

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting March 12, 2024

The March 12 Board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer, other board members: Julie Le, Stacey Potosnak, Elizabeth Charles and Kathryn Long. Absent: Brad Kukuk. Other gardeners attending: Deborah Levi, Mary Connolly, Faatimah Muhammad, Suzanne Hellman, Eva Bastianon, Chanthal Harris, Nicola Giardina, Margie Heins, Zion Bezu, Sally Richards, David Mendez, Jennifer Penoso, Mimi Murphy, Juli Hedrick, Caroline Kersey, Patty Enneking, Frank Cooper, Naima Kearney and Natalie Frank. Also attending: Oscar Mendoza, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the January 16, 2024, minutes. It was seconded by Elizabeth, and the minutes were approved.

City Report: Oscar will be the interim liaison with the Board until the city hires someone to take over, and Tonja Walls will continue with all administrative matters.

Oscar also reported:

Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) will deliver gravel next Thursday (March 21) to the lower parking lot to stabilize the area. The area will be closed for parking during this time. Anne will be there to supervise. Oscar said T&ES will also remove the tree that came down on the service road in the recent wind storm.

All of the plots have been rented and paid for. Anne said there are 176 plots – 173 rentals plus two dedicated for the food bank and one for composting.

The City will be hiring for two positions, both Natural Resources Managers (one will be reclassified from a Recreation Leader position). One will handle the east and one the west region. The job description is being developed with HR Central and then it will be advertised in late Spring or early Summer. Tonja Walls will continue to handle the plot renewals and reassignments in the interim.

T&ES is holding an Eco City festival in May; Oscar will send information to Richard in case Chinquapin Gardens wants to participate.

Maintenance Activities: Richard reported that a small-engine repairman tuned up the lawnmowers. BrightView will be mulching and weeding the Grove area on Friday. Al Havinga has fixed several wheelbarrows. Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad and Faatimah led a group to prune the fruit trees. LeafGro compost, which is provided by the city under a USDA grant, will be delivered in March and placed in the upper bin. Regular leaf mulch will be placed in the lower bin in early April pending city delivery scheduling. Richard asked when the water will be turned on, Anne noted that usually it's done in early April. Oscar said it depends on the weather; he said if it stays warm they might be able to turn it on at the end of March.

Volunteer Activities: Anne reported that she and Richard are updating the volunteer task list and it will be sent out soon to gardeners who agreed to volunteer this season. Faatimah will send out google sign-up sheets for help with weeding the terraced beds and orchard area. Eric Keber will lead the mowing team and will send out a zone assignment list to those volunteers. Tracy Friend in T9 will be in charge of the path restoration project in the fall.

Food Bank: Stacey said volunteers are starting to prepare the two Food Bank plots and they could use help. She also said help is needed on Saturday mornings to wash and pack the produce. The time does not count towards the required volunteer hours. This is the fourth year of the Food Bank project; the vegetables are taken to Mother of Light ministries which distributes food in the Del Ray/Arlandria area.

Finances: We have \$622.83 in the bank. Recent expenses include the annual lawn mower tune up.

Social Events:

Fund Raising - Julie reported that the fundraiser at &pizza was cancelled, and she will try to reschedule something at another venue for June. Richard said the problem is the &pizza restaurant wanted to donate to a 501(c) group so that they could get a tax break and the gardens are not 501(c) (non-profit, tax exempt), nor could we find a qualified group to partner with (the city, Master Gardeners, Mother of Light). Julie asked for items for the upcoming raffles, for the Spring Social and the Summer Picnic, as these are major fundraising events. She said that any garden-related items can be donated and that small items can be bundled or put in baskets.

Spring Social and Summer Picnic -- Elizabeth said she could use volunteers to help set up for the Spring Social on April 27. It will be a potluck event with a speaker from the county extension office. The summer picnic will be August 24. Oscar suggested inviting the new city climate change person to the event.

New Business:

New Gardener presentation - Richard invited all to the new gardener session on March 26 at 7 p.m. via Zoom. Elizabeth is developing the agenda with Anne; it will be similar to the session held last year. Board members are expected to attend.

Faatimah's program for the master gardeners virtual class, "Introduction to Vegetable Gardening Part 2", will be this Friday. Elizabeth reported that hairy bittercress, the prolific weed with white flowers, is coming up everywhere and now is a good time to pull it out. Richard reminded everyone to shake off the soil from the weeds before putting them in the yard waste bins. He also mentioned this is a good time to plant peas, lettuce and other spring vegetable seeds.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Upcoming 2024 events:

March 26 – new gardener program on Zoom

April 27 – Spring Social

May 21 – next Board Meeting
June – date tbd – restaurant fundraiser
August 24 – Summer picnic