

**WILLOWSFORD CONSERVANCY**  
**Meeting of the Board of Trustees**  
July 23, 2019, 4:30 pm  
Sycamore House

**MINUTES**

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

- I. Call to Order at 4:30pm
- II. Approval of Agenda. Motion passed 5-0.
- III. Approval of Minutes with title change from "Agenda" to "Minutes". Motion passed 5-0.
- IV. New Business
  - Review of 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Financial Statements (attachment)
    - i. Stacey to provide Willowsford staff with a report of closings in Willowsford for 2019
  - The Board appointed Treasurer Mary Hegedus as an additional signer on the Conservancy bank accounts effective July 23, 2019. Daniel Autino will remain in place as the other authorized signer on the Conservancy accounts.
  - 2020 Benefits, HR and Payroll Vendors
    - i. Iris reported that the Conservancy is researching other companies beyond Paychex to secure a better fee structure and better service and will submit a proposal to the Board by the September board meeting.
  - Board of Trustees Development (attachment)
    - i. The Board discussed potential candidates for the position(s) both within and outside Willowsford, areas to advertise/post the description, and the make-up of the new Board to include development team, residents and non-residents with the correct expertise.
  - Resident Open Space Violations
    - i. Iris shared with the board information on a range of resident open space violations the Conservancy is currently managing, the time and resources it costs the Conservancy to manage, and the lengthy process that is involved in resolving the issues and restoring the open space. The Board agreed the best first approach is to send a letter educating the residents on open space violations and consequences.
- V. Old Business
  - None
- VI. Reports
  - Projects & Facilities:**
    - Grange Farm Drainfield & Septic System: The project is completed.
    - Farm Stand Gutter Repair & Replacement: The project is completed.
  - Programs & Events**
    - Amenities Rentals: The Grant campsite continues to be a popular amenity. For May-July, 36 camp pad reservations have been received.

- Trail App: The Greens and The Grant portion of the new trail app were launched in June. All four villages are now served by the App which is available to residents free for download. A guided trail walk was offered in each village to introduce the app and help residents learn how to use it in the field.
- The Native Plant Demonstration Garden has been installed. Plants have grown in well, and interpretive plant labels assist visitors with selecting native plants for use in home gardens. The garden is also being used during education programs. A few remaining beds are scheduled to be planted this fall.
- The Conservancy launched a Weekly E-newsletter on July 11.
- 2019 Programs and Events Overview: see below.

#### **Land Stewardship** (Patrick Boleman, Land Stewardship Manager)

- During a June 16 work day in the Grange Wet Meadow, four large dump cart loads of Dogbane (an aggressive invasive plant) were removed by 6 volunteers. Volunteers are also assisting with trail maintenance, native plant garden maintenance, wildlife monitoring and other tasks.
- All riparian buffers in The Grange, Greens, Grant and Grove were mowed.
- Buffer strips were bush hogged in June as scheduled.
- The Conservancy is working with 4 residents to plan and guide residents' implementation of invasive plant removal and native plantings on Conservancy open space, including C. Bodley, J. Doolittle, J. Anderson and K. Tong. A written agreement and planting plans are prerequisites for each project.
- The Grove wetland (conversion of a former farm pond) has grown in well. The exclusion fence can be removed this winter.

#### **Trails:**

- Trails: trail mowing and clearing is a main focus for the Land Stewardship team during the spring and summer. While equipment can often be repaired in-house, with only two mowers shared by the team, the downtime of mowers and employees repairing them impacts mowing schedules.
- Numerous trail improvements have been completed:
  - o In The Grange, the Farm Loop connector between farm fields has been rerouted in response to a washout.
  - o In The Greens,
    - A new 2-mile section was opened in July: Raptor Perch trail runs through the center of The Greens, connecting to the Bull Run Overlook trail and adjacent home sections in south and east portions of the village, and to Wetlands Way/Spring Peeper Pond in the north. It creates additional, shorter hiking loops and improved overall resident access to The Greens trail system. In addition, a new trail connector now leads from the Hidden Meadow Event Field to the Bull Run Overlook Trail. Updated trail maps were posted on the Conservancy website. Trail signage is being added.
    - A stream crossing bridge was added at the south end of Raptor Perch trail.
    - Multiple wet sections were repaired by firming trails and adding water diversions.
    - A trail around Spring Peeper Pond was added tying in the new Wildlife Viewing Pavilion.
  - o In the Grant, various projects were completed, including:
    - A bridge between Quinn Meadow Ct. and Blue Larkspur Ct.
    - A boardwalk at the end of Meadow Star Pl.
    - Trails were hardened and much gravel added to wet sections at the southern end of the Grant Loop trail.
    - Various trail connectors were established.

- In the Grove, planning is underway for trail expansion into the western section of the village.

### **Business Operations**

- Hiring Update: Robert Gavin was promoted from seasonal Land Management Technician to full-time Ranger effective June 22.

### **Farm Production** (Collin Thompson, Farm Manager)

The farm is busy, with most of our time spent harvesting and processing product coming from the fields. With less rain than last year, the weed pressure is not as extreme, and we are able to get into the field when needed. The crew continues to do good work, and my goal of having employees stick to 40-hour work weeks has helped improve worker morale and productivity. I've outlined some key successes and challenges below:

#### Successes:

- Strong harvests on the first storage crops of the year. Onions and garlic look good overall, though we have seen some losses due to soil-borne disease pressure. The potato crop looks to be a success, with strong yields of beautiful spuds.
- Wholesale continues to be relatively strong. Our CSA demand does not leave a large surplus for wholesale partners, but we have consistently sold \$800-\$2000/week. This information is a valuable baseline for next year's production, to match the demand of our purchasers.
- We continue to develop the infrastructure to support production needs. This includes cooler modifications, repairs to the irrigation system, and improving storage spaces to streamline operations and increase capacity.
- A successful chicken harvest yielded around 175 birds in the freezer. This batch would have benefitted from being harvested a week or two earlier because the average bird size was in excess of what most of our customers prefer. As a result, we may adjust how they are marketed. This batch was the first using a new system and while it was successful, there are lessons learned that will improve operations for future batches.

#### Challenges:

- Equipment repair issues continue, primarily due to a past lack of preventative maintenance. Midseason repairs are costly, both in financial terms and lost productivity. We continue to identify and prevent issues before they happen.
- Deer continue to be an issue within the exclusion fence. While we have addressed fence holes or potential entrances, once deer have found their way in, it is difficult to locate them due to the tree and brush cover. The farm has secured a kill permit and sought the assistance of hunters within the Conservancy's deer management program to help with deer removal.

### **Farm Retail** (Ashley Swensen, Retail Manager)

Farm Stand sales are consistent week to week and show modest increases thus far for July over June. Food truck dates are well attended, with vendors expressing interest in future dates. Twilight Farm Tours are well received, and the Farm sessions during Discover Camps have been positive. Retail assistant manager Alexandra Burnham is assisting as delivery driver for wholesale orders and off-site CSA drops.

Increasing sales and customer traffic outside of CSA hours (Wednesdays, Sundays) is an ongoing challenge. In August, we hope to increase foot traffic with a Sunday food truck. We are adding branded merchandise and are sourcing produce items NOT available through CSA to encourage impulse purchases during pick-up time frames.

Projects

- Winter CSA promotion will begin in late August; it will run again from December - February. Capacities are yet to be determined. In addition to vegetable shares, we will offer a Willowsford Whole Chicken subscription, milks from South Mountain Creamery, eggs, and our Farmers Choice Pastured Meat Share in collaboration with Whiffletree Farm. We anticipate adding a new year-round subscription to eggs and milk for 50 weeks/year. 'Farm Stand Online' will also remain available in the off-season.
- We continue to pursue partnerships for prepared foods offerings through CSA and Farm Stand Online, and baked goods for the Farm Stand and online sales. We have begun inquiries for culinary partners for a Farm-to-Table event in collaboration with the HOA, as outlined in our marketing plan. A tentative date has been set for a family-oriented volunteer event (Aug 7 – Potato picking), also outlined in the marketing plan as an opportunity for community outreach.

CSA Update:

We continue to see mid-season signups for Vegetable CSA Shares (share items in grey are unavailable for midseason purchase) and expect to meet our goal of 300 shares sold. The Harvie software system has generated positive feedback from most customers and provides helpful data for future crop planning.

Current CSA Membership (as of 7-18-2019)	Total	Budget		2018 Shares
Main Veggie Shares:	289	300	96%	253
Family	117			
Personal	172			
Adventurous Eater	63	50	126%	
Meat Shares:	55	30	183%	
Farmers Choice	39			
Chicken	16			
Milk	47	40	118%	
				N/A
Eggs	173	200	86%	
				13
Flowers	47	50	94%	46
Total Sales (Gross)	\$269,146	Paid:	\$189,051	219
				58

Additional Online Sales

The recent launch (through Harvie) of "Farm Stand Online" allows subscribers to opt-in to notifications about availability of extra produce for online purchase without a full-season commitment. It offers a new direct-to-consumer sales outlet for crop surplus. "Extra" purchases continue to increase week-over-week as our seasonal offerings expand.

'Farm Stand Online' (Opened June 21)	
Subscribers	109
Boxes Sold	14
Box Revenue	\$345
"Extras" Purchased	\$1,655

## 2019 Marketing Analysis

CSA Marketing		
Marketing Avenue	Members Added	Sales
E Blast	70	\$51,972
Social Media	7	\$ 7,101
Refer-A-Friend	6	\$ 3,592
Mailer	9	\$ 4,950

## 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 Woods 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 (Ashley Swensen), April 27-May 4, 11-2 pm Farm Stand, The Grange (75)
- Earth Day Watershed Cleanup, Sunday, April 28 – 4 resident groups
- Trail App Nature Walk (Patrick 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 (Patrick Boleman), Tue, May 28 (23), 10 am-12 pm, Meet @ Pin Oak Park, The Grove
- Terrific Turtles – family program by Virginia Master Naturalists, Sat, June 15, 2:00-3:30 pm, Cedar Pond Pavilion, The Greens (33)
- Wet Meadow Volunteer Day, Sun, June 16, 9:00 am, The Grange (6 volunteers)
- Gardening with Native Plants – Field Trip to Watermark Woods Nursery, Thur, June 20, 9:30-11:30 am (8)
- Trail App Nature Walk (Patrick Boleman), Sun, June 23 10 am, The Grove (15)
- Farm Twilight Tour, Wed., June 26, 6 pm, The Grange
- Enjoy the Beauty of Butterflies and Dragonflies – Walk with LWC, Sat., July 20, 9:30 am, The Grange Wet Meadow (16)
- Trail App Nature Walk (Patrick Boleman), Sunday, July 21 (35) 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 (A. Swensen) (20)
  - 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 (20)
    - Nature Exploration Days: Plants & Pollinators (Fridays, P. Boleman), The Grange and The Greens (20)
  - o Culinary Camps, Mondays, June 10, 17 and 24: A Day at the Farm (A. Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm (20)
- Hunter Volunteer Day, Sat, July 27, 8:30 am – 1:30 pm
- Farm Twilight Tour, Wed., July 31, 6 pm, The Grange
- Trail App Nature Walk (Patrick Boleman), Sat., Aug 3, 4 pm, The Greens
- LCPS Independence HS Volunteer Day, Sat., Aug. 3, The Greens

- Native Plants in the Home Garden, presented by Virginia Master Naturalists, Sun, Aug. 4, 9 am – 12 pm, Sycamore House and Farm Garden, The Grange
- Hunter Volunteer Day, Sun, Aug. 4, 8:30 am – 1:30 pm, The Greens
- Farm Volunteer Day, Wed., Aug. 7, Grange Farm
- Farm Twilight Tour, Thur, Aug. 8, 6 pm, The Grange
- Raptor Perch Trail Opening – Guided Walk with A. Richardson, Wed., Aug. 14, 5 pm, The Greens
- 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Bonfire & Camp-over, Sat-Sunday, Sept. 14-15 (Rain date Sept. 28-19), Hidden Meadow Event Field, The Greens
- Autumn Fest with wildlife ambassadors from the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center, Saturday, October 12, The Greens

VII. The meeting was adjourned at 5:57pm.