

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 12, 2018

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

Absent: Ed Madden

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 except Ed Madden were in attendance. However, a quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of June 14, 2018

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of June 14, 2018 were approved. No corrections were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

Update: Workday Schedules

The weather conditions for our last workday of July 1, 2018 were very hot; however, 15 volunteers were present to help with buckthorn removal at the Slough. The workday ended early with snacks and water and a tour to see what was in bloom. A few volunteers stayed to plant grasses. Although many of the Michigan Lilies did not survive the recent flood, new growth has appeared.

Our upcoming workday on July 15, 2018 will be split the workday between the sedge meadow and the Nature Preserve. The interns have started to remove a thick population of teasel at the sedge meadow. We will continue the work for about one hour, maybe collect some sedges and then move to the Nature Preserve to do planting.

Status: Seed/Greenhouse Program

We have started to collect seeds of spring species then sowed them in containers. We will, again, collect seeds in August and September.

Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards (PCPS) have invited us to visit their prairie in August or September and collect seeds of species we either do not have or have a limited quantity of.

We are very fortunate to have a connection and a wonderful relationship with PCPS. They are always willing to share their bounty. Also, we have been growing some prairie plants for them. We planted a few thousand plants.

We also have a few native plants in reserve to provide the PHPD for their objective to naturalize the pavilion area.

Status: Meeting with Luke Mathew – 398 Owen Court, Prospect Heights, IL

On Friday, June 15, 2018 at 8:00 a.m., Agnes, Dana, Jeremy, Gabi and Jill arrived at the home of Luke Mathew's parents at 398 Owen Court, Prospect Heights, to meet with Luke, as pre-arranged, to review the bank erosion and bank stabilization of Hillcrest Lake that borders the west side of his parents' property.

Unfortunately, Luke was not present. However, PHNRC reviewed the area of concern and have recommendations and an alternative to building a concrete barrier, such as utilizing riparian buffers to stabilize the shoreline by filtering and holding the water. Aquatic plants also ease the ripple effect of the water.

PHNRC also reviewed the Hillcrest Lake bank along Owen Court to Willow and felt naturalizing this area, too, could address flooding issues.

Repeated calls and message by Dana to Luke Mathew has not generated further contact. However, PHNRC is still available to assist Luke and his parents with their concerns.

Plan to Increase Public Access to the Wetlands

Dana reported that PHNRC has completed what we think to be the first draft of the Plan for distribution to the City Council. The PHNRC plan incorporates all of the commissioners' comments and also reflects the 1.5-hour meeting with Mark Roscoe of Public Works and his thoughts. Mark had quite a few modifications to the Plan, which have been incorporated.

The PHNRC plan is prefaced by not having specifics of the MWRD project, which could change the entire proposed PHNRC plan and cause a major re-think. Could we possibly receive more information or possibly sit down with someone from MWRD, so we could be more specific? Peter Falcone said that the City is working with MWRD.

Our concern is getting the project in the right place regarding absorption of water and whatever else we could positively impact.

Dana sent a .pdf of the plan to all commissioners. The changes are Mark has modified the parking on the Lake to be the two small red areas and addition of four benches and three trash cans on the Lake. We removed the extension of the buffer zone that would run through the property on 103 Maple, and all of the work that is scheduled or theorized to happen on Willow Road has been set off to the side because of the MWRD project. These are the only changes.

Dana opened for discussion to receive Commissioners' input.

Seth Marcus expressed his concerns. Seth has uncertainties about the project but does not want to criticize it. Are we going to be told "here it is" and it has been decided in a certain way? Or we will have input before the final decision? How will it impact the issues of the vegetation, animal life and water flow?

Before a decision is made on how the project will be, may we have a seat at the table? We would like input before the MWRD plan is finalized.

If the project happens, thousands of hours of volunteer work will be destroyed. Do we have a voice? Will we be adjusting our plan to fit the needs of the MWRD plan? This is about public access and use of the area. When they raise the road, how will it affect water flow, plants and animals? What is the MWRD plan? Will we still have input and adjust our plan? Will it damage our work at the Slough?

We know the City is trying to get the agreement to fix this problem area. How will this impact what we have done and are planning to do? Can the PHNRC be involved in that process?

Peter said the City is in a discussion phase with the MWRD. Nothing has been decided upon. The City is anxious for a response because they want the project done. It is in the hands of the engineers regarding water flow. MWRD is involved because of the flooding issues.

Peter said the MWRD Project cost is \$3 million of which IDOT or MWRD is paying \$2.6 million. MWRD engineers are working on the project. The City of Prospect Heights is enthusiastic to get the plan. At this point, it is all speculation.

Marc strongly feels that the expectation is we will have to adjust our plan to MWRD, but MWRD should adjust their plan to our needs. Marc would desire MWRD presenting us with their plan and then we adjust it. This is about public access and use of the area. Separate from that, when the road is raised, how will it affect water flow and restoration? We would desire input before the plan is finalized.

Dana said the MWRD knows our organization and the work we have accomplished quite well.

PHNRC is an advisory council to the City Council. Therefore, Peter recommended that we either send a letter to our Aldermen or attend a City Council Meeting to voice our concerns. After a full discussion, it was decided to include our inquiry during our presentation of the plan to the City Council at their meeting on July 23, 2018.

Dana said in our meeting with Mark Roscoe, we learned that the project involves placement of 6, 5-foot diameter culverts between the Slough and Hillcrest Lake and raising Willow Road six feet or placing a bridge.

The flow will move water to the Lake. If the outflow is increased, the water will move faster. Peter said there will be a compensatory storage area for the displaced water.

It is possible for the spill pipe from Hillcrest Lake to the ditch to McDonald Creek to the Des Plaines River will not change anything. What is the grading into the Lake? All the work is simply theorized on what will happen to Willow Road.

John's caution or worry about the plan is that although we proposed a lot of things, the plan may get watered down to just putting parking on Hillcrest Lake and that is all. Is that what increasing public access means without affecting the shoreline or doing anything else?

Dana said the shoreline is continuously eroding, and riparian buffers would be beneficial. Our proposal for including boardwalks and interpretative signage could be debated and pared down.

John understands our intention but worries about others. This will clearly be an issue of debate. It could get very much pared down.

Agnes said that another issue of debate is building boardwalks because it crosses the creek, it is in a flood plain, and it is thought to obstruct water flow. However, boardwalks are used in fens, wetlands, forest preserve district and every natural area. Boardwalks do not obstruct flow and are not an issue. Agnes does not see boardwalks as a problem.

We are simply advising the Council with ideas and possibilities. If the City Council does not approve boardwalks and the land is on Park District property, we could approach the park district.

After a vote, the PHNRC approved the revised Plan to present to the City Council.

Dana will send a .pdf copy of our Plan to Peter Falcone. Seth Marcus will address the City Council of our concerns at our June 23 presentation to the City Council.

Prospect Heights Park District Project

Dana said the PHPD will begin their project as early as next week to remove the pavers in the remodeled cabana area, build a permeable path and naturalize the area with native plants to attract pollinators. The planting could take two to three hours. Jill suggested accomplishing the planting as part of a volunteer workday.

Library/Park District Program: Nature Speaks Program

The Nature Speaks Program scheduled on June 28, 2018 with Dr. Gerould Wilhelm, Director of Research at the Conservation Research institute in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, was nothing short of spectacular! Dana expressed concern, however, by non-attendance of anyone in a policy-making position from the City and Park District. Dr. Wilhelm's presentation addressed flooding, watersheds, storm events, waterflow, the way the land works, and other issues that would have provided invaluable information for city officials. For future Nature Speaks Programs, we will issue a special invitation to our City and Park District officials encouraging their attendance.

Also, Dana said we did not get to videotape Dr. Wilhelm's presentation. Therefore, we need to meet with Terri and Patrick to learn the Library conference booking schedule in advance to ensure we have the right space and Patrick's availability and assistance.

Our fall speaker is Joel Greenberg, Author of The Natural History of the Chicagoland region. We expect to have a full-house like we did for Dr. Wilhelm's presentation. However, Joel does not want to be videotaped.

Joel will be discussing three birds, their habitat and conservation. The title of Joel's presentation is "Hope is the thing with feathers: Americans and Three Birds." The three birds (passenger pigeon, Kirkland Warbler and Whooping Crane) represent a different outcome in the hands of people; what humans have done with these birds through mismanagement of the environment.

Seth has a contact that has special knowledge of Blanding's turtle and is giving a presentation in Lake County. Would we be interested? Dana would be interested in contacting this person as a possible speaker for a future Nature Speaks Program.

Nature Preserve – Interpretative Signage

Dana said the small signs are out for production. Dana is completing the two large signs, and the entire order will be shipped together to reduce shipping charges. We can also schedule a special workday to install the small signs and two large signs.

The Library's Storyboards were recently vandalized. The majority of the Storyboards were tossed into the creek.

Prospect Heights Park District Block Party

PHNRC participated in the PHPD Block Party on Saturday, June 23, 2018. We registered 150 people to receive the Journal. Our current mailing list for the Journal and volunteer workday notifications is 318 people. We also gave away a lot of native plants.

Agnes said many young children spent time talking with her. One 7th Grader had participated in MacArthur Middle School's "Make a Difference Day" and said she wished she could participate again. Agnes said she can participate by coming to our volunteer workdays.

The PHPD Block Party is worth participating in, and PHNRC will continue to do so.

Kids' Care Workday at Nature Preserve

Agnes said that Kids' Care organizes four volunteer efforts through the year. The age group is 2 to 12-year-old children along with their parents and grandparents. It is a family event.

Kids' Care organized a workday with PHNRC, again, on Sunday, June 24 where 15 children and family members planted a few hundred native plants in the Nature Preserve then participated in an educational walk.

Some of the children who participated last year saw the butterfly milkweeds they planted in full bloom with butterflies surrounding the plants. They saw fruition of their work and appreciated it. The children also engaged Agnes in conversation about the importance of planting native plants.

City of Prospect Heights Fourth of July Parade

PHNRC, once again, participated in the City's 4th of July Parade on July 4, 2018. We distributed 450 bags of candy with PHNRC handouts and will have to prepare close to 1,000 for 2019.

The parade is a fun event with a special, enthusiastic thanks to the Hebron Presbyterian Church in Prospect Heights for the fantastic hot dog lunch provided to participants at the conclusion of the parade. They give back so much to the City.

Our workday on July 15 will be the first workday after distributing our treat/info bags, so we are curious to see if new volunteers come to the workday.

We are also hopeful that John's VW bug will be present at the 2019. However, utilizing the electric car in this year's parade was also a good thing.

NEW BUSINESS

Status: Summer Interns

Our summer interns, Jeremy Schultz and Gabi Szyniec, are just great! They are incredibly hard workers and intelligent. They have accomplished so much and have learned a great deal. They know basic plant management, and when Agnes takes them on field trips, she could tell that they are studying on their off-hours. They can determine a plant by searching the field book. Our interns are interested and committed.

We have five or six volunteers, including Lauren, on Wednesday morning to assist the interns with planting and transplanting.

John expressed appreciation to Agnes for placing an educational component with the internship and for legitimizing the internship program.

Agnes then expressed the desire to employ Jeremy beyond his internship. Jeremy is a college graduate and is invaluable to the PHNRC. Jeremy is looking for full-time employment. How may we proceed? Could we utilize the monies received from our talks or use our budgeted money? Could Commissioners make donations to the City?

Peter Falcone will speak with the Finance Department. Any money we make goes into the general fund. We can take and put that money aside, but only have use of it for one year. We may need Council's approval to use our budget money to pay the intern. We can also approach the City Council.

McDonald Creek Commission Meeting – June 26, 2018

Jill Moskal was unable to attend the McDonald Creek Commission (MCC) meeting of June 26, 2018; however, Jill listened to a recording of the meeting.

The MCC have drafted a letter to accompany their brochure on the McDonald Creek. They plan to address the mailing envelope to “Neighbor” instead of “Resident” to prevent people from tossing it away before reading it.

MCC planned to present to the City Council at their July 9, 2018 meeting; however, their presentation has now been rescheduled to August.

Jill copied the McDonald Creek Commission presentation and distributed it to Commissioners for their immediate reference; however, Jill will not cover all specifics until it is presented to the City.

The Mission of the McDonald Creek Commission is to improve and maintain the quality of the Creek and to educate and empower residents to appreciate the Creek as an asset to the community.

The overall message from the MCC to the City Council is to emphasize that the creek is a critical part of Prospect Height’s infrastructure and is both an asset and a liability.

One of the MCC goals is to develop partnerships with neighboring communities and other related relevant agencies, such as the PHNRC. PHRNC would welcome this partnership and, also, assisting with MCC’s objective to plant deep-rooted plants to stabilize the creek’s shoreline.

The next McDonald Creek Commission meeting is scheduled for Tuesday evening, July 24, 2018 at 6:30 p.m.

PHNRC Summer Meeting Location

Members discussed conducting our meetings in the summer in City Council Chambers instead of an outdoor location due to the high mosquito population.

Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards (PCPS) Seed Exchange

We are excited to partner with PCPS for a seed exchange of species that we do not have or have very little of. PCPS has multiple dates in August and September for us to collect seeds with them. We are also welcomed to assist them with their Seed Processing Day.

New Considerations

Jill stated that just as we have representation at the McDonald Creek Commission monthly meetings, the PHNRC should also be a welcoming presence at the Prospect Heights Park District monthly board meetings to show our interest and offer assistance. Dana said he would attend the next PHPD board meeting.

John also proposed that, likewise, we should attend the City Council biweekly meetings. Therefore, Agnes will compile a calendar of the City Council biweekly meeting dates, and PHNRC members can elect which meeting they will attend and report back to the PHNRC.

Public Outreach – Presentations

The Cook County Master Gardeners are interested in having a Prospect Heights Slough Native Habitat Field Trip on either September 12 or 19, 2018 (Wednesdays). Their objective is to obtain a concept of our Slough restoration, what we are doing to protect the Slough, what is out there, our future plans and to provide a hands-on experience for attendees.

We were recently contacted by the Mount Prospect Garden Club with a request to present our Slough 101 Presentation on November 14, 2018 from 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Jill also inquired of our reaching out to the local high schools to present for their career days. Agnes said one of our volunteers has a contact with the John Hersey High School environmental teacher.

Seth Marcus expressed interest in participating and presenting.

Seth also inquired of our Fall Burn Season, which is October/November.

Visitor's Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is scheduled for Thursday, August 9, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. in City Council Chambers.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary