

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
October 10, 2024

Present: Pete Hahn Jill Moskal
 Ed Madden Dana Sievertson
 Seth Marcus Agnes Wojnarski

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. All Commissioners were present except John Kamysz. However, a quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of the Board Meeting of September 10, 2024

The minutes of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Board Meeting of September 10, 2024 were reviewed. No changes or corrections were noted. Therefore, the meeting minutes of September 10, 2024 were approved.

OLD BUSINESS

Volunteer Workdays

A volunteer workday was held on September 15, 2024 for planting near 408 Hillcrest Lake, cleaning up Phragmites debris on Owen Court, removal of a few invasives, and continuing a general clean-up of the area.

Our volunteer workday of September 29, 2024 was conducted at the ComEd Seeded Prairie where we hosted 47 students from the Leyden East High School Science Club, Franklin Park, Illinois. The students joined PHNRC regular volunteers for a day of clipping seed heads from the Tall Canada Goldenrod in the west prairie. Agnes explained to the students that Tall Canada Goldenrod is a native plant, but it is very aggressive and strives to form monocultures. Agnes stated that the PHNRC is involved in the five-year study of how to best control Tall Canada Goldenrod's rapid growth. Removal of about 1,000 pounds of Tall Canada Goldenrod was accomplished. It was a perfect event and workday.

The PHNRC expresses sincere appreciation to Mark Roscoe and the Public Works team for retrieving and disposing of the lawn leaf bags filled with cut Tall Canada Goldenrod seed heads!

The students from Leyden East High School are members of a service club, which is a function of the high school. The students' focus is to serve their community, and PHNRC volunteers found the students to be engaged, polite, and interested in learning about natural area management.

The students expressed interest in attending our workday on a quarterly basis. Therefore, we will seek to invite them, again, during a winter workday.

Blair Ripley was our intern for two years. Her mother, Lisa, volunteers with us and travels from Oak Park. Blair's mother, Lisa, was a teacher at Leyden East High School. Megan Michorczyk, who brought the Science Club to our workday, was a student of Lisa's. At the conclusion of the workday, Megan expressed that East Leyden's first-time volunteering with the PHNRC was an amazing experience and was loved by the students. We are looking forward to enjoying a continuing relationship with Leyden East High School.

Volunteer workdays continue to be heavily attended. We are never less than 20 people. To date, volunteer work hours are about 3,193 hours. Volunteer work hours for 2023 tallied 3,374. We will eclipse this number in 2024. The students tallied 120 hours of service time during the September 29 workday.

Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Events

Nature Speaks Program

The Nature Speaks Program on October 23, 2024 will feature a screening of the outstanding film entitled "Why Not Scotland?" This film is a one-hour and will be shown in the Library Meeting room and via Zoom. The library will also prepare and offer popcorn for enjoyment during the viewing. Registration is required.

On January 28, 2025, Flo will be the speaker for the Nature Speaks Program to provide an in-depth presentation on her experiences making the film and site stories. The presentation will be via Zoom, and the presentation time is to be determined. Ed Madden will work to release a press release this coming weekend.

The last Fall Bird Walk was conducted on Saturday, September 21, 2024 from 7:30 – 9:30 a.m., and tons of birds were present for viewing. Spring 2025 Bird Walks have been scheduled for May 10 and May 24, 2025.

Projects – Update/Status

ComEd Seeded Prairie

Dana reported that the ComEd Seeded Prairie is in the throes of early fall. Things are starting to sanest. It is looking pretty rough, and the Tall Canada Goldenrod remains problematic. Concerted efforts to clip it have been made on the west prairie with students from East Leyden High School and MacArthur Middle School students.

Biodiversity remains high; you must really look for it to see it. The Prairie is not scheduled to be burned this year, which is a setback. A discussion about what to do there should be conducted soon in lieu of not burning.

A huge shout out to Mark Roscoe and the Public Works Department for the clean-up they performed after our September 29 East Leyden High School event. Thank you!

Heron Pond

A current report on Heron Pond was not provided.

Hillcrest Lake: Pollinator Park and Shoreline Restoration Project

A current report on Hillcrest Lake, Pollinator Park, and the Shoreline Restoration Project was not provided.

Nature Preserve (Gary Morava)

Peter Hahn visited the Nature Preserve on October 9, 2024 and saw that most plants were in seed; some were very interesting. Very dry conditions exist due to our growing drought conditions. Some newer bushes and trees are showing signs from the dry conditions. Peter thought two Tulip Trees were recently planted. Peter recommends planting more native trees, especially oak trees.

The small oak trees planted years ago need attention as too much undergrowth is slowing their development.

The water in the creek is very low and barely moving.

The steppingstone area needs repair. Many rocks, stones, and debris litter the creek. The branch pile has been eliminated or chipped and hauled away. A large pile of wood grindings is of no use.

Peter stated the interpretative signs we installed need to be cleaned; the wording is almost impossible to read. Update: Seth Marcus cleaned all the interpretative signs and removed cinder blocks from the creek.

Peter said it was pleasant to walk through the Nature Preserve; however, some areas need attention. A lot of Pokeweed is present in some areas and overhanging the walking path. The paths are clean and very easy to maneuver through the Nature Preserve.

Seth Marcus cleaned all of the interpretative signs at the Gary Morava Nature Preserve and removed cinder blocks from the creek. Plans are to go after the cattails.

Remnant Prairie (Wheeling)

A Monitoring Report for September was not provided.

Remnant Sedge Meadow

Jill Moskal stated that there was nothing new to report from the Remnant Sedge Meadow as the growing season winds down. Seed collection was not conducted at the Remnant Sedge Meadow this year.

Saint Alphonsus

Ed Madden reported that the St. Alphonsus church prairie had gone to seed with some remaining blooming flowers. Ed recommended in September for a seed collection to be conducted.

Slough, The

Agnes Wojnarski reported a large influx of Phragmites is located all around the Slough. Agnes stated we must be very vigilant and get every single one before it turns into a huge problem. Agnes has herbicided 90% of the Phragmites invasion.

Agnes reported that the Cattails are coming back slightly after the Drone application last fall. This was to be expected. Since it has been so dry, Agnes has been able to walk out almost to the water's edge and attack the Cattails. Agnes will attempt to do more of this work this week and next week, even though it is late in the season.

Agnes said parts of the Slough look great, while other areas are degraded. Agnes said a Tall Canada Goldenrod problem exists, which must be addressed.

Tully Park

Jill provided the Monitoring Report for Tully Park from Wendy Dewar.

Prospect Heights Park District Meeting: Christina Ferraro, Executive Director of the PHPD, sent an e:mail message to residents on October 7, 2024 and entitled "Announcing Community Meeting about design of 214 S. Wheeling Rd." The meeting will be held at the Gary Morava Center and remotely on Tuesday evening, October 15, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. providing an opportunity for residents to learn about and share their feedback on the plan for the 214 South Wheeling Road property which is adjoining Tully Park.

T Tully Park: Most plants have gone to seed. Asters are both blooming and gone to seed; therefore, Wendy is hopeful some seed gathering may be conducted this week. Also, an effort will be made to remove the seed heads from the invasive Tall Canada Goldenrod.

Wendy noticed significant buckthorn resprouts that could be tackled this winter at one or two scheduled workdays.

Wendy said she may be receiving a grant of seeds from KO Pollinators. However, she will not know for certain until the seeds are received.

Seed/Greenhouse Program

Agnes reported that seeds are senescing. Planting has ceased for the season. We are experiencing a huge drought.

Seed Collection Wednesdays will continue until the end of October.

Education Update

Wheeling High School

Three Environmental Science classes of Wheeling High School were present on September 11, 2024 between 8:00 and 9:40 am; 10:00 and 11:40am; and 1:40 to 3:00 p.m. Work accomplished was clipping the Tall Canada Golden Rod heads!

MacArthur Middle School

Agnes reported that Stephanie Ritter, the Science Teacher at MacArthur Middle School, was present with her 6th Grade class of 160 students on September 9, 2024. Two groups of 80 students worked two hours each. Students collected seeds from the prairie, conducted Tall Golden Rod control, and processed seeds. During down times, Agnes provided educational instruction.

Eight volunteers and several teachers were present to assist. However, going forward, with this student group size, more assistance is required, and perhaps conducting over two days. Schedules at school were rearranged to make the September 11 workday happen.

Nellie, the daughter of our volunteer, Maja, remarked to Agnes that she remembers this event when she was a 6th Grade student. Nellie is currently a high school senior. Agnes remarked that every single student in Prospect Heights gets to experience this event at least once. In turn, Agnes recognizes 4th Graders, Nature Camp attendees, and Boy and Girl Scouts in the 6th Grade class body.

Seth observed that students were at first hesitant to filter among the native plants to collect seeds because of flying and buzzing insects. However, once they saw their fellow students participating, they lost their fear of nature and flying insects. Our volunteer, Spencer Watson, suggested we forewarn the students that there are no man-eating animals present.

Pop-Up Art Sale – September 21, 2024

The third annual Pop-Up Art Sale was conducted on Saturday, September 21, 2024 at the Izaak Walton Park Pavilion. The show featured paintings, sculptures, drawings, crafts, jewelry, Tarot reading, soaps, aroma therapy, music and more. The nature trails and the Boardwalks were open for exploration.

Artist Mara Lovisetto hosted the Make-Your-Own Nature inspired table for the third year in a row, a crowd favorite. The day also featured demonstrations and conversations with Plein air painter, Michael Latala.

The Pop-Up Art Sale is organized by the Sunflower Group and is a joint project with the Prospect Heights Park District and the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission. Our sincere appreciation to Kate Tully, Mara Lovisetto and Andy Fagiolo for their commitment and creativity.

Status: Drone Herbicide of the Cattails at the Slough – Second Application

Dana reported that the quote received from The Davey Tree Company for a second Drone Herbicide Application of the Cattails at the Slough doubled from last year or \$4,000. We cannot afford this price.

Due to the drought, the Slough is dry, so Agnes has been able to walk to the water's edge, and in the process, cut the cattail resprouts and then brush cut the cattail stands. It is a lot of work, but it can be done.

CONTINUOUS REPORTING

ComEd/Green Regions Grant Application

Dana is proud to announce that the PHNRC has been awarded our fifth ComEd/Green Regions Grant! The Grant monies will be utilized to create the Public Service Pollinator Park.

The Grant is a matching grant with the PHNRC contributing \$7,000, in part, through donations from volunteers, commissioners, and a generous donation of \$4,000 from Julie and Dr. Chris Wood. The City of Prospect Heights provided an additional \$3,000, making the grant total of \$10,000, which was matched by ComEd. The project total is \$20,000 with work on the project intending to start this fall.

Dana said that Mark Roscoe of Public Works approached the engineering firm to obtain engineering on the concrete slab, which will be built for the pavilion. Plans are expected to be received on October 18, 2024. Measurements needed to be reviewed, so caused a bit of a delay. Dana will meet with Mark Roscoe on October 21, 2024. The first objective is to install the concrete slab before winter.

NRC 2024-2025 Budget

In John's absence, Dana provided Commissioners with a copy of the current City of Prospect Heights 2024-2025 NRC Budget.

The second page reflects the funding of \$10,000 from the ComEd Green Regions Grant that we just received. No expenses to date. The Shoreline Restoration Project's current Net Revenue is \$17.80. On page 1, Supply Expenses to date are \$2,749.62. Current Gross Revenue is \$6,376.38.

Also, Dana reported that the PHNRC received gift donations after the marriage of Dana and Agnes on September 27, 2024. Dana requested Agnes to read part of the description in a card on why the donation was made: “May it continue to blossom alongside the beauty we are surrounded by each and every day because of your heartfelt efforts to restore this little piece of heaven. Natalie, Eric, Charlie and Emma.” The check from Eric and his family of \$500 will be deposited into our account. Eric is Dana and Agnes’ neighbor across the street from 9 Marion.

Agnes said more supplies are needed, such as clippers, loppers, gloves, blue dye herbicide, etc. due, in part, to the increased volunteer presence at workdays and more work accomplished.

Signage for Pollinator Park is listed under “New Initiatives” on the agenda. However, Dana addressed this objective now.

Dana reported that people are fishing where we just completed the restoration on Hillcrest Lake, and they are sitting on the plants and squashing the newly-planted area. Therefore, Dana would like to post a sign stating “Fishing Prohibited. Restoration in Progress.” Also, a few signs indicating “Designated Fishing Area.” Dana will discuss with Mark Roscoe of Public Works.

City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation

Jill reported on the following:

City Council Meeting of September 23, 2024: The Resolution authorizing funding for a ComEd Green Regions Program Grant for the Public Service Pollinator Park located between the Police and Fire Departments was approved. Monies of \$4,000 in matching funding for the ComEd Green Regions Grant will be provided. Mark Roscoe expressed his appreciation to Joe Wade, City Administrator, for his assistance in seeing this project proposal through, funding options, and keeping everyone on the same page.

Prospect Heights Park District Board Meeting of September 24, 2024: Christine Ferraro, Executive Director, met with neighbors of Tully Park to discuss the future of the new parcel at 214 South Wheeling Road. Residents expressed concerns on the proposed placement of either a cement or gravel parking lot and its impact on stormwater. Therefore, the project has been paused. Additionally, a public meeting is scheduled for October 15, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. at the Gary Morava Recreation Center.

Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting of September 25, 2024: Dan Peterson, Director of Building and Development, provided a presentation and recommendation of proposed revisions to city regulations for keeping chickens and other fowl, after noise complaints last fall resulted in months of public communication in finding a compromise. A discussion was held with all in attendance.

The ordinance revisions were approved 6 to 0 by the Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals and are scheduled to be reviewed by City Council in October 2024.

Friends of the PHNRC

Dana reported that a meeting was held last week with the lawyers, Joe Wade, and Peter Falcone. The application was filed with the IRS, so as soon as we receive IRS approval, we will form the Friends of the PHNRC. IRS approval could take one to three months or longer.

The PHNRC sincerely appreciates the city's assistance and support with this endeavor.

MacArthur Middle School and Tree Initiative Program

Pete Hahn provided an update on a Tree Initiative Program with MacArthur Middle School.

Pete said the date of October 24, 2024 has been scheduled as the planting date for 12 trees at MacArthur Middle School. This is a cooperative adventure between District 23, school staff, Openlands, TreeKeepers Chapter, and the PHNRC. The trees are donated by Openlands and will be planted by students, staff, parents, volunteers, and anyone else interested in the project. Those interested in participating should proceed to the Openlands website to register.

Three groups of students are expected at different times. Each group will plant four trees each. Work will involve a lot of digging. The trees are not small; they are 1.0 or 1.5 inches in diameter and contained in a five-gallon container. The trees will be planted around the school. Dana will get the water bags. The trees will be delivered between 8:00 and 9:00 am on October 24, 2024 and staging will begin.

Molly Roche from Openlands is coordinating the planting process. Oak Trees, Bald Cypress and a few other trees will be provided. The workday will occur rain or shine unless severe weather is predicted.

Openlands offers this program to schools. A teacher or principal would need to contact Openlands, and a Grant is involved. Peter participated in this program at Thomas Junior High School in Arlington Heights last year and thought this would be a nice program for Prospect Heights' schools. Agnes knows of two teachers who would be interested. Peter directed Agnes to provide the Openlands contact of Molly Roche.

NEW INITIATIVES

Morton Arboretum Visit

Staff and volunteers from the Morton Arboretum came out to the Slough for a visit on Friday, September 6, 2024. They spent the entire day reviewing the shoreline restoration at Hillcrest Lake because they are having issues with their ponds, creeks, etc. They were impressed with everything that is going on, especially with the use of coconut logs for shoreline restoration.

Other areas were visited, including the ComEd Seeded Prairie, issues at hand were discussed. They were impressed with a lot of things that we do.

Dana remarked that when you walk around the Slough people who know what you are doing, you do not have to offer a lot of explanation but simply share ideas. It is nice to share what is happening in Prospect Heights.

Trails/Paths and Optimal Width Conversation

This topic will be discussed at our meeting of November 14, 2024 when John Kamysz is present.

NEW BUSINESS

Seed Collection Wednesdays – August 21 – October 23, 2024

Agnes reported that Seed Collection Wednesdays have resulted in collecting a lot of seeds. Seed collection dates could extend past October 23, 2024 due to the unusually warm weather.

Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards Seed Collection Days

Agnes said Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards Seed Collection Days are normally conducted in mid-October but we have not yet arranged a date. It is late in the season, and the recent high winds blew the seeds from the Indian Grass directly from the stalks. If there is anything left to collect, we could look to October 20, 2024.

PHNRC Annual Seed Processing and Volunteer Appreciation Day

Dana and Agnes confirmed that the PHNRC Annual Seed Processing and Volunteer Appreciation Day will be conducted on Sunday, November 10, 2024 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 9 Marion. A potluck meal will be provided.

Dana requested Commissioners to send him their nominations for the Golden Lopper 2024 Award.

Announcements to the Public

Based on conversations with a friend, Debbie, calling her lawn a field, Seth poses a challenge: What would it be like if you started your lawn a meadow? Over time, maybe you might start thinking of what is in your front and back yards and thinking of it differently. The definition of a lawn and meadow is predominantly grass. However, if your lawn is consider a meadow, you would not to mow it as often, thereby attracting more pollinators, butterflies, caterpillars, etc. This may bring about change. Agnes thought it was an interesting concept. The semantics frame the thought.

Visitors' Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is November 14, 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 7:35 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary