

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 8, 2016

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

Attendees: Christina Ferraro, Executive Director, Prospect Heights Park District
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 were in attendance for Roll Call. A quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of August 11, 2016

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of August 11, 2016 were approved. No corrections were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

Results of the Park District Block Party

The Prospect Heights Park District Block Party held on August 13, 2016 was outstanding! Christina Ferraro did a spectacular job! The Block Party was beneficial because it provided exposure for us and an opportunity to showcase our mission and public outreach and provide education.

All Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commissioners were present and participated. Many thanks to John for the materials and for decorating our booth.

The response from the public for the PHNRC was overwhelming! PHNRC Journal subscriptions increased from 156 readers to 207 that night. Many subscribers first learned of the PHNRC at the Block Party. At the PHNRC workday of August 14, three new volunteers participated based on their conversations held the night before and have continued to attend scheduled PHNRC workdays. More volunteers are anticipated from learning of us at the Block Party.

We were unprepared for the positive turn out; sometimes there was a long line that evening. We also quickly ran out of plants. We gave away 70 trays or 500 prairie plants to residents and neighbors at the Block Party.

We would like to expand our role and our booth side for the 2017 Prospect Heights Block Party and ensure we are well staffed. We should also see if we can get volunteers to help us manage our booth and be available to interact with the public.

Workday Schedules - Update

August 18, 2016 (Sunday): Scheduled workday at the Slough and will conduct seed collection and planting plugs. We need to work on the path. We also need to begin work on the foot bridge because it is unstable. We have a simple plan to shore it up and fix it up to make it safer to use.

The bridge is located on Park District property and is part of the walking path area. The area is shallow, and the bridge will help feet from getting wet. Our current budget cannot support the purchase of lumber, so Dana proposed to purchase it with his personal funds.

Wednesday Evenings: Seed collecting on Wednesday evenings has been outstanding! We will continue to collect seed on Wednesday evenings as long as weather permits. Where we will collect seed is based on wherever seed is ready to be collected. A notice is e:mailed to PHNRC volunteers the Tuesday morning beforehand.

September and October: Workdays for the remainder of September and all of October will be at the Morava Nature Preserve and prairie.

Prospect Heights Public Library Programs

September 27, 2016: Kurt Dreisilker, MS, Head of Natural Resources at the Morton Arboretum, will be a guest speaker at the Prospect Height Public Library on September 27, 2016 and will provide a presentation on invasive species and how they can be controlled. Registration is currently low; therefore, please contact your friends, family and neighbors and encourage them to attend. Kurt is a wonderful speaker, very engaging and a smart guy. An e:mail blast will be sent on either the Saturday or Sunday, September 24 or 25, before the talk date and the day before the actual talk date.

Ed Madden will send a press release before September 27, 2016.

January or February 2017: Dana has contacted Abigail Derby-Lewis, Senior Conservation Ecologist at The Field Museum and asked if she could provide a presentation on Climate Change during the winter season. Dana offered three dates in January 2017 and one date in February 2017 for Abigail to choose from. Dana stated she is an outstanding speaker!

If we are unable to secure Ms. Derby-Lewis, Dana has two other speakers to contact.

April 19, 2017: A presentation on monarch butterflies by Doug Taron, Chief Curator of the Chicago Academy of Sciences and Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum is planned for April 19, 2017. This date coincides with Earth Week.

Prospect Heights Park District Programs

The Prospect Heights Park District (PHPD) is offering four new classes:

Bird Walks are scheduled for September 17 and October 1, 2016 from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m., hosted by Mary Lou Mellon, President, and Lee Ramsey of the Bird Conservation Network. The bird walks are very popular and well-attended. The Bird Walks are also free of charge.

Mary Lou and Lee are very knowledgeable, kind and giving of their time and energy.

The Slough has witnessed a huge increase in the number and types of birds, such as cedar wax ring, egrets and herons. The changes we have made in their habitat are changing the inhabitants.

Bird monitoring is conducted by the Bird Conservation Network during the bird walks, so it will be interesting to see their results. Bird monitoring is conducted twice a year in the spring and fall. Agnes said it will be interesting to see the difference in the bird tally from last Fall to now.

Dana said we will start promoting the Bird Walks through e:mails and the PHNRC Journal. Dana also requested Ed Madden to produce a press release. Ed wondered if a change in title to "Birds Gone Crazy!" would be acceptable.

Marci Glinski, Supervisor of Recreation, missed the inclusion date for placing the Bird Walks in the regular calendar or flyer that the PHPD provides. Therefore, Marci will promote the Bird Walks program internally through distribution of flyers, placing posters inside Gary Morava, and we will promote it on our own. Registration is required to attend.

Chris Mest, Founder of Tree Guardians and a Certified Arborist, has proposed to teach two classes on Trees. Dana distributed two prospectus sheets to members. Details are as follows:

A class for children about trees and their importance. The interactive class is designed for 5 to 9 year olds, but people of all ages will find it informative. The class date is Saturday, October 8 at Gary Morava, and the timing will be either 8:30-9:30 a.m. or any hour after 1:30 p.m. up to 5:00 p.m. Chris will advise.

A class for adults on basic tree care entitled "The Things Most People Do Wrong (including Professionals)." The class date is October 13 from 7:30-8:30 p.m. in Meeting Room 1 at Gary Morava. Jill noted that the next PHNRC Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 13 at 7:00 p.m.

A few of the classes arranged for this year experienced zero registrants or people registering but not showing. The Bird Walks have been successful, but other classes, like "Critters in the Creek" not so successful. Therefore, how do we proceed? Do we continue to have the classes, tone it down or do something different? The classes are for kids and are family-based. We get the word out through our website, but maybe that doesn't cover a wide audience.

Ed Madden suggested reaching out to the Science Teachers at area schools and have a flyer prepared for reference. We are offering valuable programs, and the schools have a captive audience. Perhaps the school could plan a field trip. However, we realize the programs we offer would have to be in alignment with the school's curriculum.

We could look to advertise the programs in the City of Prospect Heights Newsletter. There is no charge to attend the programs. John said that we gained exposure at the Block Party, and we have a number of residents who have signed up for the PHNRC Journal. Therefore, we are probably reaching more people.

For Spring 2017, we recommend two Bird Walks. Dana said that the chief may be up to doing a celebrity bird walk. He will nail him down.

Any ideas or suggestions for classes are welcomed and should be submitted via e:mail.

ComEd Visit by Sara Race

Sara Race, Senior Environmental Compliance Specialist for ComEd, toured our Restoration Projects - the ComEd Restoration Project on Sherwood Avenue, the Slough, the Morava Nature Center (new grant from ComEd), and the Remnant Prairie with Agnes and Dana on August 18, 2016. Agnes and Dana spent almost two hours with Sara, an unexpected pleasure.

Sara was impressed with our work; however, to quote Dana: "Sara was blown away!" Nobody is doing what we are doing, and what we have achieved is remarkable. Sara comment when she visited the Remnant Prairie: "This site is better than the sites that I manage."

We requested to burn the seeded prairie on the east side of the ComEd Restoration Project this Fall; however, Sara said they could not do it until the Spring 2017. We need to speak with the City Council about our burn request. We will work with the City and keep residents informed.

The cost to burn two (2) acres is between \$8,000 and \$12,000. ComEd has a fund set aside for this expense.

The controlled burn would be conducted in two timeframes - 2.5 acres in the Spring 2017 and 2.5 acres in the Fall 2017. A burn is performed every 3 to 5 years. ComEd chooses the burn date based on site importance.

The controlled burn is managed by ComEd's consultant group because of the risk of arcing from the electrical towers (power lines). We volunteered our burn crew to assist, but ComEd said we could only watch.

Sara stated that if we need anything - boots on the ground, signage from stock or produced, interactive signage - just let her know. We are very appreciative of her unbelievable outreach and support.

John asked if ComEd has any speakers or if Sara does presentations. Agnes said that Sara is a speaker, and Dana said she provides stellar presentations.

Sara was surprised that we have been so successful in a highly residential area. Sara may not be aware of some obstacles we had to overcome. Sara said she would like to use us as an example.

ComEd has experienced a hard time getting positive publicity for the things they do. Sara said she would like to see more of ComEd's sites in residential areas transformed, but they do not necessarily have the resources plus they have resident's concerns to consider, too. Agnes and Dana offered our expertise, time and help to benefit other ComEd sites to become restored prairie.

Watering Project

PHNRC purchased a 125 gallon water tank that fits perfectly in the back of Agnes' car. Bill Peterson donated a solar powered turbo device with a 50 foot flexible hose. We have two batteries, and each battery is charged for four hours of use. The tank runs 40 minutes to disperse 110 gallons of water.

The device pumps the water from the tank through the hose. All you need is sun and a tank full of water. The new pump is very powerful and makes watering the opposite bank of plantings at the Morava Nature Center a breeze!

We would be utilizing this equipment just during dry periods and for watering remote locations.

This beats carting five, 5 gallon jugs and watering cans to hydrate our plantings! We just drive right up to a site and start watering.

NEW BUSINESS

Slough – Fall Burn Plan

Members received a copy of the PHNRC Fall 2016 Burn Plan for the Slough. It was color-coded for the Burn Break, Burn Area and Burn Path X Start. All three locations will be strip burned against a Northwest wind. PHNRC will use a five-member burn crew. The plan may change based on wind direction and weather conditions on the day of the burn.

We need to approach the City for permission to conduct a managed burn along the sides of the Slough. Part of the area is on Park District property.

We need to prepare for a presentation to the City Council. What do we need? We would follow the same procedures for a controlled burn. We submit a letter with a map outlining the areas to be burned. We prepare a packet to hand to Peter Falcone before the first meeting of the City Council in November (the second Monday in November) or the fourth Monday in October. However, Peter said that the Park District may be more restrictive. Therefore, we will submit a packet of our plans with complete details by Tuesday, September 13, 2016, the date of the next Park District meeting.

Our request involves only a resolution and does not need a second reading. The City Council would have to pass one resolution and a second resolution for the Park District property.

We would involve the Fire District, and alert neighbors of our plans with a window of when the burn would occur. A reverse 911 system would be utilized. We formulate a message, which is sent to the houses we want to target in the area. We can send the message the day of the burn. We can also do mailers.

Timing: November 2016, before the first snow. However, the exact date depends on the climatic conditions. We need a northwest wind and do strip burning very slowly. We avoid the cat tail area because cat tails burn very quickly and intensely. We will have more specifics as we near the date. Local wildlife will either be already hibernating or gone south before winter.

Chicago Wilderness offers two, free sessions of the Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training, which is based on the National Wildfire Coordinating Group S-130 and S-190 courses. The sessions are held at the Morton Arboretum on October 6 and 7 from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm and October 8 and 9 from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Our EPA Permit is valid until January 2017.

Budget Purchases and Requests

We are currently overdrawn, so our request to purchase seeds, loppers, trays and sprayers is moot.

When we last discussed our budget, we were under the impression we had \$1,000 left. However, we are currently overdrawn by \$44.23.

The cost of our first three purchases – backpack sprayers and trays – was placed in a wrong account, so we thought we had \$1,300 in our budget and continued to make purchases – the water tank and auger. By the time the accounting error was rectified, our budget reflects that we are overdrawn by \$44.23.

We should remember that we have the Grant money for the Morava Nature Center, so any tools we purchase for that project can be utilized by PHNRC for other restoration projects.

Dana inquired about our budget for next year and if there is a protocol in making a request for our budget for the next fiscal year. Our fiscal year begins May 1, so if we feel we require more than \$4,000 for the new budget cycle, we should send in a proposal after the first of the New Year. There is no guarantee we will receive approval or if we will receive a budget of \$4,000. It depends on the financial stability of the City at the time. However, we should be thinking of our financial needs for next year now.

Does the cost for hiring a PHNRC intern fall into the regular City budget or special funding request? No, it is part of our budget. Our current budget is \$4,000, and cost for an intern is \$4,500.

Agnes asked if we could request an intern for 2017 with the PHPD. Christina suggested placing our request in a letter and meeting in November to discuss. We have received a commitment to renew the internship for next year from our volunteer, who has agreed to donate their time for next year. Ideally, we'd like to have three. There is a pool of people in Environmental Studies at college, so there is no shortage of available applicants.

We have located a used John Deere Gator Utility Vehicle for sale for \$3,200. It has been in storage for 13 years, is completely rebuilt and offers an elongated bed with a dump function. We would have to make a formal request at the next City Council Meeting for the City to provide the funds for this purchase.

Our purchased equipment has made a huge difference in the efficiency of our work and in accomplishing our restoration goals.

Nature Speaks – September 27, 2016

Kurt Dreisiker, Head of Natural Resources at the Morton Arboretum, will present “Invasive Plant Prevention at Morton Arboretum” on Tuesday, September 27, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. at the Prospect Heights Public Library. His presentation centers on how this public garden controls invasive woody species by using several unique resources.

Dana is hosting a Commissioner's Dinner at his home on Saturday evening, September 24 at 6:30 p.m. with Kurt Dreisiker present.

Progress Reports – Work Sites

Morava Nature Center: An extra workday on Saturday, August 3 was held. Nine volunteers were present, and it is estimated that 2,500 plugs were planted. Native plants have been planted on 100 feet of shoreline, and they have survived, grabbed on and will hold the shoreline.

We have to start working on executing the Grant with purchases of seeds, plugs and plans for an educational area. We have 18 months to work with.

We have a list of 10 or 12 species that we can purchase. Agnes provided a sheet of the Woodland Spring Flora of the Chicago Region. We can look to either Taylor Creek Nursery or Spences Nursery to purchase seed.

We need to plan for a quarterly presentation at a PHPD Meeting to keep them apprised of what we are thinking, our plans, such as what species of trees and plants will be planted and where, and a site plan or overview of what has to be cleared. We should set up a schedule with the PHPD on dates we will present.

What interactive things do we want to build? A bridge, interactive signage and an educational center.

The bridge will be brand new, be comprised of wood and steel, and built by us or a carpenter than can volunteer his/her time. The Water Reclamation District may have input. There is a permit process to follow along with guidelines by the Illinois Department of Resources or the Army Corps of Engineers.

We know of an Eagle Scout, Sam Sobczak, who did a lot of planting at the Slough. Sam is a great kid and wants to work at the Morava Nature Center for his Eagle Scout Project. Sam is particularly interested in the interactive signage and plants, where it would go and how it will look. We are awaiting his proposal.

Slough: We have cut the cat tails from the area around the Observation Deck and found burr reed. We picked patches and pockets. We need to herbicide and then seed. We want to progress gradually so as not to alarm neighbors. Part of our master plan is to create a vegetative buffer zone.

We planted 1,000 plugs on the shoreline, and the patch planting is completed. We now have a showy diverse area with wood ducks populating the Slough waters.

Dana was approached by two irate residents regarding people coming to the Slough and Hillcrest Lake and feeding bread to the ducks. We have been asked to erect a sign saying something like: "Please do not feed the ducks. People food is bad for their digestive system and alters their behavior."

Lynn's Prairie: We planted 1,000 plugs, as per the compromise reached with Lynn. We need to do additional herbiciding and brush cutting. We will then plant a beautiful wall of Indian Grass and showy flowers.

We have brush cut two acres of the prairie.

Tully Park: The Tully Park neighborhood group planted 4,000 native plants. Someone is always working on site. It's great the neighborhood came together and are working on this project.

Remnant Prairie and Sedge Meadow: We focused on teasel and thistle removal. The teasel growth is a real problem because the plant is aggressive and invasive. We've cut the plants two and three times and eradicated 50% of it over 1.5 years, which is incredible. However, removing teasel continues to be a major undertaking. We'll return in the Spring to perform more removal of teasel.

Seed Collection: We've started collecting seed and have secured about 20 pounds of seed. Fifteen volunteers are attending the Wednesday evening workday collecting seed. Last year, we had three volunteers on a Wednesday evening. Fifteen people can collect 10 pounds of seed.

On Wednesday, September 28, 2016, Agnes will be speaking at the Morton Arboretum at their Woodland Steward Program orientation. Agnes is a graduate of their program and will speak about the grassroots and the program of PHNRC, what we have accomplished, the projects we're managing, etc.

Dana plans to attend with Agnes. Members discussed the seed collection workday on Wednesday evening and decided to move it to Thursday, September 29, 2016.

Seed Processing: We have seed processing trays and seed drying racks donated from the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards. The seed drying racks are part of a 10-shelved unit. We have seven seed processing trays.

Equipment and space are needed for a two-day Seed Processing workday. We asked Christina if the PHPD has space for us to hold our Seed Processing workday or workdays. Christina suggested we take a walk with her to view their storage units and see if one is appropriate.

Peter suggested we look to the Park District or City to secure a small garage or workspace for our tools, equipment, seed trays, etc., instead of relying on Dana's and Agnes' garages. Agnes thought that the Public Works would have something for our use.

All of the seed trays and pots that were used last year are still in good order and just need to be cleaned and bleached. Jill volunteered to do so. We may need to purchase just a few seed trays for the coming season.

Visitors Comments:

Christina Ferraro gave praise and said: "You guys are terrific!" Thank you, Christina.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is scheduled for Thursday, October 13, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. However, due to the Tree Guardian's Adult Class scheduled that evening, we need to reschedule our October Meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the Commissioners, and the meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
Recording Secretary
Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission