

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
January 9, 2025

Present: Pete Hahn Jill Moskal
 John Kamysz Dana Sievertson
 Ed Madden 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 Seth Marcus. However, a quorum was present.

Revised Agenda

Dana reported a few items to add for discussion during our meeting this evening and will add them in where appropriate.

Meeting Minutes of the Board Meeting of November 14, 2024

The minutes of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Board Meeting of November 14, 2024 were reviewed. Only one typo was sited and corrected. Therefore, the meeting minutes of November 14, 2024 were approved, as amended.

OLD BUSINESS

Volunteer Workdays

A volunteer workday was conducted on Sunday, November 24, 2024 at the ComEd Seeded Prairie to cut and stack woody species, such as Callery Pear and Buckthorn.

A volunteer workday was conducted on Sunday, December 8, 2024 at Tully Park to accomplish essential winter work of clearing invasive buckthorn, cutting down a few hanging snags, creating new trails, and putting down wood chips. The December 8 work day held the first Kielbasa roast of the season.

A volunteer workday was conducted on Sunday, December 22, 2024 at the Slough at Hillside by Zeke's Trail. Work accomplished included cutting down a few hanging snags, clearing invasive buckthorn, and putting down seed. The December 22 workday was the last official work day of 2024 and the annual Holiday Party. A brush pile burn, Kielbasa, plenty of holiday treats, music, and distribution of volunteer gift bags were the highlights of the workday.

Dana commented that 26 volunteers were present during our first workday of 2025 on January 5, 2025. A beautiful new trend is occurring where we are seeing new volunteers, like Ann from Oak Park, and no matter the weather conditions.

Volunteer Hours for the past 5 years totaled as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Volunteer Work Hours</u>
2020	926
2021	2,667
2022	2,889
2023	3,374
2024	4,482

Ed Madden noted the numbers reflect a 33% increase from the previous year.

Our workday of January 19, 2025 is planned at the Slough to continue moving the riparian buffer toward the north and stripping brush to put down seed. Agnes said we must also get to the Gary Morava Nature Preserve for maintenance.

Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Events

Nature Speaks Program

The next scheduled Nature Speaks program is slated for February 13, 2025 from 7:00 – 9:00 pm Central Time and features “Live from Scotland: Flo Blackburn – Why Not Scotland? Lessons Learned on My Rewilding Journey.” Please register with the Prospect Heights Public Library to attend this event.

The spring Nature Speaks Program is slated for April 2025.

Jill alerted Commissioners that the PHNRC February meeting date is February 13 and in conflict with the Nature Speaks Program event. After a brief discussion and confirmation of availability of City Council Chambers, Commissioners changed the February meeting date to Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.

Projects – Update/Status

Public Service Pollinator Park

Dana said Mark Roscoe of Public Works requested bids, and they came \$9,000 over the original estimate. Therefore, Mark went back to the drawing board with the engineers and changed the proposal to lower the elevation of the pad to reduce the amount of backfill and reduce the thickness of the slab concrete with the expectation to reduce the cost. Also, Mark will send the bid out for public broadcast for a larger target audience of contractors. Mark expects that the bids will be calculated and received by mid-February with construction to start in Spring 2025.

Ed inquired if they expect any issues with a thinner pad for longevity? No, they were going with an exorbitant amount of fill to level off the area between the two, but there is no need to do that. It just puts a ramp down to the pad. They were trying to balance out the fill amount with the concrete thickness of the pad. Dana trusts the engineers to design it correctly.

Mark originally spoke with one contractor that they frequently work with and received an estimate of \$10,000. We added another \$1,000 for a project budget of \$11,000. It came back at \$18,000, which is \$2,000 short of the whole project. Therefore, by reinventing the slab and the sidewalks, Mark expects to have the project in compliance.

Dana said we have money in our budget to purchase trees at \$1,380. Dana has received quotes for one Burr Oak at \$395 and one Tulip Tree at \$125. Dana is expecting receipt of two other quotes. We will purchase the trees for spring delivery.

Dana reported that the herbicide has taken effect. Only the mow path is green.

Agnes has purchased several types of special, rarer seeds for this project, and they are already prepared for stratification over the winter. The seeds will mature to plugs that will be planted in the project area.

Seed/Greenhouse Program

Agnes reported that 80% of seeds and mixes are in 20 trays stratifying over the winter. Agnes has 20% seed to prepare for stratification that once matured, will be installed as plugs at the Slough and our other project sites.

Seed collection in 2024 was a little bit less than the previous year. Agnes suggested ramping up our seed collection days or maybe in the fall have more Seed Collection evening workdays. Dana mentioned that due to the warmer temperature, seeds were too ripe for collecting at the appropriate time and then were not available for collection.

Education Update

East Leyden High School

Megan Michorczyk, coordinator of the East Leyden High School Service Club, contacted Dana with a request to schedule two workdays for her 67 students with the PHNRC in March and April. Dana and Agnes felt conducting a workday at the Remnant Prairie to tackle brush control would be appropriate in late March where a brush pile would be unnecessary. ComEd would be enlisted to pick up the debris. A workday in April would involve transplanting grasses.

MacArthur Middle School

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

Wheeling High School

Agnes stated nothing new to report with Wheeling High School.

District 214

Agnes reported that a few students have chosen the micro internship in the spring. Further information forthcoming.

Prescribed Burns and Permit Renewal Update

Dana reported that we have received a new burn permit. The new system worked, and we have established contact with our Agency Contact, Floyd. We are in good shape and just need cooperation from Mother Nature.

Can a prescribed burn be conducted during the winter season? Yes, but dependent on the correct relative humidity, wind direction, etc.

CONTINUOUS REPORTING

NRC 2024-2025 Budget

Dana provided Commissioners with a copy of the current City of Prospect Heights 2024-2025 NRC Budget. Net Revenue is currently \$4,159.20, which must be spent by end of April 2025.

The Hillcrest Lake Shoreline Restoration Project, Year 3, has a Capital Budget of \$6,000 with \$17 remaining. The First Responder Park Funds is \$20,000 and reflects our purchase of seed for \$432.75.

Agnes noticed that the seed purchase of \$432.75 is reported in two areas of our budget: First Responder Park Expenses and Supply Expenses 01-310-5960. Peter Falcone will remove the reporting of this expense from Supply Expenses.

Dana reported that Kate Tully and Andrew (Andy) Fagiolo have contributed \$300 for a year-end contribution to the PHNRC. This donation may be applied to our 2025 budget or once the Friends of the PHNRC is established, the City can cut a check for \$300 and transfer it to the 501(c)3.

Funding from the Prospect Heights Park District of \$8,500, which is \$1,000 more than in 2024, was approved. The PHNRC is very appreciative of the Park District's support and consideration throughout the years.

The PHNRC must prepare the 2025-2026 budget proposal to present to the City Council for consideration in February 2025.

City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation

Jill reported on the following:

Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals: At the November 20, 2024 PZBA meeting, Dan Peterson reported that the attorney reviewed the draft chicken ordinance. Dan has been in contact with the community chicken keepers' group and the folks who wanted reasonable restrictions. The first reading of the chicken ordinance occurred at the November 25, 2025 City Council meeting.

The PZBA released their 2025 meeting schedule. The first meeting of 2025 has been rescheduled to January 29 from January 22, 2025. The March meeting has been rescheduled to March 19 from March 26, 2025.

City Council: Deputy Chief Milo Derman has been promoted to Chief of Police upon the retirement of William Caponigro in February 2025.

The first reading of the Chicken Ordinance occurred at the City Council Meeting of November 25, 2024. The second reading of the Chicken Ordinance was tabled from the City Council meeting of December 9, 2024 to a City Council meeting in January 2025. Reason: To obtain answers from Dan Peterson with interpretation of what has been brought to the City Council from the PZBA. The city's website and e:newspaper will announce the meeting date when the Chicken Ordinance will be discussed and voted upon by the City Council.

Prospect Heights Park District Board Meeting: Christina Ferraro has arranged a community meeting with Tully Park residents on Thursday, January 30, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. at the Gary Morava Recreation Center to present a revised plan with associated costs based on the feedback received in October 2024 regarding surface options and plantings for the remainder of the parcel at 214 South Wheeling Road, which is adjacent to Tully Park. A Zoom option will be available for the community meeting. The park district continues to investigate the cost, grants, and feasibility of alternative options for the gravel area, such as using a permeable mesh or webbing material instead of gravel.

Christina Ferraro, Executive Director, earned the Certified Park and Recreation Executive Certification in December 2024. This is the highest level a park and recreation professional can reach and demonstrates leadership in all aspects of managing a park and recreation department. Congratulations, Christina!

Friends of the PHNRC

Dana reported he received a call from the IRS on Wednesday, January 8, 2025. The woman assigned to our case was still looking for information despite the attorney having provided the information to her twice.

Dana clarified that we are start-up and will not have revenue until we are legally able to receive funds. She understood and requested an estimate: Will we be over or under \$50,000 for the first three years of operation. Dana estimated under \$50,000.

We can expect approval in either four days or within four weeks.

NEW INITIATIVES

Trails/Paths and Optimal Width Conversation

John Kamysz stated that path maintenance has been great. However, in some areas it has been too great creating trails or paths that are too wide, almost the width of a road. Therefore, John said it feels less like a path and creating an area for a vehicle to drive down it. The width of the trails or paths should simply be wide enough for a mower to progress once for a trim and not twice. The paths or trails should not feel like a road but the feel of strolling down a nature path.

Dana inquired if the width of a path is affected by the time of year or season. However, Agnes said that John measured the paths.

John recommended an optimal path or trail width of 48 inches or 4 feet wide. When the grass grows, we will then trim.

John said that the paths at Heron Pond, the Nature Preserve, and at the Slough are becoming wide. John is particularly concerned about the Heron Pond path, which is well maintained thanks to Chris Wood. However, erosion is occurring by the creek. John said we are cutting so much by the shoreline that we are defeating the purpose. Agnes said that turf grass does not have deep roots like native grasses, but the turf grasses are surviving being mowed and not the native grasses.

Dana will send an e:mail to volunteers who are maintaining the trails or paths at our sites that path or trail width standard is not more than 48 inches or 4 feet wide. The Boardwalk is 32 inches, but this is a separate feature.

Pete commented that at the Nature Preserve, plants hang over the path during the growing season allowing only one person to traverse through the path. John recommended simply cutting the overhanging plants.

NEW BUSINESS

Tree Initiative

Pete Hahn reported an opportunity to purchase more trees by a grant from Openlands and TreeKeepers. Does the PHNRC want more trees especially for the eastern portion of Prospect Heights? It has been identified as an area that needs more trees and is available for grants. The western portion of Prospect Heights is not eligible for some of these grants. The Commission could locate a school, park or area where we could plant more trees through grant funding.

Dana said we had talked with Public Works about planting trees in the east side; however, Public Works could not come up with a location as far as the city is concerned. However, Agnes said the area in question is the River Trails Park District. Additionally, there is city-owned property on the east side of Prospect Heights, rights-of-way for consideration, etc.

Pete inquired if Christina Ferraro is aware of any park in the eastern portion of Prospect Heights . Agnes noted that River Trails Park is in Prospect Heights, and the Prospect Heights Park District is outside the boundaries of Prospect Heights. Therefore, boundaries overlap, even though they are separate entities. However, they all work together.

Having a conversation with Mark Roscoe and Christina Ferraro, as well as Brad with the River Trails Park District would be beneficial.

Also, Pete mentioned that his sister, Mary Hahn, is available to assist in submitting grant paperwork. There is no deadline; however, Pete suggested quick action because it takes time to organize. Pete felt this was an excellent opportunity to plant more native trees in Prospect Heights, especially the eastern portion of our town.

Facebook

Dana wished to express sincere appreciation on behalf of the PHRNC to the volunteers who are managing our Facebook account, especially Judy Zolner. Our followers' count has escalated, postings of information, events, and photographs are numerous and frequent, and our response rate has increased. Through Judy and volunteer efforts, people are kept engaged and informed.

Ed inquired if Judy is also including Instagram because they are owned by the same entity, so they are interconnected. Therefore, if you post on one, you are posting on the other social media forum. If so, Ed felt that was extra effort. Dana did not think we had an Instagram account but will verify.

The Native Giveaway and Swap at the Prospect Heights Public Library is on January 12, this Sunday, from 1:00-3:00 pm. This is an initiative by the library:

Don't have any seeds to swap? We have plenty to get you started. Have a big bag of Marsh Blazing Star or any native that you do not have time to clean up and place into smaller bags? Donate to us. We'll do the work." The library will have stations on site prep, winter sowing, and Master Gardeners to help with plant selection. An area to pick up extra plastic pots or drop off extras you may have. It is a day on learning about why natives are important, how to garden with them, and getting free seeds. Have an established garden? Share some seeds and your knowledge.

Learning Opportunities

The Forest Preserve of Cook County is conducting Frog Call workshops in February for beginning and experienced frog monitors to teach and review the calls of 13 frogs and toad species. Help monitors find survey sites and learn monitor protocol. Attending one virtual monitor training workshop is all that is necessary to learn the protocol and frog calls. However, this year, an additional training session may be held to review the new database and field questions from monitors. Registration is required to attend the Zoom training. Allison Sacerdote-Velat will conduct the classes.

Link: https://frogsurvey.org/?page_id=23 E:mail contact: asacerdote-velat@naturemuseum.org

Training dates:	February 1, 2025 (Saturday)	9:00 am – 12:00 pm
	February 6, 2025 (Tuesday)	6:00 – 9:00 pm
	February 8, 2025 (Saturday)	1:00 – 4:00 pm
	February 10 (Monday)	6:00 – 9:00 pm

Janet McDonald from the Arlington Heights Memorial Library contacted Dana to advise the library is offering a Virtual Homegrown National Park class by Professor and Author Doug Tallamy on Monday, January 27, 2025 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Learn to create diverse ecosystems in your yard and communities, farms and surrounding lands by reducing lawn, planting native, and removing invasives. Learn the importance of native plants, how to choose them, and how to introduce biodiversity in your home and your community. Registration is required.

Proceed to <https://www.ahml.info>, choose Programs from the menu bar, then choose Adult. The calendar for January will be provided, and proceed to the date of January 27.

Announcements to the Public

Seth typically provides sustainable, green options, so in his absence, Jill wished to advise residents to wash their hands of paper towels!

Did you know that we use about 3,000 paper towels per person per year? Unpaper Towels from Marley's Monsters, a woman-owned company in Oregon, are the perfect sustainable alternative to traditional paper towels. Made from soft, absorbent, 100% cotton-flannel fabric, these towels may be used for cleaning up spills, wiping down counters, or even used as napkins at mealtime. Unpaper towels are a small sustainable act with a huge environmental impact! Visit: marleysmonsters.com.

Visitors' Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission has changed from February 13, 2025 to a Special Board Meeting on February 11, 2025 (Tuesday) at 7:00 p.m. Central Time in City Hall Chambers. The change is prompted by the scheduled Nature Speaks Program on February 13, 2025.

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