

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
March 13, 2025

Present: Pete Hahn Jill Moskal
 John Kamysz Dana Sievertson
 Seth Marcus Agnes Wojnarski

Guests: Peter P. Falcone, Assistant City Administrator

OPENING ITEMS

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. Central Time by Agnes Wojnarski.

Roll Call

Roll Call proceeded. All Commissioners were present except Ed Madden. However, a quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of the Special Board Meeting of February 11, 2025

The minutes of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Special Board Meeting of February 11, 2025 were reviewed. No changes or additions were provided. Therefore, the meeting minutes of February 11, 2025 were approved.

MEETING AGENDA

Agnes proposed adding a topic to the meeting agenda on the meeting with the River Trails Park District.

OLD BUSINESS

Volunteer Workdays

Winter Projects

The scheduled volunteer workday of February 16, 2025

The scheduled volunteer workday of March 2, 2025 was cancelled due to very wet conditions creating soft ground which would lead to soil disturbance.

Volunteer workdays continue to show a high level of interest, enthusiasm, and attendance from our volunteers, new and ongoing.

East Leyden High School

Megan Michorczyk, coordinator of the East Leyden High School Service Club, and 47 students are anticipated to join our volunteer workday of March 16, 2025 at the Remnant Prairie to remove invasive woody species. ComEd has agreed to pick up the debris.

Megan Michorczyk and 40 students of the Service Club are expected on April 13, 2025 to transplant grasses at 9 East Marion, Prospect Heights.

River Trails Park District

Agnes met with the River Trails Park District regarding the property at Wolf Road and Euclid Avenue by the creek where they are working on invasive control and maintaining natural areas management. The River Trails Park District has a Natural Areas Manager who requested the Commission's input on their restoration project and recommendations on certain concerns. Agnes said the discussion centered on seeds, plants, establishing habitats and a salamander habitat, leaving dead snags, and restoration in general. Agnes said they had tall grass restoration three times. The Natural Areas Manager is concerned about budget and having the necessary resources to continue and complete their project.

They have a big machine capable of cutting invasives and Phragmites. They have a buckthorn problem. Perhaps we could help them with buckthorn removal, and they would lend their large machine to us to remove Phragmites at our sites. This work must be accomplished soon.

Agnes is excited about working with the River Trails Park District. The work they are accomplishing at their site is no different than anything we have done, and she does not feel it would be a conflict of interest. Dana said we have a history of helping out, like with the Cook County Forest Preserves and Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards. It's close and a beautiful place.

The date of April 13, 2025 is preferred; therefore, we may seek to reschedule the transplanting volunteer workday with the East Leyden High School Service Club. It was thought that perhaps the Service Club could assist us with the River Trails Park District project; however, Dana did not feel it was favorable to combine the two volunteer efforts.

Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is expected on Saturday, April 26, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. We are moving our regularly-scheduled volunteer workday of April 27 to April 26, 2025. The location will be the Remnant Sedge Meadow, and the work area will be the west side of the bike path to the fence to remove buckthorn, woody species, and cattails, and along the railroad tracks to remove buckthorn and woody species.

We are expecting between 60 and 100 people from the Sierra Club. Our regular volunteers will be present to provide leadership and instructions.

Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Events

Nature Speaks Program

The Manager of the Library's Adult Programs position has been filled by Lynette Kirkwood.

Lynette has been out with the flu all week; therefore, coordination of a spring Nature Speaks Program in April has been delayed. Additionally, Dana has not received feedback from the people he contacted to be speakers. Therefore, a presentation may not be scheduled until May.

Projects – Update/Status

Public Service Commons (Fifth ComEd Green Regions Grant)

Dana reported that the Fire Department passed a referendum and received funding to increase the size of their facility due to the expansion of their firefighter staff. Therefore, the context and scope of the Public Service Commons project has completely changed.

The Fire Department needs to expand their building to increase their number of firefighters. The present building cannot be expanded up because it was not designed to up. Therefore, the thought is to build east, which is the passageway in between our project and the fire department building. They would assume about one-third of the back portion of our project space where we have the low plantings. This also removes the possibility of the concrete pad, gazebo and open grassy area. We are left with two-fifths of the original project plan.

Originally, they were going to dredge this area for a detention area in response to the MWRD's request for compensatory water storage. Mark said this action is not required because the fire department has compensatory water storage in front of the Police Department.

Dana met with Mark Roscoe to review some areas where we could plant and talked about other areas. Dana shared specific drawings. It is a bit frustrating because everything we thought would be great to do, there is also potential that the Police Department will be expanding, too, at some point, perhaps seven to 10 years from now. The Police Department would expand to the east, so the plantings would be destroyed by construction.

The last one-third of the detention area where we were going to put everything will become parking spaces with a planting area in the middle. Mark and Dana came up with a strip that is about 2800 square feet, roughly 176 feet long by 16 feet wide and parallels Maple Avenue. Mark said the two trees in front of the Police Department station would be removed. The three flag poles would remain, and the area would be naturalized. The Police Department is getting a new sign in front of the station, which will happen quickly, and we could increase the footprint. The clock would remain. The Garden Club has been planting that area, but they do not have the volunteers to maintain it.

The two trees in the red zone where we were originally going to take them out will remain, and we could build an impervious pad for sitting and a picnic table in between. This provides us the opportunity to buy bigger, caliber trees, like Bur Oak and plant a Swamp White Oak in the basin, shrubs in front of the Police Department station, and we can spend more time with and money on the bioswales.

John felt it was a piecemeal design, and if the Police Department expands their building to the east, all plantings will be destroyed. True, but Agnes said the expansion may not be for several years, and it is a nice thing to have now.

John also inquired of the square around the new sign in front of the Police Department station and behind that would be the water detention basin. Dana said yes, and Mark does not want any plantings there because of the way that area must be mowed and the height. They must mow up and down. We could have another conversation. John felt the redesign was piecemeal and lacked aesthetic quality.

Dana spoke with ComEd, requesting an opportunity to reframe the project and still make a project out of the grant money. However, if ComEd is dissatisfied, the funding would be returned. Our good will and standing in their community is more important than this single project. We are trying to instill some integrity into the project.

Dana will reconfigure the budget and prepare a brand new proposal, which the city must approve before we submit to ComEd.

Further, Dana said there is urgency to complete the project within the two-year deadline. Delays are expected based on the anticipated construction. Dana will mention this fact to ComEd. There exists the possibility of extending the execution of the grant. They truly want to work with us on this project.

ComEd Seeded Prairie - Mowing

Dana reported that the ComEd Seeded Prairie will not be mowed this season. Therefore, we must get out there to at least mow down or scythe the Tall Goldenrod before it goes to seed.

Seed/Greenhouse Program Update

Agnes reported that almost all the seeds are out. Agnes literally has two bags left.

The Greenhouse is filled with seedlings, and they are growing. We have many special plants this year. Dana said we have a lot of new plants for the ComEd Project, specifically very short prairie species that were designed into the original proposal.

Education Update

MacArthur Middle School

Dana and Agnes stated nothing new to report with the MacArthur Middle School.

Wheeling High School

Agnes reported that Mrs. Mediha Abat, the Wheeling High School Environmental Science Class (STEM) sponsor and Science Teacher, will be bringing one group comprised of 30 students from the Wheeling High School Environmental Club on April 2, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. for a tour or introduction of the Slough. A second visit planned will involve transplanting. The tour provides an educational experience. The students return to school at 12:15 p.m.

District 214

Dana said the Director, Katherine Witt, contacted us to say we are doing a great job with the Micro Internship Program. The new short-term micro-interns are very happy with what they are doing and expressed how much they are learning.

Ms. Witt said they have received 700 applications through the Career Pathways Program for the summer Micro Internship Program. Ms. Witt is confident that people would be asking to join us. We originally indicated we would not be conducting a summer program because of previous experiences and the depth of the request. However, Agnes said she would consider it. Dana said if we proceed, it cannot interfere with the education process for the regular summer interns. The summer Micro Interns would start after the morning education session of the regular summer interns. The bulk of the time would be Wednesday.

Agnes felt we could not refuse young people who want to learn about nature. The current micro interns are fun, engaging, express enthusiasm with what they are learning. Agnes will need assistance from volunteers and whoever else is interested. Dana said the micro interns must do more work than education.

Maja, Seth, and a couple of volunteers have offered to help. Jill suggested that Agnes record the educational part of the program and play the recording while the micro interns are transplanting seedlings.

Spring Prescribed Burns

Photos of recent spring prescribed burns were displayed while Dana reported on our progress.

Dana said we have burned four days in a row. Maja, one of our volunteers, received her burn certificate, and she has been of tremendous help, being present every single day. John, Peter, Eric and Evie were present. The very first day of burning we had a large crew.

A prescribed burn was conducted at Tully Park; however, we must return to do a quick retouch after they cut down the woody stems. Other areas where a spring prescribed burn was conducted was Saint Alphonsus, the Eisinger, Kamysz, King and Marcus residences, Pollinator Park, and the PHNRC test sites. The Prospect Heights Slough was burned except the cattails and 30% on the other side in the basin. We must have a large crew and the right wind to keep the smoke from the burn away from Elmhurst Road traffic.

A spring prescribed burn will not be conducted at the Prospect Heights Public Library because the plantings are brand new. Work sites left to burn are Heron Pond, the Nature Preserve, and a major part of the Prospect Heights Slough.

Areas that were previously not burned due to very woody conditions underwent the process of brush cutting. This was a lot of effort but worthwhile because burning after the brush cutting process yielded a 100% burn rate.

Wild Things Conference

The Wild Things Conference, organized by the Friends of the Illinois Nature Preserves, was held on Saturday, March 1, 2025 at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, 5555 North River Road, Rosemont, IL 60018. The PHNRC presentation was conducted at 1:15pm in Room 43 of the Convention Center.

John said our presentation on how to engage your community was successful. During Covid, we became acquainted with the Sunflower Group, a local band of artists, and our collaboration with this Group culminated with the Fourth of July Parades and the success of our participation in these parades.

Four volunteers spoke during our presentation, which received a good reception. Afterwards, many questions were asked, and we felt the audience gained great ideas for their own groups.

John expressed sincere appreciation to Dana who spent hours putting the presentation slides together.

Dana felt the stars of the show were our volunteers who donned the 20-foot Caterpillar costume and 12-foot high ants costumes and paraded through the conference areas of the Convention Center. Everyone was taking photos and videos. The whole purpose of giant puppets and animals was to draw attention, and we did. Big shout out to John who did a yeoman's job. It was excellent!

CONTINUOUS REPORTING

NRC 2024-2025 Budget

John Kamysz received a report on the City of Prospect Heights 2024-2025 NRC Budget from Peter Falcone but was unable to distribute to members in time for the meeting due to personal reasons.

John said \$2,900 and change remain in the budget. These funds must be spent by May 1, 2025. Dana and Agnes said Greenhouse supplies, such as soil, pots, etc., are needed.

Proposed 2025-2026 Budget and Comprehensive Equipment List

Agnes and Dana submitted the PHNRC operational budget request and letter for the fiscal year of 2025-2026 to the City of Prospect Heights on January 29, 2025. Our budget request was presented at the City Council Meeting of 10, 2025 and received no opposition.

City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation

Jill reported on the following:

City Council Regular Meeting of February 10, 2025:

An interesting and informative exchange between Mayor Ludvigsen and a Prospect Heights resident on how our tax dollars are spent was held the last 20 minutes of the meeting. I encourage all residents to either regularly attend or watch the recordings of the City Council Meetings to be educated on how our tax dollars are spent and how our city government operates.

City Council Regular Meeting of February 24, 2025:

The PHNRC request for prescribed burns in the spring and fall of 2025 was approved.

Prospect Heights Park District Board Meeting of February 26, 2025:

Christina Ferraro, Executive Director, confirmed the proposed design of the expansion of Tully Park at a cost of \$38,000. The revised proposed plan for the district's newly acquired parcel at 214 South Wheeling Road involves construction of a horseshoe driveway with geogrid, trees planted between the home located north of the parcel and Tully Park, and installation of a fence. Construction will proceed as soon as weather permits. The driveway will be large enough for one car to park and another car to get by.

Planning & Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting of February 26, 2025 was cancelled. The next scheduled meeting is March 19 at 7:00 p.m. (The meetings are typically conducted on the fourth Wednesday of every month in 2025.)

Friends of the PHNRC

Jill reported that the Friends of the PHNRC held a meeting on Monday, February 17, 2025.

Marsha Lehr, President, proposed the structure of the Friends of the PHNRC meetings and outlined items to be structured for the organization to proceed, such as development of a Business Matrix, Business Planning, establishment of a website, etc.

Members proposed establishing a Governance Committee to develop the Friends of the PHNRC framework and a Financial Committee to manage and track finances.

A banking relationship and checking account at Village Bank & Trust in Prospect Heights was established through an appointment by Marsha and Jill. Next, Marsha and Jill propose to meet with the CPA referred to by Seth to receive professional guidance on accounting organization.

Results from the brainstorming session by John Kamysz, Marsha Lehr, Jerome McDonald, and Maja Wojdalski on the organization's Mission Statement were provided and discussed.

Members determined a meeting cadence to be the third Tuesday of every month of the year at 7:00 p.m.

The next meeting of the Friends of the PHRNC is Tuesday, March 18 at 7:00 p.m.

Dana added that he received the last document or form to be completed and signed by Marsha and Jill and sent to the Attorney General of Illinois. Completion of this form means the Friends of the PHRNC may proceed to start collecting funds.

Summer Interns 2025

Two summer interns have been hired. We are two months ahead because both interns filed an application before we posted the position. Isabelle Sparreo was upset that she missed the deadline last year, so she wanted to be sure to have her application in on time this year. Isabelle attended the Wild Thing Conference to meet other people and associate with the Commission.

Isabelle Sparreo and Sawyer Schnell will be the two summer interns of 2025. We are looking forward to working with them.

NEW INITIATIVES

Tree Initiatives Program Update

Dana and Agnes attended an all-day seminar on tree initiatives at the Morton Arboretum and specifically to learn how to start a tree ordinance in Prospect Heights. It is very complicated. It requires a tree inventory, which the Park District maintains, and we believe the city has accomplished a little bit of this. However, one thing that was very clear: To have a tree ordinance program, you must have a Certified Arborist on staff to manage and administer the program. Also, it depends on how you wish to conduct a tree ordinance program. For example, the goal of the town of Glenview is to re-canopy the town. They have a replacement value for any tree that you remove, and it is on a schedule. If you remove a tree that is 10 inches in diameter, you must replace it with two trees. Also, residents pay into an escrow account until the trees are planted. The escrow account has a value, so it could be \$1,000 per tree. What we learned from Wilmette and Glenview is that most people will simply pay the money into the escrow account and then not plant the trees.

Another issue: Can a town have a tree ordinance if you are not a Home Rule community. An answer is unavailable. Robin from Glenview, the presenter at the Morton Arboretum, and the Wilmette could not provide the answer.

Agnes said it is complicated legally to have these fees, schedules, etc., and to have homeowners participate.

Dana said the advice is not to reinvent the wheel but use what is existing. It is the implementation of a tree ordinance program and how you go about it that is complex.

Dana met with Mayor Ludvigsen and spoke about a tree ordinance at length. Dana and Mayor Ludvigsen will arrange a meeting with the City Attorney and implement a few ordinances to protect older oak trees and prevent what happened to the 350-year-old oak tree.

John said it seems like you need resident involvement and agreement to make it work. Dana was unsure. Glenview simply presented the tree ordinance program. The permit is \$75 plus the replacement value cost, and the replacement tree must be non-invasive and non-ornamental species.

Agnes attended a presentation on Bioswales at the Wild Things Conference. They have reimbursement and bioswale programs and a storm water management plan. They install bioswales on people's property and maintain it for you for one year and then the homeowner maintains it thereafter.

John inquired what is a bioswale. Agnes said it is basically an area that holds water, such as the retention ditches in front of everyone's property. If this area is planted with native plants, the plants soak up the water and are great for storm water retention and a great idea overall.

They have established a program in Downers Grove, which is prone to flooding, and have seen great successes. For example, 30% of the water on properties that have a bioswale is absorbed by the native plants.

Agnes said the program involves fees, so everyone is levied a stormwater tax depending on the size of your house, the quantity of impervious surfaces, etc. If a homeowner has a rain garden or bioswale, either the taxes are reduced or they do not get taxed. If your home is the size of a mansion, you may pay \$20 per month extra for the stormwater program. However, if you have a bioswale or impervious surfaces, you may pay \$10 per month. However, you cannot proceed if your town does not have Home Rule.

Seth was unsure and said residents are charged fees for stickers, fees for dogs, etc. There's something about fees versus taxes.

Dana will present these questions and concerns and Mayor Ludvigsen and him meet with the City Attorney.

Local Cub Scouts

A local Cub Scout unit of 15 Cub Scouts seeking service hours were expected at our workday of March 2, 2025. However, the workday was cancelled; therefore, this activity must be rescheduled.

Sierra Club Presentation

Dana and Agnes will be providing a presentation on invasives to the Sierra Club on April 10, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. at the Schaumburg Spring Valley Nature Center.

Arlington Heights Garden Club

Dana and Agnes will be providing a presentation to the Arlington Heights Garden Club on April 28, 2025. Dana welcomed any other Commissioners who would like to attend and assist.

The presentation will be on our organization, how we started out and what we did. They are looking to replicate the NRC in Arlington Heights. We look forward to providing our presentation and the opportunity to strengthen our relationship with the Arlington Heights Garden Club.

NEW BUSINESS

Earth Day – April 22, 2025

Jill reported that Earth Day is April 22, 2025. Our regularly scheduled volunteer workday on Sunday, April 27, 2025 has been rescheduled to Saturday, April 26, 2025 to conduct the Sierra Club special event. No further discussion as held on planning Earth Week activities and events.

City of Prospect Heights Community Days

Prospect Heights Community Days are typically held the first Saturday in June. However, in theory, construction is starting on the Fire Department, which may impact whether this event is held or held in a different location.

City of Prospect Heights Independence Day

The City of Prospect Heights Independence Day Parade will be held on Saturday, July 5, 2025.

Announcements to the Public

Dana said tremendous native plant, tree and shrub sale on Saturday, May 3 and Sunday, May 4 from our friends at the Citizens for Conservation in Barrington at the Hillendale Estate. They will be selling quality plants, ferns, wildflowers, trees and offer advice. You can place a pre-order online between March 9 and April 12, 2025. Pick-up of preorders is on May 2 and 3, 2025. Their website is citizensforconservation.org.

John said it is baseball and softball season again. The creek and lake are filling with balls galore. The balls are getting hit out of the park and into the creek. No effort is made to retrieve the foul balls. John said literally dozens and dozens of balls are polluting the creek and lake.

Pete Hahn reported that a Native Tree Planting event will be held at the Wings Program, Inc., Administrative Building, 5104 Tollview Drive, Rolling Meadows on April 2, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Wings is an organization that provides support to people experiencing domestic violence through housing, integrated services, education, and advocacy to end domestic violence.

Thirteen native trees will be planted through Open Lands and Treekeepers. All tools and trees are supplied by Openlands. Volunteers are being sought to assist with this Native Tree Planting event. Please proceed to their website and look for Rolling Meadows Tree Planting: <https://cerv.is/0254x2408>

Visitors' Comments

No visitors were present at the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

A Special Board Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission will be held on Tuesday, April 8, 2025 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 7:53 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary