

Chinquapin Organic Garden Advisory Board Meeting January 28, 2025

The January 28, 2025, board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer and other board members Julie Le, Kathryn Long and Elizabeth Charles; board members absent: Brad Kukuk and Stacey Potosnak. Other gardeners attending: Jean McKean, Eva Bastianon, Chelsea Redman, Natalie Frank, Jennifer Penoso, Sook Park, Deborah Levi, Daniela Macander, Sharon Vannucci, Ulyses Guerrero, David Mendez, Sonia Samee, Faatimah Muhammad, Christine O'Hara and Zion Bezu. Absent: Oscar Mendoza, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting started at 7:00 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the November 19, 2024, minutes. It was seconded by Elizabeth, and the minutes were approved.

Richard welcomed the gardeners to the first Board meeting of the new gardening year. Oscar was absent so there was no report from the City. Richard and Anne are scheduled to meet with Jack Browand Acting Director of the RPCA and Oscar's boss on January 8 but the meeting was cancelled due to snow, so the meeting will be rescheduled for later in February. The purpose of the meeting is to explain what we do as a Board, as well as discuss the MOU with the city as it needs to be renewed in October, and if plot rental fees are to be changed, that needs to be worked out before July which is the end of the City's fiscal year.

Elections of Board officers: Richard reminded the gardeners that the Board officers were nominated in November and that they need to be formally elected. Julie Le called for a vote for 2025 Board officers. All nominated officers were re-elected: Richard as Chair, Anne as Vice Chair and Lori as Secretary/Treasurer. All Board members also agreed to continue serving in 2025. Richard said we welcome new members as the gardens are a group effort, and all participation is helpful.

Maintenance: The City has repaired RB1, which is a handicapped plot. They also stabilized the lower mulch bin. We are out of leaf mulch, but have wood chips. Richard will order leaf mulch from the city in the spring and also see if we can get some LeafGro compost again from the City's kitchen waste composting program. March would be the earliest delivery as the city has to remove the snow plows from the delivery trucks, he said.

End-of-season Monitoring Report: Anne provided the monitoring team report for the fifth and final review of the 2024 season, which was conducted on Dec. 8. The focus of this review was on end-of season cleanup. Of the 164 rented plots (10 were vacant or not being renewed), the team reported 125 had no violations. This is an improvement over the 115 during the October session – and significant when you consider that there were fewer plots being reviewed because of the vacancies/non-renewals. Twenty-one plots were cited for inadequate end-of season cleanup, which was up from 12 during the December 2023 session. Only one plot showed no sign of activity, but this plot had been recommended for

forfeiture following the October session. It was reviewed again because there was no confirmation that the RPCA had forfeited it. Only three plots were cited for weeds, in large part due to the fact that the weeds had died back due to the cold weather. Eight plots were cited for path maintenance and four for rotting crops. Anne thanked all of the gardeners who participated in the five monitoring sessions this season.

Volunteers: Faatimah will email some volunteers for a February fruit tree pruning session. She said that Agriculture Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad also is helping again. Faatimah said that the orchard maintenance will be overseen by Brian Cohen (R1) this season and the terraced bed work will be overseen by Miriam Hacker (Q7).

Finances: Lori reported that we have \$690.73 in the bank.

Fundraiser: Julie reported that the season restaurant fundraiser will be March 4 at Los Tios in Del Ray. She is working on a flyer. Anne asked if the restaurant might give us more than 10% of the sales, and Julie replied that last year they rounded up the amount so it was not a specific percentage and actually was higher than 10%. She said the event will be at the Del Ray location only because the Landmark location has a separate manager and having it at two locations would cause a delay in our getting the proceeds. Daniela asked how much was raised last year, and Julie replied approximately \$250.

Spring Social/Picnic: Elizabeth reported that she is looking at April 26 for the Spring Social as it falls closest to Earth Day, which is April 22. She suggested August 16 for the picnic, and Julie said that date could conflict with the Arlington Fair, which is that weekend. It was decided to discuss and firm up the dates at the next Board meeting. Elizabeth reminded the Board that last year the City wanted to charge us for using the pavilion, but because of our relationship with RPCA (through the MOU), we typically do not have to pay. Richard said he might need to get Oscar or Jack involved if this comes up again but he expects they will not charge us.

New Business: Anne informed the gardeners that the City is assigning the vacant garden plots, of which there are 15 or so. She said the last she heard was that there were 60 people on the waitlist. Richard asked if 15 were from gardeners who did not renew, and Anne responded yes. She said she has asked the City for a vacant plot list so that she can compare it with her list to make sure there are no errors.

Richard noted that some gardeners are using more construction materials in their plots and building large raised beds, arbors, trellises, etc. which can become a problem when they vacate their plots and the new gardener doesn't want the materials. He mentioned one gardener having a pallet of bricks delivered to his plot and that others have built large raised beds which would be difficult to remove. Anne said there is no regulation against this, and Kathryn said that the person who is offered such a plot can choose not to take it, and wait for a different one. Richard suggested asking the City if they can clear plots that have a lot of materials but Anne said she doesn't think we should ask the City to do

anything else for us. She said that if we know ahead of time that a gardener isn't renewing, we could have volunteers remove the materials, but that once a plot is assigned to a new gardener, it's their plot and we can't remove anything from it – plus the new gardener might want to use what's there. She said she usually tells gardeners to put unwanted materials next to the shed and tells gardeners to help themselves. If not taken, and not in good shape, the materials then have to be moved to the large trash area at the lower end of the gardens for city pickup. The Board will continue to monitor this and involve the City if it becomes an increasing problem.

The meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Upcoming 2025 events:

February 18 – Board meeting

March 4 - Restaurant fundraiser

April 26 (tentative) - Spring Social

August 16 (tentative) – Summer picnic