

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting November 21, 2023

The November 21 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 Brad Kukuk. Absent: Board member Kathryn Long. Other gardeners attending: Deborah Levi, Sharon Vannucci, Mary Connolly, Sook Park, Faatimah Muhammad and Natalie Frank. Also attending: Rod Simmons, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. There was a motion by Anne to approve the September 19, 2023, minutes. It was seconded by Julie, and the minutes were approved.

City Report: Rod Simmons explained how the Parks and Recreation office is set up and provided a history of its liaison with the Board. He said the city used to have a Horticulturalist who worked with the gardens. After the most recent person (Maureen Sturgill) retired, Rod was assigned as liaison for Chinquapin and Holmes Runs gardens. He noted the Board takes care of most duties which is different than in the past. Two members of his staff Renata Narciso and Wilma Newby handle the administrative duties, such as plot renewals. In 2024 the office hopes to regroup and restructure, including having the natural resource manager run the garden programs. Also, they hope to hire someone to handle some of the logistical duties. Rod thinks the recreation centers should run the gardens, but they are also short staffed. He noted that Alexandria often copies what Arlington does. For example, RPCA staff recently drafted an urban agriculture proclamation, like Arlington has. The Alexandria City Council commended the proclamation and highlighted the community gardens, particularly Chinquapin as it is an organic garden. He will send out a copy of the proclamation. Richard noted we invite the City Council members to our summer picnic and we had a good turnout this year.

Anne reminded everyone that the plot renewal applications are due November 30, with payment due December 15. She asked that Richard and herself receive a copy of the lists of renewals and outstanding renewals so they can remind people to renew. She asked if invoices were sent out as the renewals were received, which has proven to be a better way rather than to wait until all are received and then sent out. This helps expedite the process and encourages payment on time. Brad asked if the payment period can be extended to the end of December to give the city more time. Rod noted there were problems with the RecTrac payment system last year and the city could agree to an extension. Anne disagreed saying that the current schedule allows time after payments are received to assign new plots. Richard noted that the schedule was posted in our regulations and we should stick with it. He and Anne suggested that the city can allow for extensions on a case-by-case as needed. Anne noted this this year some registrations have been mailed in but evidently not received by city staff. Rod will check with the admin people to insure they check the mail. He will find out on Monday how the invoices are being handled and will update Richard and Anne.

Monitoring Report: Anne reported that the monitoring team conducted the fourth review of the season on Oct. 15. Of the 170 rented plots (four were vacant), 115 had no violations, which is an improvement from the 105 cited in August. Three plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy, which is down from eight in August. However, all were repeat violations, so the

gardeners were given two weeks to correct the problems or forfeit their plots. One gardener cleaned up her plot, but two did not, so we recommend that the city forfeit both. We have not received notice as to whether that was done. Another 28 plots were cited for weeds, which about the same as during the August review, but most were minor infractions. Twenty-one were cited for path maintenance, which is half the number cited in August, which is encouraging. There also were 15 cited for rotting crops, not unusual for this time of the year, although we noticed many were pumpkins and squash showing huge bites, an indication of rats vs. chipmunks or squirrels. Gardeners also have reported seeing more rats this season, which is why it's important to harvest crops expeditiously and keep plots clean. The next (and final) monitoring session is scheduled for Dec. 2, the focus of which will be end-of-season cleanup.

Food Bank: Stacey said they had a good season with the help of some very dedicated volunteers. They collected hundreds of boxes of produce but they do not weigh the boxes so there is no final tally. They had three plots this season (one belonging to a gardener who was out of the country and offered it for Food Bank use). They have planted winter cover crops and are closing up for the winter. She asked if someone would like to take over as the leader, as she would like to take a break and Margie wants to step down too. Brad said he thinks they do a good job and the program is well run. Richard encouraged volunteers to contribute and the Food Bank leaders should discuss how they want to handle it next year.

Finances: We have \$876.82 in the bank account.

Volunteer Activities: Faatimah asked if the terraced beds should be a separate area for work from the orchard. Richard said they should be kept together, but separate from the perennial grove. He suggested growing pumpkins again. After Halloween, the terraced beds were prepared and planted with cover crops with volunteer help supervised by Dona Lee. Richard also had several volunteers help on the path leveling this past Saturday with Mark Condon's help. Richard is planning another volunteer task to help sort the large trash later this month.

Fund Raising: Julie reported that she is finalizing the restaurant fundraiser at &pizza in the Bradlee Shopping Center. The date is February 27, 2024. The restaurant will give 25% of total sales back to the group.

New Business: Richard sent out next year's meeting schedule, which will largely remain the same. There will be a meeting or some activity every month except December. He also noted that nominations for Board members and officers will be accepted. All officers said they would be willing to continue for another year and the election will take place at the January meeting. He asked if anyone on the call was interested in becoming a new Board member, but no one responded affirmatively. He remarked that we can always use more volunteers, to help to keep things looking good. In the Spring we will also discuss the awards program for the summer picnic. Someone asked about Leafgro compost delivery. We had four truckloads delivered last year. Richard will check with his contact to see what we can get in 2024. Wood chips will be provided as needed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Upcoming events:

November 30, 2023 – season ends, renewal applications due

December 2, 2023 – end of season inspection

December 15, 2023 – payment for new season due

January 16, 2024 – Board meeting

February 27, 2024 – fundraiser at &pizza