

WILLOWSFORD CONSERVANCY

Meeting of the Board of Trustees

March 26, 2019, 4:30 pm

Sycamore House

MINUTES

Attending: Stan Settle, Mary Hegedus, Claudette Papathanasopoulous, Mark Trostle, Rick DiBella, Stacey Kessinger - Trustees; Iris Gestram, Executive Director, Ashley Swenson, Retail Manager, Collin Thompson, Farm Manager, and Patrick Boleman, Land Stewardship Manager. Absent, Chris Bodley

- I. Call to Order at 4:35pm
- II. Approval of Agenda. Motion passed 6-0.
- III. Approval of Minutes. Motion passed 6-0.
- IV. New Business
 - **2019-2020 Deer Management Program** – The Deer Management program has been modified for the upcoming season to accommodate and recruit hunters with a proven record of harvesting antlerless deer vs. recreational hunting, per its original intent. The program guidelines for the 2019-2020 season and proposed hunting dates were provided to the board for comment for both the archery and firearm season; no objections were recorded. Motion to approve the program as presented passed 6-0.
 - **Employee Handbook** – A draft will be sent to board members the first week of April for review and approval at the next meeting.
- V. Old Business - None
- VI. Reports
 - Land Conservation
 - Grove Wetland Restoration** – The wetland establishment area has been planted with woody species. Wildflower seeding will occur this spring.
 - Riparian Plantings** - Riparian forest buffer plantings in the Greens and the Grant were replanted to increase seedling establishment. Maintenance on tubes and the planting area will continue as seedlings mature in all riparian buffer plantings. Tree protection tubes are being removed as seedlings reach appropriate size.
 - Grassland Management Policy** - Updated Grassland Management Policy will be implemented in 2019. Bush Hogging schedules are being revised to increase grassland habitat value. Buffer strips will be mowed along private property, roadways, and other necessary areas to mitigate undesirable plant and wildlife encroachment.
 - Trail Upgrades** - Planning for 2019 trail upgrades is underway. Larger trail improvement projects will be contracted out as part of Land Development. The

Conservancy is testing wetland boardwalk designs that can be constructed and installed in-house for reduced cost.

- Projects & Facilities

Farm Garden - Renovations and improvements are underway including replacement of the aging bed borders; re-planting of native plant demonstration beds; added space for programs and farm-related events; and improving the customer experience by adding a children's activity area, a pen for visiting farm animals, and shade trees. The Farm Garden will be available rentals by residents. Work is scheduled to be completed in time for the seasonal re-opening of the Farm Stand on May 4.

Farm Facility Drainfield - A drain field is scheduled to be created this spring to provide a restroom for farm employees at the Grange Farm work site. Wet weather and saturated soils continue to delay project work.

Amenities Rentals - Conservancy amenities, including the new Cedar Pond Pavilion, the new Hidden Meadow Event Field & Group Campsite, and the Grant Family Campsite are now posted online for rental by residents and non-profit groups. The rental season is April 1 – October 31 for Cedar Pond Pavilion, and May 1 – October 31 for Hidden Meadow and the Grant campsite.

Rt. 50 Farm Market – Business partnerships for the market continue to be explored.

Hidden Meadow Event Field & Group Campsite- Structural components are being finalized. Site components such as fire pit, grill, and lantern posts are being installed this week to finish Hidden Meadow and open the venue for the season.

Spring Peeper Pond - Wildlife viewing structure is finished. Final grading and planting will be completed this spring. Spring Peeper Pond trail has been outlined and will be open this year.

Trail App Launch - Willowsford Conservancy Trail App was released on March 26. The Grange and Grove tours are currently available with the Greens and Grant tours scheduled to be available this June. Nature walks utilizing the trail app will be led later this year for each village tour.

Programs & Events

- CSA Info Sessions (Farm Team); Sat, March 9 (55 attendees), and Sun, March 17 (40 registrants), 11 am-1:00 pm, The Lodge, and Sycamore House & Grange Farm (Farm Tour)
- Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Fundraiser, Fri, March 22, 6-10 pm, Sycamore House (sold out/160 max)
- Launch of the Trail App – March 26
- Right Plant Right Place – Native Plants for the Home Garden (Julie Borneman, Watermarks Native Plant Nursery), Wed, April 3, 6:30-8:00 pm, Sycamore House (sold out/35 max)
- Willowsford Wildlife - Beavers at Work (Andrew Richardson), Wed, April 24 (sold out/24 max), 5:00-6:30 pm; meet @ Cedar Pond Pavilion, The Greens
- Voices in the Night - Amphibian Program & Walk (Patrick Boleman), Thur, April 25, 6:30-8:00 pm (sold out/24 max), Sycamore House & Grange Trails
- Feathered Fosters (Ashley Swensen), April 27-May 4, 11-2 pm Farm Stand, The Grange (sold out/75 max)

- Earth Day Watershed Cleanup, Sunday, April 28, 9-11 am, The Grove
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sat., May 11, 4pm, The Grange
- Amenity Rental Season Opens: Cedar Pond Pavilion, Hidden Meadow Event Field & Group Campsite; Grant Family Campsite, May 1-Oct 31, The Greens, The Grant
- Farm Stand Opens, May 4 - Nov 26: Tue-Wed 2pm - 7pm; Sat-Sun 9am - 2pm
- Wildlife at Willowsford - Bluebird Walk (P. Boleman), Tue, May 28 (10/20) (Rain Date June 4) 10 am-12 pm, Meet @ Pin Oak Park, The Grove
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sun, June 23 (June 30 rain date) 10 am, The Grove
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sunday, July 21 (July 28 rain date) 10 am The Grant
- Summer Camps:
 - o A Week at Willowsford Farm Summer Camp (ages 5-8), Mo-Fri, July 22-26, 8:30 am-2:00 pm; The Grange Farm Garden and Farm (Ashley Swensen)
 - o Discover Camps (ages 9-12), Mo-Fri, July 8-12 and July 15-19, 9 am-2 pm
 - A Day at the Farm (Mondays, A. Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm (sold out)
 - Nature Exploration Days: Plants & Pollinators (Fridays, P.Boleman), The Grange and The Greens
 - o Culinary Camps, Mondays, June 10, 17 and 24: A Day at the Farm (A. Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sat., Aug 3 (Aug 10 rain date), 4 pm, The Greens
- 5th Annual Community Bonfire & Camp-over, Sat-Sunday, Sept. 14-15 (Rain date Sept. 28-19), Hidden Meadow Event Field, The Greens
- Autumn Fest, Saturday, October 12, The Greens

Administration:

Employee Manual, Safety Program, QuickBooks Transition - Iris is working to complete the Conservancy Employee Manual and will share a copy the week of April 8 for Board review. A Safety Manual has been completed and a robust Conservancy employee safety program is being implemented.

The transition of Conservancy accounting to QuickBooks is nearing completion under the leadership of Business Operations Manager Karen Siler.

Hiring update – Mike Hoover was hired effective March 7, filling the additional Conservancy Ranger position (initially posted as Landscape Maintenance Technician). Mike was a Ranger with NOVA Parks for 4 years prior to joining Willowsford Conservancy. He graduated with a B.A. in Humanities and Social Sciences from George Mason University, and an A.S. in Recreation and Parks from Northern Virginia Community College. Hiring is underway for the Field Operations Manager position vacated by Mark Ahlijanian. Land Stewardship Manager Patrick Boleman is taking on added responsibilities in the interim.

Future HQ - Planning for the future office is underway and site review and renovations will begin once the building is vacated.

Board of Trustees Development - Beginning in May, quarterly financial statements will be shared at the January, May, September, and November Board meetings.

Planning for recruiting trustees for the 2020 Board term will begin at the May meeting. An Executive Committee will be formed including the President, VP, and Treasurer.

Farm Production, CSA, Retail -

- New **wholesale account** established at Common Market Food Co-op in Frederick MD with growth potential
- **Chefscape Leesburg** (indoor market) had a successful first week 3/21. Willowsford Farm is present with a farm stand throughout the season.
- New **marketing** pieces now available including magnets, and brochures with Farm Stand coupons for new residents. Targeted email series to 900+ CSA members from 2013-2018 highlights new CSA features and benefits available through Harvie, the new CSA software. Resident survey assessing Farm communications in progress.
- **"Feathered Fosters"** community outreach program has sold out
- Other **Farm Stand events**:
 - o May 4 "Grand Opening" with Golly Waffles
 - o Flavour food truck to serve brunch from Farm Garden during HOA Flea Market May 18th
 - o Outdoor yoga class in the Farm Garden (May-TBA)
- **Farm Field season** for 2019 begun with the spell of warm, dry weather. The farm team started tillage and bed prep for spring plantings. The earliest items to be planted will be hardy greens, onions, carrots, and beets. We are entering new marketing channels and want to make sure we have a diversity of offerings consistently throughout the season, meaning we will be planting and transplanting on a weekly basis.

Most notably is the new indoor, year-round farmers market at Chefscape in Leesburg. This new facility serves primarily as a high-end food court and incubator kitchen for chefs and food manufacturers. On Thursday evenings from 3-7pm, the common space is opened for a Farmers market of which Willowsford Farm is part. Our first market on March 21 was well received. We have prime placement near the front entrance and are one of two produce vendors at the market. We are also using this space as a drop point for our CSA program, encouraging members from the Leesburg area.

The Farm is also exploring wholesale relationships with surrounding businesses, including the Common Market food co-op in Frederick, MD, a grocer focused on local and organic products. This store recently secured another building to open a second, expanded location. There may be quite a bit of growth potential for Willowsford Farm alongside Common Market, and we will continue to explore product offerings to introduce at their locations.

Still working on an organic certification for the Farm; we are approaching the final stages.

The farm crew is changing as spring progresses, with the departure of Anya Rosen this week. Anya has served as a seasonal farmer, as well as the interim Farm Manager over the 2018 growing season. She has done an incredible job

managing the operation during a challenging period for the farm. We are grateful for the work and thought she put into the farm over the last few years, and thank her for her time, energy, and passion. New and familiar faces will be arriving at the farm this spring, including the return of Nathon, James, and Morgan as seasonal farmers, as well as Rory, a new seasonal farmer with some CSA distribution responsibilities. We are excited to have the full crew back and working hard.

Spring is always an exciting time on the farm, and this year is no different. There will be plenty of effort expended refining the countless changes that we have made in the last six months, and it seems the adjustments we have made thus far are moving us in the right direction.

- VII. The meeting was adjourned at 6:12pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 21, 4:30 pm.