

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting January 17, 2023

The January 17 board meeting was held via Zoom. Participants included: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer, other board members: Julie Le, Stacey Potosnak, Kathryn Long and Brad Kukuk. Absent Board member Ed Mensh. Other gardeners attending: Deborah Levi, Sharon Vannucci, Jean McKean, Margie Heins, Jennifer Penoso, Zook Park, Ulysses Guerrero, Gretchen Schreiber and Kirsten Fehrenkamp. Also attending: Maureen Sturgill, City of Alexandria Recreation Manager/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:01 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the November 15, 2022 minutes. It was seconded by Julie, and the minutes were approved.

City Report: Maureen reported that there are 16 vacant plots and they are reaching out to people on the waiting list to see who is still interested. The regulations have been updated for all three city garden areas and they will be sent out soon and posted on the website. Anne remarked that last year there were 29 vacant plots at the beginning of the year and fewer people seem to be giving up their plots causing longer wait times. She has noticed that other counties have long waiting lists also. Brad asked how long the wait list was – Maureen said she is not sure as it is continually being updated, with people being taken off and others added. Richard suggested maybe the city can find new areas for additional gardens. He noted there seems to be more interest since the pandemic, more interest in gardening than in travel, etc. He thanked Maureen for her efforts.

MOU: Richard stated that the MOU has been updated and was sent to the Board members last month. It was signed by the city and is good for 3 years, until 2025. The plot rental rates will remain the same. Brad asked if the number of volunteer hours had changed. Anne responded no, it remains at four. She noted some gardeners wait until the last few days to do their volunteer hours and she does not recommend waiting that long, some people opt out at the end of the year and pay the extra fee.

Board Elections: Richard reported that Ed wants to step down as a Board member due to health issues. Richard said we will need to find someone else to manage the path restoration project as Ed has been an important help on this in the past. We currently have eight Board members but if anyone is interested in joining, they can contact Richard or Anne. There was a vote to re-elect the current Board officers and the decision to reappoint them was unanimous.

Monitoring Report: The monitoring team conducted the fifth and final review of the season on Dec. 3. The main focus of the review was on end-of-season cleanup. Of the 148 rented plots (20 were vacant – up from only four in October -- and two are designated for the Food Bank project), 107 had no violations. This is down from the 125 during the October review. Four plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy; this is down from the 11 in October, but this was likely because some of those cited in October had given up their plots. Thirty-two were cited for inadequate end-of season cleanup, although most of these were minor infractions. Thirteen of these also were cited for having rotting crops on the ground. Only five were cited for weeds, but this is because the weeds are dormant at this time of the year and not posing a problem for nearby plots. Fifteen were cited for path maintenance and were encouraged to take advantage of

the dormant weeds and soft damp soil to thoroughly dig up and cover/chip their paths over the winter. Anne thanked all of the gardeners who volunteered to help with the monitoring this season, stating that it is a difficult (and somewhat subjective) job as we don't want to discourage gardeners, but also want them to take plot maintenance seriously and comply with the city's regulations. The first monitoring session for 2023 is scheduled for mid-April.

Volunteer Activities: Richard noted that he and some volunteers cleaned out the trash pile at the lower end and the city has picked up the trash. Volunteers also helped weed the perennial gardens. The path leveling needs to be done soon, before the gardening season starts. Ed is willing to bring his equipment (saws, hammers) but will not be able to help much. Anne suggested looking at the list of last year's path volunteers and see if someone can take over the project.

Gretchen asked about the use of fences and whether they are really necessary? She suggested creating a list of the pros and cons. Anne noted that most people use them to keep the deer out. Gretchen suggested providing a list of deer proof crops. Brad noted that hungry deer will eat anything, and they even ate his horseradish foliage. Anne agreed, she has seen them eat zucchini and other squash that has prickly leaves and stems. Kathryn suggested preparing a list of what deer don't usually eat. It was also suggested that we consider banning bird netting as fencing material.

Anne asked Kathryn if any plot markers need to be done. Kathryn thinks they are in good shape and will survey the gardens and see what needs to be done. Anne noticed some of the new markers have already rotted. Richard noted that treated wood is now being used to help prevent this. Kathryn said the rotting might be due to not painting the lower end and said they can go back to painting the whole post again in the future.

Finances: We have \$764.27 in the bank.

New Business: Julie reported that she has lined up Frank Pepe's Pizza on Duke Street in the Alexandria Commons shopping center for the winter fundraiser. They will give back 25% of sales on food and beverages, whether dine in or take out. A person must show a picture of the flyer to get credit. She suggested Wednesday, March 1. Anne said it sounds good and she explained the program for new gardeners attending the meeting. Kathryn asked if the new gardeners will be notified and able to attend since it's so early in the season? Julie reminded everyone that last year's event was too early (January). Stacey offered to help with the flyer. Julie worked on it last year with Michelle Late, and they need to get it out fast. Gretchen suggested putting it on Facebook. Julie suggested getting non-gardeners to attend, she will work with Maureen on getting city approval to post a flyer in the Chinquapin rec center. Julie also said she is ready to accept donations for the summer raffle and Brad said he has stuff already – things he bought at end-of-season sales. Richard said he would work with Anne and Elizabeth on dates for the Zoom training session for new gardeners (mid-March) and the summer picnic. He suggested an April 29th date for the spring social, which is later than usual due to some conflicts, and this was tentatively agreed to.

The meeting adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Upcoming 2023 events:

March 1, fundraiser at Frank Pepes Pizza

Mid-March, zoom session for new gardeners

March 21, next Board Meeting

April 29 – tentative - Spring Social

August 19 or 26 – tentative – Summer picnic