a Bird Walk and take a tour of the Slough. We would also provide a nice lunch.

Members also discussed advising our Super PHNRC Workday in the City's e:newsletter, our Website, post on Facebook and Twitter with Patrick's assistance, and have Ed publish a Press Release.

Status: Summer Interns

We will be able to employ one summer intern due to the generosity of an anonymous donor supplying one intern's salary. We are hopeful to employ a second summer intern with our 2018 Budget. To date, no questions have arisen from the City on our 2018 Budget; however, we have learned that we are not under Public Works but Administration (Forest and Commissions).

Jeremy Shultz, our intern from last summer, definitely wants to work with us this summer. However, he has on other possibility and will advise.

Dana and Agnes have spoken with Gabriella (Gabi) Szyniec. Gabriella is a senior at Hersey, lives in Prospect Heights, is a regular volunteer, has an incredible work ethic and wants to major in environmental resources in college. Gabriella has also shown interest in getting an herbicide license. Gabriella will be our second intern, if our budget is approved.

ComEd Grant Report

Agnes stated that we completed the ComEd Grant Report, and after making a few changes, Christina from PHPD submitted it. We understand ComEd was pleased with the report; everything was done on time.

There are still a few items to be expended before the deadline, like the establishment of the interpretative signs and having the stepping stones fixed. The original contractor will return to stabilize the stepping stones. Upon inquiry, movement of the stepping stones should not be a continual occurrence. The original contractor has ideas to make them straight and permanent.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation of PHNRC 2018 Budget to the City Council

Dana and Jill attended the City Council Budget Workshop on Monday evening, March 12, 2018. We learned that PHNRC was moved from the Public Works budget into Administration. This move was based on an easier accounting practice. It makes more sense for PHNRC to be with all the other Boards and Commissions and not with Public Works.

Our budget may be approved at the City Council Meeting of April 23, 2018. However, if the City Council waives the first reading of the budget, we may be approved as early as Monday, April 9, 2018.

McDonald Creek Commission Meeting – February 27, 2018

Jill Moskal attended the McDonald Creek Commission (MCC) meeting of February 23, 2018 for PHNRC representation.

Most of the meeting time was a presentation by Justin Kirk, Senior Civil Engineer with the Storm Water Management Section of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD). The purpose of his presentation was to explain what resources MWRD offers for community groups and residents.

Also present was Bob Newport of the Metropolitan Planning Council.

The McDonald Creek Commission sought ways for Prospect Heights to partner with MWRD.

MCC asked if MWRD had advisers that could look at situations in our town and with the Creek. Can MCC, Public Works and Engineering have access to MWRD and talk conceptually? Can MWRD be a sounding board? How can we know what is the best thing for us to do?

Response from MWRD: Keep a running record, document storm water problems, send information on problem areas to MWRD for their review. Criteria for flood prone properties involves a cost-benefit ratio if problem is a recurring scenario. How much damage is experienced before it is looked at? Multiple flooding events must occur.

The City of Prospect Heights should put together an application on a storm water project that makes the most sense for MCC. Identify issues and be inclusive. MWRD then sends the application to Springfield, where it is reviewed, and a determination made.

Can MWRD do an assessment of the creek? The last assessment was during the detailed watershed project. McDonald Creek was included in the 2007 Des Plaines River Scope and Sub-Watersheds Master Plan, but that was over 10 years' ago. Since then, the water flow upstream is more vigorous. MWRD said they have no plans to update the 2007 Plan.

Bank stabilization: Look for root cause of erosion; might be upstream. Creek bank stabilization – will need permanent easement so municipality can access the land. A healthy stream has trees on its banks to help keep the water cool. Shade is much better for habitat.

MWRD has a small streams maintenance crew. Suggested MCC check their website. They also have their own app.

FACTS:

1. MWRD is the second largest property owner next to the Forest Preserve District. MWRD currently owned 85 properties and leases some of their property.
2. The major cause of flooding is typically storm water and not from McDonald Creek.
3. The major pollutant in a stream is storm water. Next is Phosphorous, which comes from fertilizer placed on personal property in the Spring. A lot of rain falls, and it ends up in the stream. Educate the public!
4. Willow Road flooding is not included in MWRD's Phase 2 Storm Water Management Program.

PHPD is concerned about creek bank erosion at Kiwanis Park (Elm and Viola Streets). We must get a list of native plants with deep roots to MCC for stabilizing the shoreline.

Do deep rooted plants work? Don't they wash away? It depends on the plant, the time, and it is recommended to have a 3:1 graded slope for planting. We have experimented to see how it works. Sometimes you must stabilize with a bit of hardscaping. There are many different methods, like a seawall, to create the flow of the water and steer it from one side and make it more of a current down the center. However, plants with very long roots are much better than turf grass, which have short roots. The force of water comes through so quickly and fiercely that it will take land with it.

Dana said he learned that the MWRD is working with Chicago Public Schools to replace their asphalt parking lot surfaces with an impervious material; the water goes right through the asphalt into the ground instead of running off the surface. Perhaps we could reach out to MCC and inquire if MWRD can help with a Pilot Program.

The next scheduled McDonald Creek Commission Meeting is Tuesday, March 27, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. in City Hall Chambers.

Prescribed Burns

Dana spoke with Floyd at the Springfield EPA Office. They have located our permit and will expedite it to us. The window allowing us to burn is short because of the warm-up. Dana said our permit will be approved soon.

Currently, the Cook County Forest Preserves are performing prescribed burns. The Morton Arboretum is burning next week. Busse Woods has been burned.

Peter Falcone advised that we submit our burn plan to him so could get us on the March 26 City Council Agenda.

Agnes said the weather forecast for next week includes some light precipitation. We only have the two remaining weeks of March available to conduct a prescribed burn. Agnes asked Commissioners for their availability to help with the burn. Agnes mentioned we have a new member to the burn team – Seth Marcus who recently acquired his burn license.

The plan is to burn the planted areas along Hillside Avenue, the plantings by the Izaak Walton sign out front, and a small area extending on Marion. It is the general area where we burned last fall. It does not include the cattails.

Peter said the fuel is high up, so there is nothing to carry the fire on the floor. Therefore, Peter recommended brush cutting or line trimming to have wood debris to bring the fuel down and carry the fire through.

The actual burning time for this prescribed burn is 1.0 or 1.5 hours.

We will also be burning Lauren's Prairie. It is an area measuring 50' x 30' and is a third-year prairie. Lauren's family have paid for an EPA permit. The burning time will only be six minutes.

Upon inquiry, Agnes recommends cutting prairie plants on private property.

Insecticides

Peter Hahn has researched the use of insecticides. Homeowners are unaware of the extensive damage insecticides and pesticides can do to our environment and ecosystem.

Neonicotinoids or neonics are a group of insecticides that are used widely on farms, as well as around our homes, schools and city landscapes. They are used to protect against sap-sucking and leaf-chewing insects. Neonics are systemic, which means they are absorbed by the plant tissues and expressed in all parts, including nectar and pollen. Unfortunately, bees, butterflies and other flower-visiting insects are harmed by the residues.

Extremely concerning is the prolific inclusion of these insecticides in home garden products. Home garden products containing neonics can legally be applied in far concentrations as much as 120 times as great, which increased the risk to pollinators. As a gardener, one can have the opportunity to help protect pollinators by avoiding the use of these insecticides.

Common products that contain Neonicotinoid are Bayer Advanced and Ortho Bug B Gon. Sevin, another very common insecticide, may be safe for humans, but it destroys bees. Round-Up is proven to do nerve damage to humans.

Dicamba is an herbicide that moves through the soil quickly, damaging surrounding plants, including landscape bushes and trees. New formulations of Dicamba have been released that can be used on some GMO crops, but Dicamba can volatilize and be carried off site, causing damage to beneficial plants, such as Milkweed. Milkweed is the only food source for Monarch butterflies, and the Monarch butterfly population is still declining.

Many of these products cannot be used if the homeowner has a well because the product goes through the soil into your water source. Consumers need to read and follow the label directions before using pesticides.

Consumers really need to think through their plans on using insecticides. Are they really needed to kill unwanted insects? Are these insects doing that much damage? What is the alternative? Can you live with it? It could simply be unnecessary use of chemicals.

Peter recalled an old college professor lecturing about the unneeded use of insecticides. He called the pests “no see-ums.” People are using insecticides for insects that they could not see or have not even seen; hence “no see-ums.”

This is a good topic for Earth Day, our Nature Speaks Program, the Garden Club and an article for the PHNRC Journal. Dana asked Peter to work with him and/or Ed and design a one-sheet handout to distribute to participants of our Speak Earth Day Workday. Further research on Neonics should be conducted by us.

New Business Items

MacArthur Junior High School is hosting a Science Showcase on Tuesday, April 3 at 6:30 p.m. Set up time is 5:30 p.m. It is a district-wide event.

Typically, Science Teachers (nine) have created booths and exhibits for the Science Showcase. However, this year, they’re reaching out to organization beyond just the teachers, and they have asked PHNRC to participate. We have worked with the MacArthur JH 6th Graders before. Jill and Agnes will be present.

Ideas: Peter and Dana will put information together on Insecticides. We will have items for a visual display, so attendees can see and feel, such as burn equipment, examples of bark from native trees and twigs, tray of seedlings, etc.

The North Town Garden Society in Chicago, near Rogers Park, have asked us to present our Slough presentation on Thursday, April 5, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. They typically have at least 100 attendees. We will receive a \$100 stipend.

They have asked for information on the speakers, so Commissioners should provide a few sentences on their background to Dana.

Visitor’s Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is scheduled for Thursday, April 12, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. in the City Hall Chambers.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary