

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
June 2, 2020

Present: Agnes Wojnarski Seth Marcus
Peter Hahn Dana Sievertson
Jill E. Moskal, Recording Secretary

Attendees: Maria Ampulski, PHNRC Volunteer
Peter Falcone, Assistant to the City Administrator

NOTE: Meeting held virtually via Zoom. Meeting ID: 890 4824 3319

OPENING ITEMS

Call to Order

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

Roll Call

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

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of March 12, 2020

The minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of March 12, 2020 were approved. No corrections or additions were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

ComEd / Openlands Grant Application Update

Dana Sievertson stated our application for the ComEd/Openlands Grant has been submitted. Our Project is entitled Hillcrest Lake Pollinator Park. The Grant Total is \$8,000 and is comprised of a match: ComEd - \$4,000; City of Prospect Heights - \$2,000; and our continuous anonymous donor offer of \$2,000.

Our Project area is part of the original plan for access and accessibility we produced twice – once in response to the Hey Report and the second time in response to the request from Alderman Larry Rosenthal. The Project plan is to restore the riparian buffers around Hillcrest Lake and improving public access.

Application results are expected to be received around June 15, 2020.

Dana further reported that we have started a test planting in front of John's house, and the workers were Agnes, Dana, our interns and John and Kristen Kamysz. We have made good progress on a small startup.

Happily, we have noticed that the climate and sense of community around the Lake have dramatically changed toward the positive. A lot of people are walking in the area and fishing the Lake. Residents have taken an interest in and complimented our work.

Soon we must plan an open venue with residents or neighbors on Hillcrest Lake to review our Project plan and address any issues. We feel our Project will be better received if funding has been provided. John has frequently spoken ad hoc on a personal basis with residents or neighbors to inform them of our Project plan, which has been well received.

A group of Prospect Heights' artists have temporarily installed a few pieces of sculpture or artwork on the western shore of Hillcrest Lake.

Cancellations and Impact on PHNRC

Prospect Heights Community Day and the Prospect Heights Block Party, both events typically held in June, were cancelled. We gave away a huge amount of prairie or native plants at these events and welcomed the opportunity for community outreach. We have typically received over 100 resident and community e:mail addresses for receipt of the Natural Resources Journal.

The Prospect Heights Park District Fly a Kite Day and seed ball event on April 11, 2020 was cancelled.

The ComEd prescribed burn of the Seeded Prairie was cancelled due to restrictions to Shelter in Place, which was enacted by the State of Illinois the day before the scheduled burn.

We have missed two months of Board Meetings and volunteer workdays.

Realizing that COVID 19 is a serious situation, how should we proceed?

What can we do with the plants that we would have normally given away in exchange for receipt of e:mail addresses to circulate information? Dana suggested placing tables in front of Agnes and Dana's home at 9 East Marion for a drive-by pick-up. Jill suggested donating the plants during the Prospect Heights Public Library curb-side book pick-up, which started June 8, 2020. Pick up a book and pick up a plant. Dana will speak with Terri.

Dana asked Maria what the Library would think of this suggestion. Maria advised Dana to send an e:mail message to Terri. Terri is changing positions and has a new supervisor, but she would be a good contact.

Maria suggested working with the school districts who are offering food distribution for kids. Maria suggested contacting District 21 and the different school districts. However, our concern is that the children may live in condos or apartments, which are not suitable environments for growing prairie plants.

Jill also suggested placing a table along Willow Road where people are fishing and walking the Slough and Hillcrest Lake. Dana felt this would be a venue for maximum exposure.

The three species of plants we have area Indian Grass, Common Milkweed and New England Aster. Agnes said we can decide on an area to plant Indian Grass. But the other two varieties that are suitable in all areas is Common Milkweed and New England Aster.

Prescribed Burns

Prescribed burns may no longer be possible due to COVID 19 and air quality for compromised citizens.

Burn Permits currently in place must be renewed if something changes with EPA laws.

Due to the lack of prescribed burns, buckthorn and woody species have made a great resurgence. Dana and Agnes have been brush cutting and raking up thatch since we were unable to conduct Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 prescribed burns.

NEW BUSINESS

PHNRC Commissioners and regular volunteers performed independent work during these past two months of Shelter in Place. Agnes provided the list of things to be done, and the response was good. Peter performed hours of herbiciding. Jill and volunteer, Linda Waycie, transplanted and pulled garlic mustard. All our regular volunteers assisted.

Two interns have started, which has provided a big boost in accomplishing our work.

PHNRC will return to regularly scheduled volunteer workdays but with limitations. Our workday capacity will be 10 people; therefore, volunteers must sign up. Tools will be disinfected at the conclusion of the workday. Tools will be assigned to volunteers to take home. We will continue to work ad hoc as well as schedule regular volunteer workdays following Cook County Forest Preserve and State of Illinois guidelines.

At the workdays, a five-gallon jug of water will be provided to wash hands. Gloves, masks, wipes, and hand sanitizers will be provided. Bottled water and packaged snacks will be offered.

Each scheduled volunteer workday will be noted in an e:mail notice with a requirement for volunteers to register by the Friday before the scheduled workday. Volunteers willing to work must confirm their attendance.

The work to be accomplished will be structured to enforce social distancing. The type of work scheduled will depend on current priorities, which is tempered by what our interns have accomplished during the week. Herbiciding and string trimming will be accomplished by our interns.

Crews with Public Works and the Park District have been furloughed. Their workforces have been cut. Therefore, the routine work they always accomplished for us is not getting done. You can readily see this at the ComEd prairie in the buffer that runs between the prairie and the houses on the east side where the grass is very tall. We have a lawn mower and can cut this area; therefore, Dana will speak with Mark Roscoe.

We are reinventing ourselves on the fly. The key is for safety. Agnes will provide a plan whether it is cutting brush, planting, etc., with the eye toward social distancing. Commissioners will continue a dialogue and decide collectively. We do miss our volunteers!

Intern Program – Summer 2020

Blair started last week, and she is amazing! Blair is hardworking, very smart, and eager to learn conducting further studying of educational materials on her own time.

Alyssa was scheduled to start yesterday or June 1; however, she is living in a neighborhood where looting occurred, and it was a dangerous situation overnight. Therefore, she could not leave her house. However, Alyssa will make up the time over the week.

Once again, we have been extremely fortunate with interns that have a great work ethic, are conscientious and thoughtful about their work, and are eager to learn about natural area management. They also work well together.

The interns arrive early Monday through Friday. They are outside under a canopy with wearing masks and standing 10 or 15 feet apart. Everyone has their own materials, books, flash cards, equipment, tools, etc. Everything is very well planned for the workday.

The interns utilize the restroom in Agnes and Dana's home and to cool off. The protocol is once inside the house, the interns have access only to the restroom, living room and kitchen areas and must wear masks.

Work Site Assessments and Work to be Accomplished

ComEd Seeded Prairie: We have not been to the Seeded Prairie recently. However, Peter has herbicided.

Heron Pond: We have been unable to recently review this site.

Hillcrest Lake: This site was covered in the ComEd/Openlands Grant Application topic at the beginning of the meeting.

Nature Preserve: We have spent a lot of time at the Gary Morava Nature Preserve independently, clearing a lot of garlic mustard. Peter has been herbiciding everywhere! Agnes, Dana and Jill planted over 300 plants this past Sunday. The trail was string trimmed, but we must install more educational material. The Nature Preserve is looking good.

Pete noted that erosion continues to be a major problem and concern. Pete is hopeful either the Park District or MWRD would investigate and offer solutions because controlling the erosion on McDonald Creek is too much for the PHNRC to manage.

Pete said the paths need constant attention, especially after the heavy rainfall we experienced this past month.

Dana reported that, unfortunately, another molestation at the Nature Preserve has occurred. Someone built a table or desk-like structure from crates and then took a string trimmer to the Sedges that have been developing in this area for the last four years, which removed them. Then mulch was placed over the area. This damage may not be able to be repaired.

Dana sent an e:mail message to Christina Ferraro and Dino Squiers of the Park District. We cannot image that the Park District would have given permission. We must determine why this was done. All the hours of work performed by our interns and volunteers was for naught. This situation is so frustrating!

Remnant Prairie: Peter said the Remnant Prairie is getting overgrown with buckthorn and other woody plants. Having a good burn would be ideal plus a lot of brush cutting. The good news is that the teasel is being defeated after years of hard work. However, we must continue to removal and herbicide the teasel to keep on top of it.

Saint Alphonsus: Jill mentioned that during the recent heavy rain, the area we planted held the water at bay.

Sedge Meadow: Peter has herbicided the Sedge Meadow quite extensively, mostly on teasel and some thistle invasives. Peter feels we have a good jump on spraying this year, which is ideal because the weeds are small and actively growing. Spraying will save a lot of our time later in the summer, as we spend a lot of time controlling large teasel plants.

Slough: A lot of flooding occurred. Prairie plantings were under water for more than six days; many expired. Invasive control and string trimming the trails are a must. People are walking the trails, and we must ensure the trails are safe. Good news – the bridge survived the floods!

We are growing the warrior sedges this year that withstand six feet of water, but we are aware that esthetics are important for our neighbors in this area.

Tully Park: No report.

Please note: The audio was poor when Pete was talking; therefore, Jill, as Recording Secretary, requested Pete to provide his comments in written form via e:mail for the meeting minutes.

Wheeling High School Program

Seth Marcus said the teacher we are working with as a liaison is still very enthusiastic about starting the Program. A plot was marked for planting native plants in a section of the school's courtyard and another section by the school's library. A walking path and types of plants were planned. However, the school decided to proceed with roof repair and installation of new HVAC equipment. Therefore, for our safety, the school did not want us working below the roof area.

Every few weeks, Seth sends the teacher an e:mail message to stay in communication. Currently, a start date has not been determined.

Site Monitoring Program

PHNRC will re-start the Site Monitoring Program by Commissioners and report at the July meeting. However, anything noticed that is eye-popping, jaw-dropping or has not been seen before, send an e:mail or call Agnes.

Objectives on Hold

The Tree Ordinance and attending Civic Community meetings are on hold due to COVID 19 and tabled until a later date.

PHNRC Treasurer Report and New 2020 Budget

Our 2020 budget has been approved and is in place. Peter Falcone sent a copy to Commissioners. Basically, with the expenses of the interns and soil purchases, we are \$80 short of getting through to the end of the year. Basically, we do not have money for operational expenses, but we have two interns for the summer.

Dana said we wisely spent the money left from last year's budget for operational supplies for this year, the purchase of enclosures around Hillcrest Lake for aquatic plants, and the purchase of soil for the Greenhouse Program. Additionally, interns are a crucial part of our budget because quite simply stated, they get the work done.

Seth inquired of the two kindly souls who made contributions. Dana said it was the proceeds from the Art Show of September 2019. John and Dana decided to contribute fifty percent (50%) of their Art Show proceeds to the PHNRC.

Announcements to the Public

None currently.

Visitor's Comments

Maria did not have any comments.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

Our June 11 meeting date was circumvented to this evening or June 2, 2020.

Our July meeting was scheduled for July 9, 2020; however, we will confirm. It would be great to return to regularly scheduled monthly meetings and perhaps in person with social distancing.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary