

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES
March 7, 2024

Present: Pete Hahn Dana Sievertson
 Jill E. Moskal Agnes Wojnarski

Absent: John Kamysz, Ed Madden and Seth Marcus

Guest: Peter Falcone, Assistant City Administrator

OPENING ITEMS

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Central Time by Agnes Wojnarski.

Roll Call

Roll Call proceeded. The majority of Commissioners were present except John Kamysz, Ed Madden, and Seth Marcus. However, a quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of February 8, 2024

The minutes of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Board Meeting of February 8, 2024 were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted. Therefore, the meeting minutes of February 8, 2024 were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Volunteer Workdays

The volunteer workday of February 18, 2024 (Sunday) was conducted at the Slough near Elmhurst Road and Hillside for winter work of cutting brush and buckthorn, preparation for a prescribed burn at the Slough in the afternoon, and distributing seed.

The volunteer workday of March 3, 2024 (Sunday) was held at Heron Pond for spring clean-up and preparation for a prescribed burn.

The volunteer workday of March 17, 2024 (Sunday) is anticipated to be conducted at the Slough.

The volunteer workday of March 31, 2024 will be cancelled due to Easter Sunday and instead a Special Workday is scheduled for April 7, 2024 (Sunday) at Camp Pine Wood located on West Lake Avenue/East Euclid Avenue and east of North Des Plaines River Road. The entrance is off Lake Avenue. Ken Schafer of the Cook County Forest Preserves District requested our assistance in removing a fairly large area of buckthorn. Agnes notes that the spring ephemerals may be emerging.

From January 1 to the first week of March on March 3, 2024, we have achieved 381 volunteer hours.

Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Events

Nature Speaks Program

Kathleen Marie Garness presentation on “Inspiring Young Artists Through Nature and Conservation” on February 22, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. was well-organized, filled with information and resources, and nicely done. Unfortunately, physical presence at the library was low with more people attending via Zoom Meeting. Jill remarked that Ms. Garness was eloquent, and her presentation contained full content and context on her subject.

Dana reported that the PHNRC Commissioners will be presenting for the Nature Speaks Program on April 25, 2024 on 10 Years and a look back on the Commission and how it has changed the face of Prospect Heights. The PHNRC presentation is in conjunction with the library’s summer reading program entitled *Read, Renew, Repeat* featuring the idea of conservation. The presentation date is during Earth Week.

Conservation as a movement focuses on protecting species from extinction, maintaining and restoring habitats, enhancing ecosystem services, and protecting biological diversity, iREAD 2024: *Read, Renew, Repeat* will be a wonderfully-diversified summer reading program that encourages reading as a restorative method of self-improvement and self-preservation.

Projects – Update/Status

ComEd Seeded Prairie

A prescribed burn this spring at the ComEd Seeded Prairie will not occur. ComEd does not burn their sites every year. Also, it is too late for us to ask Com Ed to schedule a mow for the area with StanTec, so we will seek for the area to be mowed in the fall. A successful mowing is best when the ground is frozen or very dry.

Our ComEd contact, Sara Race, is in a new role, and Lesley is the current Senior Environmental Compliance Specialist. ComEd’s environmental business is in transition.

Heron Pond

The volunteer workday on March 3, 2024 was awesome! Whole areas of buckthorn were successfully removed followed by a prescribed burn of half the area in the afternoon.

Remnant Sedge Meadow

A volunteer workday is scheduled at the Remnant Sedge Meadow with the Sierra Club on April 20, 2024 from 9:00am – 2:00pm.

Seed/Greenhouse Program

Agnes reported that all the seeds have been germinating in the Greenhouse since February 29, 2024. Agnes needs someone to manage the Greenhouse for three or four days at the end of March. The duties are monitoring temperature and watering.

Dana said we have two stainless steel Greenhouse heaters specifically for the purpose of temperature control. Both heaters are regulated by thermostats that are explosion proof, water proof, and fire proof.

Education Updates

Wheeling High School: Classes and Visit

Agnes said that Wheeling High School Environmental Science Class (STEM) sponsor and teacher, Mediha Abat, has requested the PHNRC to plan a visit and an in-class 35-minute presentation. Agnes and Seth will manage this educational request at a date to be determined.

MacArthur Middle School

Pete Hahn reported on a Tree Initiative Program with MacArthur Middle School.

In October 2023, Pete attended a Tree Planting Event at Thomas Middle School in Arlington Heights, which was sponsored by Openlands TreeKeepers Chapter. Pete said it was a learning experience for the students and faculty. The students planted between 15 and 20 small, high-quality trees. Pete asked Dana if we could do a similar event in Prospect Heights. MacArthur Middle School has open space with plenty of sun available for planting.

Currently, Pete is in the preliminary stages of initiating this program with MacArthur Middle School. Those involved are Openlands TreeKeepers Chapter, Stephanie Ritter, Agnes, and Dana. Pete said the objective is to meet with school officials, Stephanie, Dana, Agnes, Openlands, Treekeepers and others for a site visit in June. The planting window is in October, if all things come together.

The trees are provided through a Grant, and Pete's sister, Mary, is involved.

Pete said placing mulch around the newly-planted trees is necessary; purchasing of bags of mulch is an open item. Pete said Openlands TreeKeepers Chapter provides the trees and funding.

District 214 Micro-Internships

The District 214 Micro-Internships for the spring season started February 13, 2024. The Micro-Internship is a total of 30 hours per student and conducted on Tuesdays after school and a few Saturday afternoons with time for make-up days before the internship completion date. Three High School students are participating – one each from Buffalo Grove, Hersey, and Prospect Heights. The hours will increase as we begin Daylight Saving Time on March 10, 2024. The student interns have been managing a lot of work!

Dana said he received an e-mail of conducting a summer micro-internship; however, we declined due to a very busy schedule. However, if a Commissioner wishes to manage the 30-hour program during the summer, Agnes is agreeable. The District 214 Micro-Internship will be conducted in the fall of 2024.

Spring Prescribed Burns

Spring prescribed spring burns have been conducted and successfully. However, a large burn crew has been unavailable. Therefore, although we are burning, we are not covering a large amount of area. We may not be able to conduct prescribed burns much longer because the warm weather has encouraged plants to flower early, insects to emerge, and mating season for mammals.

Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission 10th Anniversary Celebration and Chili Fest

On February 10, 2024, the PHNRC celebrated their 10-year anniversary. Ed Madden, one of the original Commissioners, commented that when Agnes and Kari Spiegelhalter started the NRC in 2014, skepticism was present as to our mission and our resolve. Also, hard lessons on restoration of areas in a residential neighborhood were a learning curve. The NRC is proud of our accomplishments to date, especially building a community, and all made possible through our dedicated volunteers.

Our celebration was combined with our Annual Chili Fest at the home of John and Kristen Kamysz on Saturday, February 10, 2024. Geneviève Buley at Saide Cakes created the Nature Preserve Cake for all to enjoy. Everything designed for the cake – the rocks, dirt, water, foliage, stepping stones – were edible.

Dana presented a slide review with a historical theme, and John presented amazing slides of John's and Kristen's recent trip to Antarctica.

Monty Monterroso, a dedicated volunteer and recipient of the Volunteer of the Year Award in 2023, surprised the Commission with his nature-based Objet d'art entitled The Walnut Wing to commemorate the PHNRC 10-year anniversary. The art piece was created from walnut wood with a reverse side a wing motif with inscribed line representing the delineation of feathers in a lyrical way.

CONTINUED REPORTING

Eagle Scout Project

Dana did not have new information to share. Mark Roscoe is currently unavailable due to a training class. Dana will contact Mark upon his return. A meeting must be held to discuss the areas of interest, how the areas would be divided in parcels, and who to speak with to develop a well-coordinated plan.

Adopt-A-Trail Update

Dana was unable to provide a feature article on the Adopt-A-Trail Program in the February 2024 *Journal* because the initial information was just released in January. Therefore, an article is planned for the March 2024 *Journal*.

CONTINUOUS REPORTING

NRC 2023-2024 Budget and NRC 2024-2025 Budget

In John's absence from the meeting, Dana provided Commissioners with a copy of the current City of Prospect Heights FY2023-24 NRC Budget. Dana reported that Net Revenue is currently \$3,704.25, with \$3,000 representing donations; therefore, \$704.25 is available. This amount may be utilized to purchase herbicide and signage for the Solstice Garden and Hyndman Plum Grove. \$600 total.

Our objective for use of the donated amount of \$3,000 and for all donated money is for something special that will benefit the habitat and mean something to the people who have contributed to our Commission's mission. Therefore, we thought about signage for the Solstice Garden and Hyndman Plum Grove.

Dana reported he spoke with the Park District about an Openlands Green Regions Grant and the deadline. It would be great to double the donation amount from \$3,000 to \$6,000 through the Grant and utilize it to adjoin the flat area at Heron Pond. The deadline for the Grant application is March 31, 2024. However, two challenges are present: (1) applying for the Grant ties the money up past when it must be spent because we would not know until June if we received the Grant and (2) the Park District is not interested due to their current projects.

Another thought is the Eagle Scout Projects proposed by the city, one of which is for naturalizing the area with paths and a pagoda to create a city center between the Police and Fire Stations. We could parlay the donation money into a Grant for that area. Can we move forward? We could commit \$2,000 of the \$3,000 donation toward the Grant, see if the city wishes to contribute \$1,000 for the Eagle Scout Project, and then a total of \$3,000 could be matched by a Grant. We must remember the deadline for spending the money yet not knowing if we received the Grant.

As we move from 2024 to 2025, we must consider a Grant donation utilized with existing funds for a project that is beneficial or for public enhancement and having a specific project that can go from one year to the next without the threat of a spending deadline.

The PHNRC budget will be discussed on Monday night, March 12, 2024. Our budget amount is flat. If interested in a Grant to combine with our donations, raise this topic at the Budget Meeting.

Dana thought another idea is for an additional treatment via drone equipment to the cattails at the Slough. However, we will not know until the end of April if this is necessary. Also, Dana noted that our inventory of educational materials is full.

City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation

City Council Regular Meeting – February 12, 2024

Public Comment on Agenda Matters:

Mr. Mitch Palmer of 92 Edinburgh Lane said many communities do not have vehicle stickers and inquired why the City of Prospect Heights continues with the program. Mayor Ludvigsen said that other cities have property taxes but Prospect heights, as a non-home rule city, does not have as many revenue sources. Therefore, vehicle stickers provide a revenue stream that allows the city to operate and provide services. Alderman Morgan-Adams said that while residents might have a vehicle sticker, they do not pay property taxes to the city.

City Council Regular Meeting – February 26, 2024

Staff, Elected, and Commission Reports

Joe Wade, City Administrator suggested that March Budget Meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. instead of 6:30 p.m. Therefore, the City Council meetings of March 11, March 25 and April 8, 2024 will have a start time of 6:00 p.m.

Joe Wade also mentioned that the current City Council meeting of April 22 falls on Passover. Therefore, Joe suggested rescheduling the City Council meeting to Wednesday, April 24, 2024.

Personal Note: Upon departing the City Council meeting of February 26, I had the chance to speak with Karen Schultheis, Deputy Clark, and discovered her last day of employment before retirement is March 15, 2024.

Next Meetings: The next scheduled City Council Regular Meetings are scheduled for March 11, 2024 and March 25, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in City Hall Chambers.

Prospect Heights Park District – Board Meeting of February 27, 2024

I was unable to attend the PHPD Board Meeting of February 27, 2024 due to late hours in the downtown office and severe weather. Therefore, below is information stated in the meeting materials packet.

February 2024 Board Report – Christina Ferraro, Executive Director

TULLY PARK, 214 SOUTH WHEELING ROAD: The property transfer is being executed by quitclaim deed and a title commitment because the IDNR requires a title policy for grant award purpose, proving ownership. The agreement will be signed and then the title company can finalize the title work/closing details. A plat of survey has been ordered for the new boundaries of Tully Park.

February 2024 Board Report – Mark Grassi, Superintendent, Parks and Facilities

PHNRC: The Natural Resources Commission has performed some invasive plant and tree removal on Park District property (Heron Pond) in addition to one prescribed burn at the Slough.

PARKS: The Park District is accepting quotes (including purchase, delivery and planting) for 70 trees through the IDNR tree grant program that is consistent with the tree management plan. The Parks Department has taken advantage of the nice weather and recently installed three (3) new monument signs located at Somerset Park, School Street Park and Walnut Woods.

Next Meeting: The next regularly scheduled Prospect Heights Park District Board Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. at the Gary Morava Recreation Center in Prospect Hts., IL.

Plan Zoning Board of Appeals – Meeting of February 28, 2024

I was unable to attend the PZBA February 28, 2024 meeting in person but reviewed the meeting Agenda and listened to portions of the meeting recording.

Communications

Dan Peterson, Director, Building and Development, stated that research is ongoing regarding the chicken issues raised at the January 24, 2024 PZBA Meeting. A working group is being formed to review suggestions and settle differences before deciding what needs to come forward to do either a text amendment or ordinance changes. The working group is the PZBA and a few folks who expressed interest.

An outline formatting areas to be discussed with the understanding that a compromise must be met will be developed. The top concerns are:

1. The noise of the roosters
2. People better management of clean chicken coopers to reduce odor
3. Placement of the chicken coops and not too close to the property line
4. Number of chickens

The nuisance ordinance pertains to the period of 10:00pm to 7:00am. However, when the police respond to a nuisance call of roosters crowing and noise level, the rooster is not crowing when they are present. Therefore, is it not a nuisance. If the resident records the nuisance, they must sign an affidavit and appear in court.

Roosters crow throughout the day starting as early as 4:00am and ending at 9:00pm. Data is available to substantiate this fact. Roosters, like other livestock, serve three purposes: work for their respective operator; produce food, such as milk, eggs or meat; and are considered a food source.

This is a good time of the year to conduct site checks. Rules will be established to address the issues and compromise for a beneficial ordinance for all. Quality of life is important. Annual inspections observing maintenance of clean chicken coops, planned storage of food, placement of chicken coops in relation to property lines, and registration are factors for consideration.

Dan noted that chicken coops have always been covered under the Accessory Structures Ordinance.

Based on information, between 50 to 75 properties have a chicken coop. This is less than 2% of the residential family residences. Of the residents with chicken coops, 95% have less than 20 chickens.

Dan met with residents who were uncomfortable speaking at the Jan 24 PZBA Meeting. However, the PZBA wants representation from both sides of the issues. How can the majority speak freely?

Next Meeting: The next scheduled meeting of the Plan/Zoning Board of Appeals is Wednesday, March 20, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. The PZBA Meeting of March 20, 2024 will be a public meeting and not a public hearing.

Sierra Club Volunteer Workday at the Remnant Sedge Meadow

A special workday with the Sierra Club has been scheduled for Saturday, April 20, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Remnant Sedge Meadow. An organization meeting will be held Saturday, March 9, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. The PHNRC, the Sierra Club, various Rotary Clubs, Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops, several church groups, and civic and church groups will be participants and the Prospect Heights Park District and Com Ed have provided approval. Up to 200 volunteers could be present. Crescent Cardboard Company has granted permission to use their parking lot for volunteers' vehicles. Lunch will be paid and provided by the Sierra Club.

Anticipated speakers are Ms. Jan Schakowsky, U. S. congresswoman representing the 9th District of Illinois, will be the keynote speaker. Ms. Mary Beth Canty, a member of the Illinois House of Representatives for the 54th District, is also anticipated to be a speaker. Complete information will be posted in the March *Journal* and through spot e:mail messages.

Further details forthcoming.

PHNRC Presentation for the Sierra Club

Agnes and Dana will be providing a presentation on Native Plants to the Sierra Club on March 14, 2024 at the Spring Valley Nature Center in Schaumburg at 7:00 p.m. Native plant seed packets will be distributed.

Also, the Sierra Club requested us to provide 20 small seed packets with the species noted to allure people to attend the presentation. ComEd will contribute the seed for the seed packets.

The PHNRC presentation will provide an overview on native plants and why they are highly effective and essential for insects, birds, pollinators, reptiles, and wildlife and why they are now more important than ever; our Greenhouse Program; and our worksites, educational programs, and community outreach. Then Agnes will provide a presentation including information on each type of plant seed that comprises the seed packet.

Tree Initiative Program

Dana spoke with Mark Roscoe. The current Morton Arboretum Grant application is available from \$25,000 to \$150,000 with an application due date of March 21, 2024. However, the deadline is too soon to prepare for. Dana mentioned that another, smaller program not yet released is applicable to disadvantaged areas and probably better suited. Information on the smaller program will be released in April.

Mark chose to pass on the Morton Arboretum Grant application because he wants to ensure a concrete plan is formulated, such as trees to purchase, objectives, and a budget.

NEW INITIATIVES

Friends of the PHNRC

Joe Wade and Peter Falcone have often suggested that the PHNRC form a 501(c)3. The benefit of this program is that any donation the PHNRC receives would go straight into the 501(c)3. No questions about tax write-offs for the people who donate would occur, and there is no deadline on when the donated money must be spent by the NRC. Also, the 501(c)3 would be a separate entity from the PHNRC and would have the ability to solicit funds, organize fundraisers, etc.

Dana and Agnes will be speaking further with Joe and Peter for more information.

NEW BUSINESS

Living Green Expo

Grace Lutheran Church will host the Living Green Expo on Saturday, June 8, 2024. Jill will manage a table for the PHNRC.

City of Prospect Heights Community Days

The City of Prospect Heights plans to host Community Days on Saturday, June 1, 2024.

Prospect Heights Park District Block Party

The 2024 Prospect Heights Park District Block Party is scheduled for Saturday, June 22, 2024. The PHNRC looks forward to participating.

Independence Day Parade

The City of Prospect Heights Independence Day Parade is scheduled for Saturday, July 6, 2024. Dana said John has created new ideas or lots of additions, like a 30-foot cicada, for our parade submission.

Announcements to the Public

Daylight Saving Time returns this weekend at 2:00 a.m. local time on Sunday, March 10, 2024. Therefore, before retiring on Saturday evening, remember to set your clocks ahead by one hour. Also, please remember to check the batteries in your home smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors.

Visitors' Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is April 11, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. Central Time in City Hall Chambers.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary