

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting June 25, 2024

The June 25 Board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer and other board members Julie Le, Stacey Potosnak, Elizabeth Charles and Kathryn Long. Absent: Brad Kukuk. Other gardeners attending: Faatimah Muhammad, Margie Heins, Caroline Kersey, Patty Enneking, Bill Madden, Beth Madden, Siena Loprinzi, Natalie Frank, Sook Park, Zion Bezu, Neal Fine, Stephen Honan, Deborah Levi, Jib Vimuktalob, Vickie Cattaneo, Ulyses Guerrero and Chelsea Redman. Also absent: Oscar Mendoza, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. The minutes of the May 21, 2024 board meeting were approved.

City activities: In Oscar's absence, Richard reported that Virginia American Water Company is installing a new 12-14 inch water line along the portion of the loop road from the recreation center to the green shed that houses the gardens water connection equipment (on the west end of the gardens where it joins the lower-end access road). The project is expected to take a few weeks, during which time the loop road will remain open, but the entrance to the access road might be blocked for a day or two. Anne sent an email about the project to all gardeners today and advised those who usually park in the lower end of the gardens to park on the loop road during that time.

Garden activities: Richard reported that wood chips are low in the upper bin, so he has ordered more for both bins from Davey Trees Service. He said he will also try to get more Leaf Gro compost for the upper bin. The lower bins still have some wood chips and leaf mulch.

Richard also said he and Al Havinga are fixing a couple of broken wheelbarrows.

Monitoring Report: Anne provided the monitoring team report for the second review of the season, which was conducted on June 15. Of the 173 rented plots, the team reported 123 had no violations. This is up from 119 during the first monitoring session. Seven plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy. Of these, six were repeats from the April monitoring session, which means the plots have not been worked all season, so the gardeners will be given two weeks to clean up their plots or lose them. We could end up with some vacant plots but this late in the season it will be up to the City whether to reassign this year or wait until next year. Another 10 plots were cited for weeds, and 20 for path maintenance. There also were 16 citations for crops exceeding plot boundaries – primarily mint and perennial flowers. The email from the city sent to the gardeners suggested they donate the mint to the Food Bank. The next monitoring session is scheduled for August 25. It is the day after the picnic, a Sunday.

Volunteer Activities: Richard noted that a volunteer watering the perennial beds was stung by a yellow jacket and that Kami McGlynn who has two of the bee hives has installed a trap on a cedar tree next to the grove to trap the insects. Richard advised that if a yellow jacket is buzzing around just leave the area. The honey bees, he said, are not aggressive.

Faatimah provided an update on the orchard and terraced areas. She said she has volunteers lined up for the season, but because the weather is so hot and the squash requires a lot of water, she said they sometimes they need to be watered twice a day. She said other gardeners have been helping with the additional watering. Faatimah also said that she may not be able to continue as coordinator next season due to family and work obligations. She also noted that the water pressure was really low the last time she watered despite the fact that there were no other gardeners watering nearby. Anne reported the water company said the new pipes will improve the pressure. Richard also said that the area is experiencing a semi-drought and the Potomac River is low.

Kathryn provided an update on the plot marker replacements. She said that most of the new markers have been installed, but there still are a few more that need to be painted and installed.

Food Bank: Margie said the June 22 collection was cancelled due to the extreme heat, but that the collection should be resumed this Saturday. She also said there wasn't a lot of produce this early in the season – mostly greens -- but that eggplant and peppers were just coming in. She also said she could use more volunteers to weed and water the two food bank plots. Margie also said that the student garden plot needed watering and suggested if the Food Bank volunteers could water it, perhaps we could harvest it for the food bank. Anne said she would provide her with the sponsoring teacher's contact information.

Margie also reported that someone was seen taking produce from the gardens more than once and asked for suggestions as to how to handle it. She suggested perhaps giving the person flyer telling them where to get food assistance. She said that when she approached the person, she left immediately.

Finances: We have \$538.32 in the bank. This does not include proceeds from the recent fundraiser. Richard noted the only expenses this year have been for wheelbarrow repairs and lawn mower tune-ups and gas.

Summer Picnic – Elizabeth reminded everyone the picnic is scheduled for Saturday, August 24 and that preparations are on track. It will be the same as last year, except for changes to the garden award and tomato contest categories. She said she will update the supply and task spreadsheet and check on available supplies, as well as update the picnic flyer. Elizabeth said that help was particularly needed with the set up and grilling. Richard noted it was an election year and city council members, including the new mayoral nominee, might attend as they did last year. Richard also said he will also ask Brad if he can grill again this year and suggested getting veggie dogs again, they were a big hit last year. Anne said that Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad and the master gardeners will judge the garden plots in late July, and Lori will print the certificates. Elizabeth said she will provide the drinks, coolers and ice. Julie said she will conduct the raffle again, and said she already has some prizes. Elizabeth said she might not be able to attend the July meeting but will provide an update to Anne and Richard.

Fund Raising - Julie reported that she has not been notified of the final amount raised from Los Tios Grill but she is meeting with the manager on Thursday. She said there was a good turnout and that she received lots of positive messages from those who participated.

New Business: Margie suggested that we do something for Kirsten, who is retiring this year. She suggested a proclamation from the City, but Richard and Anne said they thought the award should be from the gardeners. Faatimah agreed and said that the master gardeners also are doing something for Kirsten. Anne suggested a gift card and Kathryn suggested a plant – perhaps a fruit tree. Julie suggested a placard by the tree. Richard suggested a sour cherry tree like the one at the top of the gardens that is doing very well. He said he will look into trees and find out the cost. He suggested spending about \$100. He will report back at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Upcoming 2024 events:

July 16 – next Board meeting

August 24 – Summer picnic

August 25 – Monitoring