

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
October 10, 2019

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

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 Seth Marcus were present. A quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of September 12, 2019

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of September 12, 2019 were approved. No corrections or additions were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

Volunteer Workday Schedules and Seed Collection Wednesdays

A Seed Collection Wednesdays was held yesterday, October 9, 2019 at the Slough. We had a great turn out; about 10 people. The next Seed Collection Wednesday will be at St. Alphonsus to collect Prairie Cord Grass. Our last Seed Collection Wednesday will be October 30, 2019.

We may add a Special Volunteer Workday at the ComEd or Seeded Prairie on Wednesday, October 16, 2019. A special e:mail blast was sent to regular volunteers and all Commissioners.

Work would be accomplished of brush cutting and herbiciding in the areas in the East Prairie. Accomplishing this work before the ComEd Fall Prescribed Burn will allow us to seed this area after the burn and thus have good seed-soil contact. Agnes stated that the areas to be seeded are the sections that were not originally seeded two years' ago at the edges of the site by residents' property. These areas are considered weedy, so we'll reseed or repopulate these areas.

A volunteer workday was held at the Slough on Sunday, October 6, 2019. Volunteers finished planting on Hillside Avenue, sowed seed, chase buckthorn resprouts and tamed overzealous pokeweed.

Girl Scouts Oak Tree Planting Update

Pete Hahn reported that the original plan was to plant 10 oak trees at the Nature Preserve and 15 burr oak trees at the Slough. Well over 50%, approaching 75%, have been planted at the Nature Preserve. One more tree might need to be planted at Morava. Four Burr Oaks were planted yesterday at the Slough.

All tree plantings look good. The stakes used to secure the plantings are impressive and will enable one to see where the trees are planted. Plantings are mulched, watered and caged as they are planted. The goal now is to protect and maintain the plantings.

Peter is confident that the oak tree and burr oak tree plantings will grow well.

Illinois Prairie Week – September 14-20, 2019

Illinois Prairie Week held September 14 – 20, 2019 was very nice. It started with a Fall Bird Walk on Saturday, September 14 and acknowledgement of Mary Lou Mellon and Lee Ramsey from the Bird Conservation Network. Three seed collection events were planned – September 17 at the Slough; September 18 at the ComEd (Seeded) Prairie; and September 19 at the Remnant Prairie.

For Illinois Prairie Week in 2020, we will probably align and do the same type of program.

Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Program

Nature Speaks Program

On October 22, 2019, Bob Dean, CEO of Center for Neighborhood Technology(CNT) and a specialist in urban flooding in and out of the flood plain, will provide a presentation on “Flooding in the Region and What You Can Do About It.” Dana stated that Bob Dean is a phenomenal speaker, and urban flooding is an important issue in Prospect Heights. Bob has all-natural solutions for flood control and managing flooding on one’s property.

Ed Madden will prepare a press release and notice will be placed in the City of Prospect Heights E-Newsletter. Dana will prepare one more e:mail blast for next week to volunteers, and we have personally invited City Officials, Park District, Public Works and Aldermen.

Flooding issues affect public policy. Bob’s organization works with municipalities to develop effective strategies and plans for flood control on a global basis within a community. If the City was interested, Bob would make a presentation directly to the City Council.

Bob is the Executive Director of this national organization, and currently, CNT has flood remediation projects in Wilmette, Oak Park and four other municipalities. CNT has a good track record with great results.

For January 2020, Katherine Moore Powell, Climate Change Ecologist, Keller Science Action Center (Ecology) of The Field Museum will provide the winter presentation.

Fall Bird Walks – September 14 and 28, 2019

The Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission and the Prospect Heights Park District conducted the first of two Fall Bird Walks on Saturday, September 14, 2019 from 7:30-9:30 a.m. It was a terrific day, and viewing the cormorants perform a synchronized and syncopated swim was delightful.

The second Fall Bird Walk on Saturday, September 28, 2019 was a drizzly event and low on birds, but high on fun!

This was the fourth year that expert birders, Mary Lou Mellon and Lee Ramsey from the Bird Conservation Network, provided the experience and wonder of birds, and they will continue for a fifth year.

Scheduled bird walks for Spring 2020 are May 16 and May 30, 2020.

PHNRC Vision Through Art

PHNRC Commissioners – Agnes, Dana and John – participated in the PHNRC Vision Through Art from September 3 – 30, 2019.

The Artist Reception held on Wednesday, September 4, 2019 at the Library at 7:00 p.m. was attended by about 50 to 60 people.

Fifty percent (50%) of the proceeds from the sale of the art are donated to the PHHRC internship program. To date, artists Dana and John have sold six (6) paintings and donated \$1,000 to this program.

PHNRC is very appreciative to all who attended, who purchased artwork and for the Prospect Heights Public Library for hosting our event.

Seed/Greenhouse Program

Agnes said a lot of seed has been collected, and she estimates that between three and five pounds of seed are collected from every Special Wednesday Seed Collection Workday. Agnes estimated that her garage is currently storing at least 50 pounds of seed! We have also retained new volunteers from these events.

Agnes has started to prepare planting pots with rare species. Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards of Hoffman Estates has already contacted Agnes with a request to plant specific seed species for their use.

Path Maintenance at Work Sites

Seth suggested having a general plan and discussing it with the Park District.

Agnes has not had an opportunity to speak with the Park District. However, Agnes will meet with Cristina Ferraro end of October. Having a set plan for next year will be a good thing.

NEW BUSINESS

PHNRC Treasurer Report

John Kamysz distributed PHNRC Revenue/Expenses through August 23, 2019. The current budget numbers were provided by Peter Falcone.

PHNRC currently has around \$1,600 left in our budget. Most of our budgeted money was spent on interns' salaries. However, the money donated by Dana and John from the Art Show will add \$1,000 to our budget.

Also, we just received a donation of \$100 from the North Town Garden Society along with a nice letter from Eva Manaburg, President to Agnes:

"Dear Agnes: Your trip around the Slough was amazing. The work you have done is a step in the right direction in reclaiming the natural environment. We should all strive to make our communities achieve a balance of nature. Thank you for taking the time to show us your work."

John also distributed a sheet listing expenses that have not been drawn from our City Budget and total almost \$2,800. These are costs personally paid by Dana and Agnes. Despite wonderful donations, we are still running short. What is personally contributed to keep the Commission running is significant and much appreciated.

John said we will have solid data by April 2020 to show how much money the Commission requires to function, maintain the sites, and keep our interns .

The North Town Garden Society donation of \$100 will be applied to our budget this year, but the \$1,000 donation from the Art Show proceeds will be applied to the next fiscal year budget on May 1, 2020.

Comprehensive Equipment List and 2020-2021 Budget

From an equipment standpoint, we are in good shape; however, we always need a few extra loppers and gloves and maintenance must be performed. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have a good record of what was spent and compared to what was funded.

We will discuss in further detail at our November meeting.

Fall Prescribed Burns

Dana provided Commissioners with copies of the October 14, 2019 packet to the City Council entitled "Request for Permission to Conduct Several Prescribed Burns in the Fall of 2019 and Spring 2020 in Prospect Heights." The request detailed purpose, background, financial impact and recommendations and included Burn Area Maps for the Fall 2019 and 2020.

Commissioners reviewed and approved this information. Therefore, Dana submitted it to Peter Falcone to be placed as an Agenda Item at the October 14 City Council Meeting.

The burn permit has been submitted to the EPA, and the burn permit covers one full year.

Performing the prescribed burns this Fall is subject to ground and weather conditions. Therefore, if we do not burn in the Fall, we will burn in the Spring. Our permit will cover that timeframe.

We also need to make a presentation to the Park District. Dana will send the same documents we submitted to the City to Cristina Ferraro. The Park District Board decides whether we must provide a presentation or if it is a topic on their Agenda for approval by the Park District Board.

A motion was made to approve the information and submission to the City Council and Park District on our burn request for the Fall of 2019 and Spring of 2020.

Dana said he just learned today that ComEd will have Standtec burn the ComEd or Seeded Prairie and, for the first time, the Remnant Prairie. This is spectacular because it adds an ecological value! ComEd will manage the logistics, burn permits and notifications. We will be a purely administrative resource.

ComEd is willing to burn the Remnant Prairie because we improved the quality of the site. If ComEd does not have enough time in the Fall, they will burn in the Spring. In the meantime, we will clear brush that the fire will not get to and have a more thorough burn and easier for them, as well. It has been on their agenda for two seasons.

Where is the Remnant Prairie located, and why is it so valuable? The Remnant Prairie lies along the railroad tracks in Wheeling right along the bike path that is leased by the Prospect Heights Park District. It lies along the exact same path as the Buffalo Grove Remnant Prairie.

A Remnant Prairie is a prairie that has been untouched. However, in this case, it is not exactly a true Remnant Prairie. A soil survey was performed five years ago, and soil core samples showed different levels of disturbances across the site. However, part of that disturbance may have been due to trucks coming in, pipes installed, etc. The fact is part of that vegetation persisted and remained for the last couple of hundred years before settlement. The Remnant Prairie is a nice mix of prairie plants, grasses, Forbes and sedges which you only see in areas of undisturbed prairies.

Remnant Prairies are typically found along railroad tracks because the areas were burned to keep the vegetation away from the tracks. When ComEd searched their historical records, they discovered the area was never seeded. Whatever is growing has been present for hundreds of years. It was invaded by invasive plants. Some areas seemed to be 100% teasel, but through volunteer workdays and interns managing removal of invasive plants over the last few years, we uncovered the Remnant Prairie. As a result, we have had a flush of the native prairie plants growing. They have been dormant and waiting for the chance to come back.

The Remnant Prairie is a treasure chest, and it is a source of local seed where a lot of the plants in our restoration work originated from that seed.

The cost to burn the ComEd or Seeded Prairie is \$8,000.

ComEd Grant

Seth Marcus requested mention of the ComEd Regional Grant and whether we will ask to apply. Agnes said it is the City or the Prospect Heights Park District that applies for the Grant. However, we have assisted with completion of the proposal application. We should direct the question to the City and the Park District and if they are interested.

Dana said we must first agree if we want to pursue the ComEd Grant. We do not know the theme for 2020. The theme for 2019 was a pollinator focus. The theme is announced by the end of the year.

John asked if it must apply to a particular project or a focus on one of our existing sites? ComEd would prefer a new project, but if substantial improvement to an existing project is proposed, they may consider it. For example, if the category they choose for next year is accessibility to sites, it is well within the realm of possibilities to apply for boardwalks for the Slough.

“Eligible Activities: Priority is given to projects that demonstrate significant impact on the surrounding community by increasing the public’s access to open space and encouraging engagement with the project and active partnerships within the community.” ComEd likes to see people working together.

The deadline is typically March 15, and an answer is provided in June. The duration of the project is 18 months. Within two months of completing the project a report must be filed.

It is a matching grant. Whatever the City gives ComEd will match. Different options are possible. You receive 50%.

The last grant was co-sponsored by the City and the Park District. In-kind services cannot be matched with the Grant.

Think about ideas for a project. Should we pursue former Alderman Larry Rosenthal's mandate to improve accessibility around the Slough? If the other City Council members are in favor of it. It can include both City and Park District property. We should do it outside the budget request, however.

Agnes will contact ComEd to learn of the guidelines for next year's project theme.

MacArthur Junior High School Grade 6 Science Class – Make a Difference Day

Stephanie Ritter, teacher of the Grade 6 Science Class at MacArthur Junior High School, contacted Agnes about their Make a Difference Day, which they hold twice a year. The class has decided on Thursday, October 24, 2019 from 9:45-11:15 a.m., and we would conduct seed collection at the West Side of the ComEd Prairie as the activity. If rained out, we could process seed, talk about natural areas and prairies, etc.

Also, Kelly Funk, teacher of Grade 4 at Anne Sullivan, regarding the year-long project they are conducting with us. Ms. Funk would like to conduct a Field Trip to the ComEd prairie on Wednesday, November 6, 2019 in the afternoon. Activities would be dependent on the weather and may be seed collecting, in-class discussion on natural areas and prairies, etc.

Lycee Francais de Chicago

Dana said 25 years ago, he was one of three founding members of Lycee Francais de Chicago Program, which is a complete and total French immersion program. Therefore, all the classes are taught in French, only French is spoken, and the program follows the French National Curriculum. The program started with 145 students and is from pre-kindergarten to 12th Grade. They offer the French and International Baccalaureate.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the school. They are 822 students enrolled from all over the world. The school is located at Wilson and Damen.

As part of their anniversary celebration, Patrick Balson, chairperson of the start-up committee for the Lycee, contacted Dana because he is aware of the work Agnes and Dana do. Patrick is looking to create a project with the school where they can work with native plants. They are looking to install an educational program like what we do with Grade 4 of Anne Sullivan school and include parts of their green roofs and areas on the ground to turn into prairie. They would also like to do a Field Trip to our town and request the PHNRC to do a presentation.

Dana would personally love to do this with the Lycee. Dana feels it is another feather in our cap for the Commission and a tremendous opportunity to further expand the horizons of the City while impacting more young people.

The program must be defined, but essentially Patrick wants to create something that would have a permanent presence on the campus. Students would sow seeds there; the faculty would adopt and operate the program; students and faculty would come to our area for visits and tours. PHNRC would be in a guidance capacity.

The timeline is sometime this year and going into 2020. Dana will meet with Patrick Balson by early November.

New Park District Projects

Marcie Glenski of the Prospect Heights Park District contacted Agnes and Dana about three new events and is seeking approval and ideas as soon as possible to place information their Spring Catalogue.

The first idea is a Fly a Kite Day and Seed Ball Event. PHPD has kits manufactured with the Lions Club and logos of the Park District and Lions Club. Last year, the Park District paid \$126 for the kites, and 236 children participated. If PHNRC participates, we would split the cost and have our logo on the kites.

Marcia said the actual kite day was spectacular!

In conjunction, PHNRC would set up a booth and provide supplies for the children to make seed bombs, which are balls imbedded with native seeds that children riding along on a bike would then throw it in a ditch. Agnes would have to decide what seeds would be used to create the seed ball. We have issues with stratification so that the seed would germinate. Seeds utilized could be Common Milkweed and grasses. The seed would also have to be kept refrigerated until the event.

The second event is a Native Landscaping Day in the Spring. Would PHNRC be interested in making a presentation on gardening and landscaping with native plants, natural lawn care and anything of that nature? If so, we need to choose a topic.

The third project is the new Bird Walks scheduled for the Spring 2020 on May 16 and May 30, 2020.

John said the exposure is always good for the Commission and educating the public about what we do and can do. The issue is if whether we have the time and resources to complete these projects. The projects are clever ways to engage children.

Dana said the Park District manages the logistics. We simply must supply the artwork for the kites, the seeds for the Seed Bombs and show how best to create and bind the seed bombs. Apparently, it is common practice in Iowa where cyclists are handed seed bombs to toss as they ride.

Agnes and Peter have expertise in Native Landscaping. However, Peter said Native Landscaping would make a nice Nature Speaks Program topic where we would bring people or a vendor or two. People do not know where to purchase native plants, so we could provide the resources. Dana has one good speaker on natural lawn care from Go Green Illinois.

In summary, the Commission is receptive to the Park District project ideas. Dana will pursue this with Marcie.

Wheeling High School PHNRC Presentation

Wheeling High School has requested us to make an introductory lecture on the PHNRC on November 13, 2019 (Wednesday) at 8:30 a.m. for one hour or class period. There is no formal educational plan for the year; just us talking about who we are, what we do, etc., and the School will decide whether to work with us, volunteer, etc.

Whoever is available to present is appreciated. We would provide a presentation like Slough 101.

Agnes will ask Seth to reach out to the teacher and ask for specifics that she would like us to address or a syllabus to follow.

Seed Processing and Volunteer Appreciation Day

Our regular workday is November 17, 2019. Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards' seed processing will be held Saturday November 16, 2019 at Busse Woods in Elk Grove Village.

Peter works on Sundays and attends the PCPS Seed Processing Workday but misses participation in our Seed Processing Workdays because he must work on Sundays. Therefore, Commissioners discussed the possibility of holding our Seed Processing and Volunteer Appreciation Day on Saturday, November 23, 2019 from 9:00 am to 12 Noon.

Dana requested Commissioners to submit their votes for Volunteer of the Year. We will not have a Junior Volunteer Award this year.

Commissioners' Monitoring Program

Heron Pond (John Kamysz)

John reported that Heron Pond is under water, and access has been blocked, so he has not been able to check the site. However, everything looks to be status quo.

Nature Preserve (Peter Hahn)

Peter was at the Nature Preserve yesterday. Everything is trimmed. However, the paths need wood chips before the winter season begins.

Peter said the new storyboard signs are installed with new posts and metal signs. They look permanent, and the storyboards are informative, interesting and attractive.

Remnant Prairie (Seth Marcus)

A specific report on the Remnant Prairie was not provided at this meeting.

Saint Alphonsus (Ed Madden)

Ed said that St. Alphonsus still looks awesome and is doing well. Also, the current state of this prairie site will provide excellent fuel for a successful Fall burn. Ed said we burned St. Al's prairie site once before, but it was not optimum.

Sedge Meadow (Jill Moskal)

Jill reported that the Sedge Meadow is status quo.

Agnes said we are not planning a seed collection workday because we have collected a lot of the sedges to date.

Seeded Prairie (ComEd Prairie) (Dana Sievertson)

Dana said the East Side of the Seeded Prairie will be burned this Fall by ComEd.

Dana said a special workday is planned for Wednesday, October 16, 2019 from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm to perform brush removal with scythes and brush cutters. The East Side has become completely invasive and weedy. Once the invasives are removed, Agnes will herbicide. Two patches have already been prepared by our interns to allow for pure seed/soil contact after the burn.

John said the purple asters are exploding in bloom! Absolutely stunning.

Dana said that Fermilab is donating another 80 pounds of prairie mix. In return, we grow prairie plants for them and give seeds to them from their wish list. They also said we may bring our Penstemon to run through their mill, so we do not have to personally process Penstemon seed.

Slough (Agnes Wojnarski)

A specific report was not provided on the Slough at this meeting.

Tully Park (Jill Moskal)

Status quo.

City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation Reporting

Ad Hoc Willow Road Project Committee (Hillcrest Lake)

The Ad Hoc Willow Road Project Committee last met on August 14, 2019 and did not hold a meeting as reported on September 23, 2019. Currently, no further meeting date has been posted.

McDonald Creek Commission Meeting – September 24, 2019

The McDonald Creek Commission Meeting of September 24, 2019 was cancelled. Their next regularly scheduled meeting is Tuesday, October 22, 2019. Also, Jon Kindseth has accepted a new position as Decatur Deputy City Manager; therefore, he is no longer a member of the McDonald Creek Commission.

Prospect Heights Park District Board of Directors

Christina Ferraro requests the PHNRC to provide a presentation at the Park District Board Meeting of November 19, 2019. The content should be a year-to-date of PHNRC activities along with an estimate of the expenditures for each individual site. Expenditures should include volunteer hours, seed collected, plants grown, etc. This will enable formulation of a budget proposal to the Park District Board.

Agnes felt completing this exercise will also make it easier for us to create our 2020-2021 budget for the City.

John said for future budgeting and tabulating of expenses, he encouraged Commissioners to be vigilant on documenting administrative hours, volunteer time, purchases with personal money, etc., on the occasion and not retrospectively.

John wants to document it on the spreadsheet when it occurs, so he can create a spreadsheet on Google Docs for all to log their hours.

Dana said our volunteer workday sign-in sheets show where we worked and what activities we performed. Agnes also has a spreadsheet on the intern program documenting every activity and hour spent by the interns during every week of the summer, (i.e., where they worked, what they were doing, how much time was utilized, etc.). This was part of our reporting to Public Works.

Proactive Nature Management Plans

Dana has retried the Master Plans for all the sites from the files. The Master Plans show tasks, work intended to be accomplished, when, how, etc., and essentially a state-of-the site. Dana will update the Master Plans.

The initial Master Plans were presented to the City and Park District, and at some point, PHNRC should make a year-in-review or status presentation to the City and Park District

Visitor's Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is scheduled for Thursday, November 14, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in City Hall Chambers.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary