

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting May 21, 2024

The May 21 Board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer and other board members Julie Le and Kathryn Long. Absent: Brad Kukuk, Stacey Potosnak and Elizabeth Charles. Other gardeners attending: Mary Connolly, Faatimah Muhammad, Eva Bastianon, Nicola Giardina, Margie Heins, David Mendez, Jennifer Penoso, Mimi Murphy, Juli Hedrick, Caroline Kersey, Patty Enneking, Naima Kearney, Bill Madden, Mary Seith, Tina O'Hara, Siena Loprinzi, Vickie Cattaneo and Natalie Frank. Also absent: Oscar Mendoza, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:03 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the March 26, 2024, minutes. It was seconded by Julie, and the minutes were approved.

City Report: Oscar was unable to attend the meeting. Richard updated the attendees on recent activities: gravel was spread in the lower parking lot to stabilize the area; all plots are now rented; the City weeded and mulched the Dale May garden; Leaf Gro compost was delivered to the top bin for use as a soil conditioner and leaf mulch was delivered to the lower bin for putting under plants like tomatoes to keep weeds down; Davey Trees provided wood chips for the paths; the City turned on the water in early April; the Board presented a new gardener information session via Zoom on March 26 and also held the Spring Social on April 27.

Monitoring Report: The monitoring team conducted the first review of the season on April 20. Of the 173 rented plots, 119 had no violations. This is down from 131 during the first session of the 2023 season. Twenty-one plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy, which is up significantly from 11 cited in April 2023. Another nine plots were cited for weeds, and 16 for path maintenance. There also were a few citations for leaning fences and crops exceeding plot boundaries – primarily mint and perennial flowers. The next monitoring session is scheduled for June 15.

Volunteer Activities: Richard reported that Eric Keber coordinates the mowers and has been using backup mowers for when the main mowers are away. The perennial bed has workers scheduled for the summer. Kathryn reports that with Julie's assistance, she is setting up a sign-up genius for the garden plot marker volunteers. She also said that if a new marker is needed she should be notified. Kathryn has 41 unpainted markers and nine painted markers, but asked Richard if he could cut a few more. Anne said she sent out the list of volunteer activities to those who opted in. Fatimah reported that she has a list of volunteers for the orchard. She also reported that Dona Lee and Jib Vimuktalob cleared out the terrace beds and planted winter squash. She encouraged gardeners who see fruit on the ground to pick it up so that the rodents don't get it.

Food Bank: Margie said they have received some nice lettuce from Bill Madden. Next week they will send out the first email about collections as people will start harvesting soon.

Finances: We have \$538.32 in the bank. We made \$200 from the raffle at the recent Spring Social.

Spring Social: Anne reported there were about 30 people in attendance -- slightly lower than last year but the weather was cloudy and chilly. Few new gardeners attended but the food was good and everyone had a good time. We decided to put flowers on the tables and to add that task to the list for next year's Spring Social. (We usually only have flowers at the summer picnic.) Julie said there was a good turn-out for the raffle.

Fund Raising - Julie reported that the fundraiser will be at Los Tios Grill in Del Ray from 5-9 on June 19th. Anne noted that it is the Juneteenth holiday and some people may have the day off so she is hoping for a good turnout. Julie suggested telling friends and family about it, participants can eat in, order carry out or buy gift cards (but delivery orders are those are handled by third parties). Participants just need to tell the server that they are with Chinquapin Gardens and the gardens will get a rebate of 10% of the check. Julie said she will finish the flyer and send it to the gardeners. She explained to new meeting attendees the money is used for supplies like gas for the lawn mowers, additional tools for the shed and other maintenance items.

Summer Picnic – Richard reported the picnic will be August 24. And that the Mayor and City Council members will be invited and will judge the tomato contest and pose for photos with the garden plot award winners. Richard said the program has become overly long and takes up too much of the city officials' time when they should be enjoying themselves with the gardeners. He and Anne proposed reducing the number of awards to help streamline these activities. It was recommended that the awards categories be reduced to five, with only first and second place winners for Best Vegetable Garden, Best Flower Garden, Best Combination Garden and Best New Garden and one Best Overall Dale May Memorial award. For tomatoes, there would be one Best Tomato category, with first and second place winners. Anne noted that over the years new categories were added and the list kept growing, but that sometimes there would be only one entry. Faatimah, who runs the tomato contest, noted the elected officials have been very helpful in the judging and that she is okay with the proposed changes. Julie said that we should try what's proposed this year as we can always change it next year. The Board voted unanimously to change the awards as proposed. (Anne noted the garden plot judging by Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad and her master gardeners will be conducted at end of July rather than in August as Anne, who coordinates the judging, will be away for two weeks and not returning until the day before the picnic.)

New Business: Margie reported that Kirsten is planning to retire this year and suggested we give her a gift. Anne suggested a gift card. She and Richard will look into this and suggest something at an upcoming Board meeting (before the August picnic).

The meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Upcoming 2024 events:

June 15 – garden plot monitoring

June 19 – fundraiser at Los Tios Grill, Del Rey

June 25 – Board meeting (moved from June 18)

August 24 – Summer picnic