

WILLOWSFORD CONSERVANCY
Meeting of the Board of Trustees
May 21, 2019, 4:30 pm
Sycamore House

MINUTES

Attending: Chris Bodley, Stan Settle, Mary Hegedus, Mark Trostle, Rick DiBella, Stacey Kessinger - Trustees; Iris Gestram, Executive Director and Collin Thompson, Farm Manager, Absent, Claudette Papathanasopoulous

- I. Call to Order at 4:30pm
- II. Approval of Agenda. Motion passed 5-0.
- III. Approval of Minutes. Motion passed 5-0.
- IV. New Business
 - 2018 Form 990
 - i. No comments on the 2018 draft tax return were received from the Board. The 2018 Form 990 was filed on May 15; a copy has been posted in the Conservancy online Document Center.
 - Employee Handbook [attachment]
 - i. Mark Trostle moved to adopt the employee handbook with the minor edits suggested. Rick DiBella seconded the motion. Passed 6-0.
 - Review of 1st Quarter Financial Statements [attachment]
 - i. The Board reviewed the 1st Quarter statements for FY2019. The Board made a note to review farm equipment use at the next budget review.
 - Board of Trustees Development
 - i. The Board reviewed a draft document for Board of Trustees Development to be further discussed and developed over the next few months with the intention to bring on new Board members during this timeframe.
- V. Old Business
 - None
- VI. Reports
 - **Projects & Facilities (Gestram):** Farm Garden; Farm Facility Drainfield; Amenities Rentals; Trail & Signage Upgrades
Farm Garden: Improvements were completed in time for the May 4 Farm Stand opening. In addition to providing a better shopping experience and reducing maintenance costs, the re-designed space now accommodates yoga classes, a pen for visiting farm animals, kids' play space, more room for the popular food trucks, and opportunities for resident rentals. Retail staff continue to receive positive feedback. Still underway are the installation of herbs in barrel planters, and the native plant demonstration beds.
Grange Farm Drainfield and Septic System construction and installation are completed. The system awaits hookup to the building and installation of the staff restroom.
Wood destroying insects were discovered in the Farm Stand structure. Immediate measures were taken, and further work may be required, such as staining the raw wood. Gutter replacement and drain issues are being investigated to prevent

rainwater intrusion. Insect/pest monitoring and control will be implemented for all Conservancy wooden structures and required wood treatments will be applied.

- **Programs & Events (Gestram)**

The Conservancy continues to support local schools. In May, we assisted Arcola Elementary with plants for the school garden, which we helped plant last year. Staff is assisting Brambleton Middle School with their school garden re-design including planting of a native plant garden.

Amenities Rentals: The Grant campsite continues to be a popular amenity. For May and June, 30 camp pad reservations have been received. Cedar Pond Pavilion had two rentals in April.

Maps, dates and documents for the 2019-2020 Deer Management Program were shared with the residents and posted in the website document center. Twenty-one hunters are registered, including 12 residents, 3 employees, and 6 volunteers.

2019 Programs and Events Overview: (attached below)

Trail & Signage Upgrades (Gestram)

- The Greens

Layout of the new Greens connector trail, Raptor Perch trail, is nearing completion. Plans are to have the trail established by late June for an expected July 4 opening. Mulch and gravel were spread along Wetlands Way to fix muddy conditions. A new trail connector from Bull Run Overlook to Hidden Meadow was built.

- The Grant

Problems with consistently muddy conditions along the southern Grant Loop trail have been fixed and trail upgrades completed. A boardwalk was installed across a wet section of the southern Grant Loop. A bridge is being built across the creek between Quinn Meadow Ct. and Blue Larkspur Ct.

- The Grange

The Old Farm Loop connector has been rerouted to improve trail use and eliminate issues with "wash out."

Signage: A sign inventory was completed to determine additional signage needs. Additional trail markers are being installed.

- **Administration (Gestram):** Staffing Update

The transition to QuickBooks and improvement of accounting processes and procedures has been completed.

Hiring Update: Steve Luckett was hired as Assistant Field Operations Manager effective May 1, reporting to Land Stewardship Manager Patrick Boleman who will oversee the Conservancy's Land Stewardship department. Steve spent nearly a decade working at Fairfax County Park Authority, caring for parks, recreational facilities, trails and forests in Herndon, Great Falls and Reston. Rob Gavin started as seasonal Landscape Maintenance Technician on April 9.

- **Farm (C. Thompson):** Farm Production, CSA, Retail

In this first week of CSA, we are feeling the spring rush as we increased the harvest to serve nearly 300 CSA customers. Ongoing equipment and infrastructure M&R projects include the farm garden renovation, and installation of the Grange barn septic system.

I am making plenty of observations about farm and field conditions in my first spring at Willowsford, and am starting to recognize challenges and opportunities my team and I will face this season:

Challenges:

- The farm has tremendous weed pressure due to past poor management of the weed seed bank, which can lead to explosive weed growth. With organic practices, we rely on mechanical cultivation, longer crop rotations and cover crops to combat weeds, which may take years to repair.
- The backlog of equipment, vehicle and infrastructure maintenance from past farm management takes extra time and resources. We have made tremendous strides while continuing to address the issue.
- The Farm has ended our relationship with the EatLoco farmers market at Chefscape in Leesburg. The steady Chefscape customer and sales decline made participation unprofitable. Recently, Chefscape closed permanently. We gained valuable lessons to consider for potential future participation in similar ventures.

Opportunities:

- Wholesale interest continues to grow. To date, sales are \$5,000 with a total 2019 budget of \$15,000. I anticipate substantial increases in sales assuming crop success and sufficient volume. Our main wholesale partner (Common Market Co-op) has requested two deliveries/week. We have adjusted harvest and labor schedules to accommodate, while balancing the need to provide for our CSA, Farm Stand and other wholesale buyers.
- The farm team is making better use of existing, underutilized equipment and is training more employees on its use, saving time and labor while boosting worker morale. We are finding and implementing other ways to save labor and to work more effectively.

In summary, there is plenty to be excited about and there are plenty of ongoing improvements to make. The team is performing well, and I am hopeful that this will be a productive year for the farm.

Farm Retail (A. Swensen):

Marketing Plan Implementation – The 2019 marketing plan is being closely followed. Refrigerator magnets were substituted for print ads in Brambleton's HOA magazine, as space in the magazine was unavailable. Our strongest marketing tool continues to be direct e-mail to residents, followed closely by the Willowsford HOA's weekly e-news. Data collected from the spring survey supports these conclusions. The survey also suggests that our efforts to inform residents about CSA changes were successful, with a significant majority reporting that they were aware of the new customized share program. The direct mail marketing campaign resulted in only 9 sign-ups and is not recommended for 2020.

Staffing – The 2019 retail team is now complete, with a seasonal assistant manager and two seasonal salesclerks. The Farm's excellent wholesale growth resulted in an increased need for farm labor. To assist, retail employees will staff the Boat House CSA drop and delivery of wholesale orders.

CSA – Much preparation has gone into the CSA using Harvie's customizable share program. We are confident of a successful rollout and prepared for last minute

adjustments as Retail and Production manage this completely new system. Vegetable shares sold well. With 39 pastured meat share subscribers, the popularity of the meats bodes well for future livestock possibilities. See update below.

Feathered Fosters sold out quickly with 75 participating households for livestock revenue of \$2,550. We expect to repeat the program in 2020.

The May 4 Farm Stand Opening was successful with \$4,360 in sales, compared to \$1,560 on opening day last year. The food truck, Golly Waffles, sold out and is eager to return.

Food Trucks continue to generate foot traffic at the Farm Stand. Flavour Food Truck also sold out on May 18 and requested future partnership opportunities. These early successes assist with filling future dates in the event calendar. Additional confirmed:

- Saturday June 8 – Roaming Coyote Food Truck
- Saturday June 22 – Two Smooth Dudes Food Truck
- Saturday July 6 – Happy Family Food Truck
- Saturday August 3 – Frenchman Food Truck

Farm Stand Programs:

- Farm Garden Yoga - Due to rain, the first two sessions were cancelled. The first class had only 4 participants, but positive feedback. Social media efforts are planned to assist in filling future spaces.
- Twilight Farm Tours (no registration required) will be held on the last Wednesday of each month, beginning May 29. Tour groups will depart on foot from the Farm Stand at 6 PM. Tours are designed in response to frequent requests for farm visits and farmer interaction, as well as to further education about seasonality and sustainable farming practices.
- Farm Summer Camp - Willowsford Farm will host its first full week of summer camp July 22-26. The camp sold out within the first week of registrations. We will also support "Farm Days" during the weeks of Discovery Camp, as in past years.

Retail Operations:

- Improved Profit Margins/Driving Sales - focus will remain on balancing the need for a widely appealing array of options with cost control and waste reduction. We will continue to identify new products, primarily non-perishables or items with longer shelf-life, to increase average transaction size.
- Launching 'Harvie Farm Stand', an online shopping program that allows non-members to place produce orders for pickup. We will add the service as harvest levels increase to support customers outside of CSA, and to facilitate online purchases of dairy and meats. Managing inventory from outside vendors between the Willowsford Farm Stand and the online Harvie Farm Stand is a challenge.
- Partners for Prepared Foods Items – At this time, we have not solidified a source for prepared foods to be sold at the Farm Stand or through Harvie. We will continue to search creatively for the right combination of skills and opportunity to meet the demand for ready-to-eat in a profitable way.

CSA Update:

	Total	Goal		2018 Shares
Main Veggie Shares:	274	300	91.33%	253
Family	115			
Personal	159			
Adventure	63	50	126.00%	
Meat Shares:	55	30	183.33%	
Farmers Choice	39			N/A
Chicken	16			13
Milk	47	40	117.50%	46
Eggs	166	200	83.00%	219
Flowers	42	50	84.00%	58
Total Sales (Gross)	\$259,497	Paid	\$ 138,433	

2019 Conservancy Programs & Events

- CSA Info Sessions (Farm Team); Sat., March 9 (55 attendees), and Sun, March 17 (40 registrants), The Lodge, and Sycamore House & Grange Farm (Farm Tour)
- Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Fundraiser, Fri, March 22, 6-10 pm, Sycamore House (sold out)
- Trail App Launch – 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 (35 registrants)
- Willowsford Wildlife - Beavers at Work (Andrew Richardson), Wed, April 24 (24), 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 (24), Sycamore House & Grange Trails
- Feathered Fosters (A. Swensen), April 27-May 4, Farm Stand, The Grange (75)
- 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 (21), 10 am-12 pm, Meet @ Pin Oak Park, The Grove
- Gardening with Native Plants – A Field Trip to Watermark Woods Nursery, Thur, June 20, 9:30-11:30 am, Watermark Woods Nursery (Julie Borneman, Iris Gestram)
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sun, June 23, 10 am, The Grove
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sunday, July 21, 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) (sold out)

- Discover Camps (ages 9-12), Mo-Fri, July 8-12 & July 15-19, 9 am-2 pm (almost full/20)
 - A Day at the Farm (Mondays, A. Swensen), The Grange
 - Nature Exploration Days: Plants & Pollinators (Fridays, P. Boleman), The Grange and The Greens
- Culinary Camps, Mondays, June 10, 17 and 24: A Day at the Farm (A. Swensen), The Grange
- Hunter Volunteer Day, Sat, July 27, 8:30 am-1:30 pm
- Trail App Nature Walk (P. Boleman), Sat., Aug 3, 4 pm, The Greens
- Native Plants in the Home Garden, Sun, Aug. 4, 9 am-12 pm, The Grange (Virginia Master Naturalists)
- Hunter Volunteer Day, Sun, Aug. 4, 8:30 am-1:30 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

VII. Other

VIII. The meeting was adjourned at 6:23pm.