

Chinquapin Organic Gardens Board Meeting September 19, 2023

The September 19 board meeting was held via Zoom. Present: Richard Dorrier-Chair, Anne Saul-Vice Chair, Lori Hartmann-Secretary/Treasurer, other board members: Julie Le, Kathryn Long, Elizabeth Charles and Brad Kukuk. Absent: Board member Stacey Potosnak. Other gardeners attending: Deborah Levi, Sharon Vannucci, Ulysses Guerrero, Jennifer Penoso, Zion Bezu, Beth Madden, Caroline Kersey, Nicola Giardina, Mary Connolly, Sonia Samee, Neal Fine, Margie Heins, Dona Lee, Sook Park, Siena Loprinzi, and Jean and Frank Abate. Also attending: Rinata Narciso, City of Alexandria Recreation/Park Operations.

The meeting began at 7:00 p.m. There was a motion by Elizabeth to approve the July 18, 2023, minutes. It was seconded by Anne, and the minutes were approved.

City Report: Richard introduced Renata Narciso from the City of Alexandria Parks and Recreation office. Maureen Sturgill retired last month and before her Oscar attended the meetings so there is a long history of City participation. Renata remarked that she has been with Parks Department for three years, and before that she worked with the juvenile court for a total of 18 years with the City. Richard and Anne met with Renata and Tonja Walls, her supervisor, at the gardens earlier today, and walked around observing the plots. We look forward to working with her on upcoming plot renewals. She can be contacted at the RPCA email address: RPCAGardens@alexandriava.gov. Anne reminded everyone that the renewals are due November 30, with payment due on December 15.

Monitoring Report: Anne reported that the monitoring team conducted the third review of the season on Aug. 12. Of the 172 rented plots (one was vacant), 105 had no violations, which is a drop from the 146 in June, but not unusual for this time of the year, particularly because of the heat. Eight plots showed no sign of activity and were very weedy, which is up from six in June. Two were repeat violations, so the gardeners were given two weeks to correct the problems or forfeit their plots. Both gardeners cleaned up their plots. Another 27 plots were cited for weeds, which is a big jump from the five in June, but most were minor. Again, the increase is not unusual for this point in the season. Forty were cited for path maintenance, although most were minor. There also were five cited for plots exceeding their boundaries – primarily, mint, flowers, berry bushes, etc. planted too close to the edge of the plot and three for rotting crops. The next monitoring session is scheduled for Oct. 14. Hopefully, with the weather cooling off, gardeners will be able to catch up on their weeding and path maintenance.

Food Bank: Margie reported that they collected over 100 pounds of food every week and the food bank is very grateful. They even accepted hot peppers, including bird peppers. Richard noted that the gardens at Mt Vernon where he volunteers donates extra produce to area food banks and he has noticed they like the hot peppers also!

Finances: We have \$1,056.31 in the bank (minus \$30 to be paid this week to Richard for gas and garden supplies).

Volunteer Activities: Anne noted that some gardeners have reported zero hours of volunteer work, and that she has plenty of tasks, including pulling vines from the fence line and covering vacant plots. She will reach out to those gardeners soon.

Summer Picnic: Elizabeth noted that 70+ persons attended, making it the largest picnic ever! She suggested changing some of the tomato categories next year, and/or adding new categories such as “prettiest flower garden.” Anne noted we usually have the picnic earlier and have more tomatoes, this year’s later date hurt the number of tomato entries. Someone asked about adding recipes on a form and on the website. Elizabeth will talk to Michelle about the code for that. The recipes and form are on the website, but the page needs a little tweaking. Lori suggested a “people’s choice” award where gardeners can nominate a neighbor; Anne thought that might lead to “ballot stuffing” and would be difficult to implement. Anne noted that Agriculture Extension Agent Kirsten Conrad and her volunteer master gardeners who judge the plots don’t know whose plots they are looking at, which works well to ensure a fair judging system. Richard agreed that the categories could be modified and possibly have awards for new gardeners only. Anne said she emailed the winners ahead of the picnic telling them they had won an award, but not what it was, and that resulted in more winners attending, which was good given that the mayor and three city council members attended. Caroline replied that she is a new gardener who won an award, and that she took her certificate to work and posted it in her cubicle and enjoyed the recognition. Brad suggested categories such as “best organized,” or limit the awards to the top 3 vegetable, flower and overall (Dale May Memorial) award. Richard said that people appreciate the awards and maybe we can think about new approaches for next year. Zion noted that her church has a zucchini/squash recipe competition. Elizabeth said we could also do a best tomato recipe, and maybe change to a different vegetable every year. She suggested that we discuss again at another meeting as we have plenty of time to make changes for next year.

Fund Raising: Julie reported that we made \$313 on the raffle. Brad asked how this compares to other year raffles. Julie said about the same as we raised \$308 at last year’s picnic. She is pre-planning the restaurant fundraiser and is looking at &pizza in the Bradlee shopping center. The tentative date is February 27, 2024. They will give 25% of total sales back to the group. Brad said he gets a lot of his raffle donations from Greenstreet Gardens as they have a sale table where he finds good gardening stuff.

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Upcoming 2023 events:

October 14 – next monitoring session

November 21 – Board meeting

November 30 – season ends, renewals due

December 2 – end of season inspection