

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting November 19, 2024

The November 19, 2024, Board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier - Chair, Anne Saul - Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann - Secretary/Treasurer and other board members Julie Le, Brad Kukuk, Kathryn Long, Elizabeth Charles, and Stacey Potosnak. Other gardeners attending: Jean McKean, Michele Late, Thomas Kilfoyle, Kirsten Fehrenkamp, Dona Lee, Sally Richards, Eva Bastianon, Chelsea Redman, Natalie Frank, Greg Ettleman, Jennifer Penoso, Sook Park, Naima Kearney, Deborah Levi, Siena Loprinzi, Patty Enneking, Daniela Macander, Lynda Rudd and lamyo. Absent: Oscar Mendoza, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting started at 7:01 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the October 15, 2024, minutes. It was seconded by Elizabeth, and the minutes were approved.

City activities: Oscar was absent as he was attending a two-day Parks and Recreation Department meeting for city residents to discuss RPCA priorities. Richard said he planned to attend on Wednesday night. He said that the RPCA website listing their services and fees showed a higher than current fee category for community garden plot rentals. He contacted the city and asked about it as we have a Memorandum of Understanding with the city through next year (2025) to keep the fees at a much lower level. Richard said the city confirmed the fees specified in the MOU are valid through next year. Richard reported that Oscar told him they have made offers to two natural resource coordinator candidates, one of whom would serve as our liaison, and that they hope to have someone in place by January. Regarding the 2025 garden plot renewals, Anne said she received a spreadsheet from the RPCA showing that 60 gardeners have not yet submitted their renewal applications, which, she said, is not unusual as the deadline is Nov. 30. Eight gardeners have stated that are not renewing their plots. Asked by Brad how many gardeners does she think will not renew their plots, Anne said she thought it would be fewer than in the past, when there usually 20-30. Richard reminded everyone that the water would be turned off tomorrow (Nov. 20). Anne said she had sent a reminder to all gardeners.

Monitoring Report: Anne provided the monitoring team report for the fourth review of the season, which was conducted on Oct. 19. Of the 171 rented plots (two were vacant), the team reported 115 had no violations. This is a drop from the 126 during the third monitoring session. Three plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy, all of them repeats from the August monitoring session, and therefore, were give two weeks' notice to clean up their plots or forfeit them. Two improved their plots, but one did not, so we have recommended that the RPCA forfeit that plot. Another 24 plots were cited for weeds, which is up from 19 in the previous review, and 30 were cited for path maintenance. There also were 16 citations for rotting crops, which is common this time of the year, although becoming more problematic because of the increase in rat activity the past couple of seasons. The final monitoring session is scheduled for Dec. 7, with the focus being on end of season cleanup.

Eva asked what type of plastic she should use to cover her plot to suppress weeds in the winter? Elizabeth recommended heavy garden plastic, and Anne suggested a tarp also would be effective. Kathryn suggested cardboard with mulch on top as both eventually break down and are good for the soil. Michele asked how a new gardener can sign up for a plot in 2025 because the form on the city's website is for 2024. Anne said they should just use the 2024 form; she also

warned that there is about a two year wait for plots. Jean asked about the buildup of woodchips on pathways and whether it can be raked and removed because the path next to her plot is now higher than the plot and chips slide into her beds. Richard said he would take a look at it.

Maintenance Activities: Richard reported that the city repaired two picnic tables at the upper end of the gardens and that garden volunteers refinished and painted one of the two near the shed. He said the second table will be finished and painted next year. Richard also reported that there are wood chips in both bins and that Davey Trees can provide more if needed. He said that the last load of LeafGro compost was delivered by the city, and that they can't deliver more in bulk because the trucks have been retrofitted with snow plows for the winter. Lynda asked when her raised plot (RB1) can be repaired, and Richard said he will ask the city to rebuild the bed after the growing season has ended. Kathryn asked if LeafGro compost will be available next year, and Richard responded he'll ask if the city can continue providing it to the gardens as this is the end of the original free two-year program for city residents to have food scraps picked up and turned into compost which was then returned to the city gardens and parks.

Volunteers: Richard reported that path restorations were completed on October 26, and November 9. Plots around five plots were completed each day. He and volunteers also sorted large trash in the area behind the lower bins and that it is ready to be picked up by the city. Kathryn said that the new plot markers have all been installed for this year. She asked if anyone sees others that need replacing to let her know and they will be added to next year's list.

Finances: We have \$640.73 in the bank.

Fund Raising: Julie is working with Los Tios for the next restaurant fundraiser this winter; she said she will have more to report at the next meeting. She will select a weekday, usually Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday as that is what the restaurant prefers. Anne asked if there was any chance they could increase the contribution percentage and Julie said she would ask. Elizabeth said that when she invited the owners to the picnic, they were very appreciative.

As this is the last meeting of 2024, Richard asked the Board members if they wanted to continue to serve and all said yes. All of the officers also agreed to serve again. The vote to accept the slate will be taken at the January meeting. Richard also said that if any other gardeners would like to join the board they should let him know.

Agenda for next year: The Advisory Board's three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the city expires in November 2025, so a new one needs to be negotiated. Richard reported that Oscar said the city wants the board to start working on it in the Spring so that any changes in the fees can be factored into the city budget in July. A Spring Board meeting will be set aside to discuss. Brad asked if the city has proposed a fee increase, and Richard said not at this time, but it could during discussion of the new MOU. Anne said the fees listed on the city's website are triple the those in the MOU, but those were based on the old fee structure, before the MOU and so, did not account for the volunteer work that has replaced services previously provided by the city. Richard said he will discuss this with Oscar before the Board reviews the MOU. There are three documents that need to be reviewed next year: 1) the MOU with the city; 2) the Community Garden Regulations; and 3) the Board bylaws, which will probably need very little,

if any, changes. Stacey asked if the MOU includes the Foodbank program and plots dedicated to that program, and Richard said it did.

New Business: Julie asked if there were any updates about the racoons as a third was found to have rabies. Anne said she is not sure in what part of Taylor Run where they were found and that Taylor Run is a very long park, so they might not have been near Chinquapin. In any case, it was advised dogs should be kept on leashes – even in the woods next to the park. Eva asked if there were any updates about the man with the two dogs who assaulted a gardener. Richard reported that the gardener had filed a police report, but she hasn't heard back. Kathryn reported that some trash bins contained weeds and yard waste bins had fencing and asked if gardeners should be reminded about the proper use of the bins. Anne said she would include that information in an end-of-season clean up reminder to all gardeners.

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Upcoming 2024/2025 events:

November 30 – growing season ends, renewals due

December 7 – year end garden monitoring

December 15– renewal payment due

January 21, 2025 –Board meeting