

CITY OF PROSPECT HEIGHTS
NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
July 16, 2020

Present: Agnes Wojnarski
Peter Hahn
John Kamysz
Ed Madden

Jill E. Moskal, Recording Secretary
Seth Marcus
Dana Sievertson

Attendees: Peter Falcone, Assistant to the City Administrator

NOTE: Meeting held virtually via Zoom. Meeting ID: 895 3243 7803

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. A quorum was present.

Meeting Minutes of Regular Meeting of June 2, 2020

The minutes of a Special Board Meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission of June 2, 2020 were approved. No corrections or additions were noted.

OLD BUSINESS

Gary Morava Nature Preserve and Response from PHPD

Dana reported on the recent molestation at the Nature Preserve. The incident concerns an individual who 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 and removed them. Then mulch was placed over the area. This damage may not be able to be repaired. The previous molestation at the Nature Preserve involved damage to the Creek area, which was single-handedly corrected by Pete Hahn.

Dana disassembled the five pellets that created the 4" x 4" square cube desk or table, and the interns took the pellets to refuge. Dana and Agnes then planted 400 sedges around that area and removed the mulch. The area is on the mend, again.

The PHPD has posted "no dumping" signs in the Nature Preserve and by the entrance from Pine Street into the Nature Preserve Trail three weeks' ago. We are hopeful the signs will alleviate the vandalism.

John said, overall, the Nature Preserve is looking good.

Intern Program – Summer 2020

Agnes reported that the summer Intern Program is going very well. Blair and Alyssa are powerhouses! They accomplish so much work, are very smart and take the initiative. When they have completed one task, they simply proceed to the next task. By far, Blair and Alyssa have been the most productive intern pair since initiation of the Summer Internship Program.

Both Blair and Alyssa are learning a great deal and can currently identify 200 species. Blair is particularly appreciative of the educational component to our summer intern program because the internship program Blair participated in last summer simply involved one task – herbiciding.

Blair and Alyssa are very careful with wearing a mask outside, sanitizing hands and equipment, and are mindful of social distancing.

Blair and Alyssa work well together and share a mutual camaraderie.

Three weeks are remaining of this year's summer intern program. Blair is entering her senior year of college; however, both Alyssa and Blair would consider interning for us next summer.

The teenage intern, Ferhat Abat, is the son of Mediha Abat, Wheeling High School Science Teacher. Ferhat has learned a lot and is extremely helpful to accomplishing our project work.

The internship program is 40 hours per week for 10 weeks.

Nature Speaks Program

PHNRC conducted their first Zoom Nature Speaks Program on June 25, 2020 where Izabella Redlinski, Conservation Ecologist at the Field Museum, presented "Restoring in the Face of Climate Change." The Program was attended by 50 people in the audience. The Program was also recorded; a link to the recording is on our website.

Our next scheduled Nature Speaks presenter in October 2020 will be on International Plant Health by Tricia Bethke, Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator for the Morton Arboretum. Tricia holds a Master of Science Degree in Natural Resources Environmental Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Tricia Bethke also provides presentations as a Morton Arboretum employee and is a speaker with the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Program Bureau.

Tricia co-authored an update to the Management of Invasive Plants and Pests of Illinois Guide. According to the University of Illinois Extension Invasive Species Alert: Jumping Worms: Jumping worms have recently been discovered in Illinois. This new invasive species was first identified in Northern Illinois in 2015 and in Southern Illinois in 2016. Jumping worms are earthworms native to East Asia. They also have been called crazy worms, Alabama jumpers, and snake worms.

Jumping worms are voracious consumers of organic material, which can affect soil quality. They breed quickly, and eggs survive Illinois winters. Adults reach maturity in approximately 60 days, allowing populations to grow exponentially during the growing season. These worms are also capable of reproducing without mating.

For future Nature Speaks Programs, we are hoping to secure Kim Klick with the Lake County Forest Preserves, who is an expert on Illinois Orchids, in November 2020.

Terri from PHPL has a potential slot for November and is seeking to increase content to more than four speakers per year.

The Prospect Heights Public Library has started Nature Speaks Encore Lectures. On July 7, all day, Botanical Citizen Science: Its Impact by Rachel Goad, was presented, which was originally presented on November 30, 2017, and Rare Animals. Rare Plants. Rare People. Adventures in Chicagoland Conservation by Stephen Packard, which was originally presented on January 23, 2018.

On Monday, August 3, 2020 from 1:00-2:30 p.m., Mary Lou Mellon of the Bird Conservation Network will provide an exclusive Zoom presentation on “Celebrating the Birds of the Chicago Area.” Mary Lou will feature over 170 photos taken over the years in our area and include songs of most of the birds. Familiar birds are the American Goldfinch, Cardinal, Baltimore Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Eastern Bluebirds, Nuthatches, Sparrows, waterfowl, Virginia Rails, Sandhill Cranes, grassland birds, Woodpeckers, Raptors, Warblers (the jewels of the bird world), Owls, etc. Mary Lou will include other things discovered while birding, such as butterflies, muskrat, deer, etc. Mary Lou will conclude with a constructive segment on what we all can do to help birds followed by a question and answer session.

Registration is required with the Park Heights Public Library to receive the Zoom meeting link information for participation.

Prospect Heights Park District Events

Future Prospect Heights Park District Events are:

Fall Bird Walks with Mary Lou Mellon, Bird Conservation Network – September 12 and 26, 2020 (Saturdays at 7:30 am). The Bird Walks are limited to 10 people, and all attendees must wear masks.

Marci Glinski, Supervisor of Recreation with the Prospect Heights Park District, inquired of Dana if the PHNRC has other programs we are interested in doing. After a short discussion, Commissioners thought of providing virtual tours or real-time guided tours with the public of our project sites and videotape it. This activity would embrace awareness and education.

Two dates would be scheduled and possibly either late summer or the fall. The real-time guided tour would be limited to 10 people. Three sites for consideration are the Com Ed Seeded Prairie, Gary Morava Nature Preserve and the Slough, the most visible areas of the City. The ComEd Seeded Prairie offers the most space for social distancing.

The real-time guided tours would be filmed or recorded with a video camera and a livestream event. The videos can be edited and then built into our website.

Marci requested copy next week for a printed brochure. Agnes, Dana, John, and Jill offered to participate.

Seth mentioned that the television show featuring interesting places in Chicago was one man recording with no audience.

John mentioned that Hillcrest Lake residents have been asking questions. If we videoed walking up and down the Lake outlining problems and erosion, potential solutions and project plans, many residents' questions would be answered. Showcasing the Art at the Lake would also be a plus.

Note: The City of Prospect Heights just authorized that the Art at the Lake would be present until the end of August 2020. John said this is a good thing because the Artwork has made residents very happy during the Pandemic and has brought the community closer.

Commissioners discussed videotaping one or two Commissioners providing content as they walk the trails of the Nature Preserve and Slough; edit content; and then post to our website. Content should include educational and visual content.

Secondly, host a guided tour for the Public at Hillcrest Lake and the Slough on Thursday, August 20, 2020 at 6:30-7:30 pm and Saturday, September 19, 2020 from 9:00-10:30 am at the Com Ed Seeded Prairie.

Dana inquired and Commissioners agreed that Dana and Agnes could start an expose from 9 Marion up to Izaak Walton Park. We can also add the different seasonal phases of the prairie sites and short educational videos, such as how to identify, control and eradicate buckthorn.

10th Week Camp – August 2020

The Prospect Heights Park District inquired if we would manage a nature camp for 10th Week Camp. Participants are estimated to be 30 children aged 5 to 11 years and would be held on-site at the Nature Preserve.

After a brief discussion, Commissioners declined due to the rules and restrictions for the COVID Pandemic. Rules are 6 feet for social distancing, wearing a mask when cannot contain social distancing, consistent hand washing, and sanitization of equipment, etc. We want children to engage in nature; however, it is too risky to ensure the safety of the children.

Commissioners mentioned conducting a virtual nature camp with Lauren as a speaker; however, a hands-on, interactive experience, seeing "life" in the Creek then using a microscope, making crafts, using the hand lens, etc., is the best method for learning about nature.

Wheeling High School Program Update

Dana noticed that the Wheeling High School roof is under major construction, and he has no idea if classes will be held in the fall. Therefore, everything is on hold.

Seth inquired of planting preparations and the next optimal time. August and September, depending on the site, are possibilities. We have planted in September, but if we plant too late, the ground pushing the plants up as it starts to freeze. We have planted in the month of September in wet areas. For Wheeling HS, do not plant after late August.

Agnes mentioned that we do fall plantings, but if late, then we risk a freeze hindering the plants growth. Plantings must be accomplished no later than August. It would be ideal to get the plants in the ground now. Agnes also mentioned that what plants to grow are based on need for each project. Therefore, we would need to know by December of January of the appropriate plants to grow for the Wheeling HS Program.

Seth will follow-up and ask if we could at least prepare the site in October for plantings in Spring 2021.

NEW BUSINESS

ComEd/Openlands Grant Application Update

The City of Prospect Heights has been awarded a 2020 ComEd/Openlands Green Regions Grant for assistance in creating a pollinator park at Hillcrest Lake. The project concept was first outlined in the NRC's proposal to City Council in July 2016 with invasive removal beginning January 2020 after the City Council approved the startup.

All the paperwork for the Grant was submitted by Peter Falcone. The City Council conducted a resolution meeting on July 13, 2020.

The Grant total amount is \$8,000 and is comprised of \$4,000 from ComEd, administered by Openlands, matched by \$2,000 from the City of Prospect Heights and \$2,000 donated from an anonymous donor on behalf of the PHNRC. The funds are to be spent within a two-year period.

Hillcrest Lake is the north extension of the naturally occurring Prospect Heights wetland. The 4.5-acre area is surrounded by residences that are separated from the Lake by Hillcrest Drive. A degraded expanse of mowed turf grass forms a large buffer between the road and the Lake. The area suffers from localized flooding, extreme shoreline erosion, has no ecological value and has little recreational value.

The Project will look to solve these issues by replacing the turf grass with native rich riparian buffers that would incorporate about 80-plus species of native plants. The benefits will be enormous. In addition to creating a vast pollinator habitat, the Project would look to arrest and stabilize the chronic shoreline erosion, filter and retain surface run-off, create a premium insect and bird habitat and become a resident attraction through a system of nature trails, interpretive signage and benches.

PHNRC also looks to motivate the youth of Prospect Heights to become the future stewards, naturalists, biologists, ecologists, and scientists as we nurture an understanding and love of nature. This is our third grant from ComEd/Openlands. This says a lot about the faith they have in us and our ability to deliver on projects. It also speaks volumes about the dedication and perseverance of our volunteers.

We are very appreciative of ComEd, Openlands, the City of Prospect Heights and our generous anonymous donor for making this great opportunity possible.

Next steps: Commissioners must address shoreline stabilization and outreach program.

Hillcrest Lake Update

The Commissioners then discussed at length the procedure for shoreline stabilization before planting of aquatic plants. Coconut rolls are an inexpensive option. First carp enclosures would be installed in two areas identified by John. Next the coconut rolls would be installed in a tiered approach. The coconut rolls temporarily stabilize the immediate shoreline. They are tagged down with rope and special stakes, and plants are planted into the coconut rolls. As the aquatic plants grow to maturity, the coconut rolls are dissolved or erased.

Also, Dana reported that we have already purchased carp enclosures (posts and fencing) from last year's budget; therefore, we are covered for any work conducted at the Lake.

A critical eroded area of Hillcrest Lake is the northwest side. PHNRC will meet with Mark Roscoe on Monday, July 20 to discuss plans and procedures. Perhaps Public Works could move topsoil from the Morava area for our use at the Lake. Utilizing a front-end loader and a truck would save time and labor.

We started an area at the Slough five years' ago with aquatic plantings that were cordoned by a carp enclosure. It was an experiment to close off inlets, and it made a huge difference. The riparian buffers at the Slough shoreline have matured and stabilized the shoreline.

We removed the carp enclosure a few days' ago but feel that it was too early to do so. Apparently, the carp like to be in the Slough over the summer. Therefore, next year, we will remove the carp enclosure in November before the water freezes.

John has been speaking with Hillcrest Lake residents, basically conducting an outreach program on an ad hoc basis. Residents have been outside in their front yard during the Pandemic. John is speaking with them about the Project, plants to be installed, and asking what they would like to see across the street. North end of the Lake has invasives blocking the view. John said everyone is on board, although there is one resident he has not spoken to because he is hard to find.

Commissioners agreed to get together for informational purposes at the proposed Lake site on Friday, July 17 to view the site, discuss the concept and provide input before PHNRC meets with Mark Roscoe on Monday.

The Art at the Lake will be present until the end of August. PHPD is looking for a parcel of land for a permanent Art Program.

John Muir Park, Prospect Heights, IL

Agnes has received several e:mail messages regarding the Lexington Homes Development Home Project presented at a Park District Board Meeting. This Project involves changing zoning from R1 to R2. Residents are upset, and their concerns center around land usage, access, and streets. Residents are inquiring about a possible wetland delineation in that area. This is a strip of land that is drainage.

The former Jelly Funhouse school operated in that neighborhood. It was privately-owned, and the female owner has tried unsuccessfully to sell the property for the past five or six years. The owner has received an offer from a developer to construct a 16-unit Townhouse development. This does not fit the model, and it would take over a part of John Muir Park.

Agnes has provided resources to residents but has stated that the PHNRC is not involved with this Project.

Peter Falcone advised not to get involved. The PHNRC is not able to advocate for the residents. PHNRC can provide information, as Agnes has done, However, the PHNRC is a co-equal body with the City Government. Residents should speak with elected officials, and members of the PHNRC would be acting as the public voicing individual opinion.

Scheduled Volunteer Workdays

Our workday of July 12, 2020 was conducted at the Slough, removing Canadian Goldenrod. We successfully removed Canadian Goldenrod last year.

Michigan Lilies are in bloom; however, all 50 of the plants have been chewed off, probably by deer.

Our next workday of July 26 will be conducted either at ComEd or the Sedge Meadow to collect seeds.

Our volunteer workdays have been well-attended. We have consistently followed COVID Guidelines and procedures at our scheduled workday and limited the volunteer group to 10 people. All volunteers wear masks.

Site Monitoring Reports from Commissioners

Site Monitoring Reports were delayed until the next scheduled meeting. However, Jill mentioned that Wendy Dewar informed her that a prescribed burn for Tully Park was needed. Dana said the prescribed burn permits must be renewed first.

PHNRC Treasurer Report and New 2020 Budget

John reported that our net revenue is just over \$3,000 and includes expenditures for various products purchased and intern payments. It does not include the Grant Money from ComEd, which is placed in a special budget. John expressed appreciation to Peter Falcone for providing the budget information to John today.

ComEd/Sara Race and Stantech Visit

Dana and Agnes reported that Sara Race visited with Dave from Stantech on July 15, and Dana and Agnes spent 2.5 hours with Sara and Dave taking them for a walking tour of the Slough; Hillcrest Lake; the Nature Preserve; the Sedge Meadow; the Remnant Prairie and the ComEd Seeded Prairie. Sara and Dave saw all our sites, and Dana and Agnes talked about everything.

ComEd inquired how they could help. ComEd will utilize a brush hog in the winter when there is less cause for soil disturbance and remove the shrubs and woody species at the Sedge Meadow and ComEd Seeded Prairie in the fall. This is huge! We are most appreciative.

ComEd also plans to conduct prescribed burns.

ComEd also said that if the PHNRC plans to conduct summer or winter Nature Camps that would be conducted under the power lines, ComEd is able to partially fund the Nature Camps. These additional funds would assist the PHNRC in purchasing supplies.

Sara and Dave were pleased to see everything we have done. Sara was here three years' ago and could not believe the positive progression.

Announcements to the Public

John mentioned that if residents have questions about restoration work particularly at any of the site and the new site around the Hillcrest Lake to please reach out to us while we're working onsite or e:mail us through our website. We are happy to answer any questions.

The specific website address for contacting us is: <https://www.phnrc.com/contact-us.html>

Visitors' Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is August 13, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. Central Time.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary