

WILLOWSFORD CONSERVANCY
Meeting of the Board of Trustees
September 17, 2019, 4:30 pm
Sycamore House

MINUTES

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

- I. Call to order at 4:30pm
- II. Approval of Agenda, motion passed 7-0.
- III. Approval of Minutes, motion passed 7-0.
- IV. New Business
 - 2020 Budget Planning
 - o The Board discussed the assessment increase for 2020 (exact number to be determined based on budget figures). Budget review and approval is scheduled for the November 5, 2019 meeting.
 - o The Conservancy plans to add a mechanic position to the staff team in 2020 to handle equipment maintenance and repair for trail maintenance, land stewardship and farm operations. In 2020, as the developer's marketing support is reduced, part-time employee Jamie McArdle will take on communications responsibilities currently provided by Kelly Smith. Currently, there are no plans to add education staff or a receptionist-type position. Current staff will continue to handle education and admin functions. The above essentially completes the Conservancy's full-time staffing plan. Additions will be considered in the future based on operational needs and on resident demand for programs and services.
 - o The Board discussed the location for the Conservancy office. The Conservancy will likely occupy the Boat House beginning in the 4th quarter of 2020 [update: 1st Qu 2021]. Budget planning will include estimated office expenses. A future Conservancy office will provide weekly scheduled hours for residents to visit the Conservancy office along with opportunities to schedule time with Conservancy staff to review business matters, in addition to the phone and e-mail interactions and scheduled resident meetings the Conservancy currently provides. Due to the limited nature of the planned facility, staff and budget, the Conservancy facility will function as an office environment. No "visitor center" type facility, staffing or services are planned or budgeted at this time.
 - o 2020 Board Meeting Preliminary Schedule – five times per year, 3rd Tue, 5:00 pm alternating between Sycamore House and The Lodge:

January 21, March 10, June 16, September 15, November 10 (budget approval).

V. Old Business

- Board of Trustees Development
 - o 2020 New Trustees
 - o Appointment of Secretary – Claudette Papathanasopoulous will be appointed as secretary for 2020.
 - o Three new trustees were selected to join the Board effective January of 2020: Greg Licamele and Chase Rowan (Willowsford residents), and Avi Sareen, president of TNT Environmental, Inc., a natural resource consulting firm. Willowsford resident Claudette Papathanasopoulous will remain on the Board, along with Mark Trostle (President), Rick DiBella (Vice President) and Mary Hegedus (Treasurer). Stan Settle, Stacey Kessinger and resident Chris Bodley will step off the board effective January 2020. In 2020, the 7-member Board will include three Willowsford residents, three Founder representatives, and one non-resident expert. During the Founder control period, which continues until the Willowsford community is completed, the Founder appoints Conservancy trustees.
 - o Board Orientation and Team Building – New trustees are invited to attend the November 5 board meeting. Prior to November 5, Iris will set up a board orientation, including Mark, Claudette, Conservancy management staff, and the new trustees. Orientation will continue at the November 5 and January 21 meetings with historical review of business operations and trajectory of operations and budget.
 - o The Board Executive Committee, appointed by the Founder, includes Mark Trostle, Rick DiBella and Mary Hegedus.
- Communication of new Board Members – The Conservancy will share board information and bios through the Conservancy and HOA e-newsletters, on the Conservancy website, and in the Willowsford Life publication beginning in October.
- 2020 Benefits, HR and Payroll
 - Due to the expense and difficulty of the Paychex system, after researching other companies, Iris recommended that the Conservancy move to Kelly as a payroll, HR and time & labor management system. Kelly also offers full benefits integration with the Conservancy's benefits broker, Loudoun Insurance Group. Mark Trostle moved to approve the transition from Paychex to Kelly beginning January 1, 2020; Mary Hegedus seconded the motion. Motion passed 7-0.
- 2019 Resale Fee Income: following up on the July 23 budget review, Iris confirmed that 2019 resale fee income is on budget as of June 30. The discrepancy between actual income and the June 30 statements was due to a timing issue in receiving and recording the income.

VI. Reports

Land Stewardship (Patrick Boleman, Land Stewardship Manager)

Habitat and Wildlife Management:

- Volunteers with the Deer Management Program manually removed invasive joint headgrass (*Arthraxon hispidus*) from the Wet Meadow. Three truck loads were removed. Volunteers continue to assist with the maintenance of the Grange Native Plant Garden.
- Boy scouts installed three American Kestrel boxes and a raptor perch at the Grange farm field (Aug. 31). This meets wildlife conservation goals by providing nesting habitat for a bird species in conservation need as well as natural agricultural pest control through predation on small mammals.
- Deer Management Program maps and interactive zone maps for mobile use are now being created in house by Conservancy staff.
- Late summer bush hogging is underway, to be completed in September.

Trails:

- Trail signage for the new Raptor Perch trail has been installed. Directional signage improvements are under review for all trails. A volunteer assists with carpentry work to create trail marker posts.
- Boardwalk sections along Wetlands Way are deteriorating. Staff have been removing deteriorated sections, improving or rerouting trails. Comprehensive boardwalk improvements will be completed this winter. Deer Management Program volunteers removed a large section of deteriorated boardwalk (July 27).
- Deer Management Program volunteers removed barbed wire along the Wetlands Way Spring Peeper Pond connector trail (Aug 4).
- All wet sections along Wetlands Way have been addressed through adding mulch, aggregate and drainage.
- Volunteers with the Independence High School cross-country team trimmed vegetation along the Grant trails (Aug 4). The cross-country team will be using Grant trails this fall for training runs.
- Overall, volunteer assistance with trail maintenance, habitat and wildlife management is increasing.

Programs & Events (Gestram)

- Amenities Rentals: The Grant campsite continues to be popular. For May-September, there are 52 camp pad reservations. Two rentals for the Hidden Meadow Event Field are scheduled for September and November.
- The Annual Community Bonfire & Camp-over on Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 14-15 at the Hidden Meadow Event Field was very successful with 273 attendees (up from approx. 200 in 2018). Residents shared much positive feedback after the event.
- 2019 Programs and Events Overview: see below.

2019 Conservancy Programs & Events

March

- CSA Info Sessions (Farm Team); Sat, March 9 (55 attendees), and Sun, March 17 (40), 11 am-1:00 pm, The Lodge, and Sycamore House & Grange Farm (Farm Tour)
- Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Fundraiser- sponsored by Willowsford Conservancy, Fri, March 22, 6-10 pm, Sycamore House (sold out)
- Launch of the Conservancy Trail App – March 26

April

- 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 (Ashley Swensen), April 27-May 4, 11-2 pm Farm Stand, The Grange (75)
- Earth Day Watershed Cleanup, Sunday, April 28 – 4 resident groups

May

- Trail App Nature Walk (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 9 am – 2 pm
- Wildlife at Willowsford - Bluebird Walk (Boleman), Tue, May 28 (23) 10 am-12 pm, Meet @ Pin Oak Park, The Grove

June

- Terrific Turtles – a 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
- Gardening with Native Plants – Field Trip to Watermark Woods Nursery, Thur, June 20, 9:30-11:30 am (8)
- Trail App Nature Walk (Boleman), Sun, June 23 10 am, The Grove (6)

July

- Trail App Nature Walk (Boleman), Sunday, July 21, 10 am The Grant
- Summer Camps:
 - 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 Camp (ages 9-12), Mo-Fri, July 8-12, 9 am-2 pm (sold out)

- A Day at the Farm (Mondays, Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm; Nature Exploration Days: Plants & Pollinators (Fridays, Boleman), The Grange
- Discover Camp (ages 9-12), Mo-Fri, July 15-19, 9 am-2 pm (sold out)
- A Day at the Farm (Mondays, Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm; Nature Exploration Days: Plants & Pollinators (Fridays, Boleman), The Greens
- Culinary Camps, Mondays, June 10, 17 and 24: A Day at the Farm (Swensen), Grange Farm Garden & Farm (sold out)
- LWC Butterfly Walk, Sunday, July 20
- Hunter Volunteer Day, Sat, July 27, 8:30 am – 1:30 pm, The Greens
- Farm Twilight Tour, Wed., July 31, 6 pm, The Grange

August

- Trail App Nature Walk (Boleman), Sat., Aug 3, 4 pm, The Greens
- LCPS Independence HS Volunteer Day, Sunday, Aug. 4, The Grant
- 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 (16)
- Farm Garden Volunteer Day, 7:30-10:00 am, 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
- Saturday, August 31: boy scouts from troop 1430 installed American kestrel boxes and a raptor perch around The Grange farm fields. Three nesting boxes were installed around the perimeter of the field along with an artificial perch in the center as a hunting vantage point for raptors such as hawks, owls, and falcons.

September

- 5th Annual Community Bonfire & Camp-over, Sat-Sunday, Sept. 14-15, Hidden Meadow Event Field, The Greens (273)
- TinkerGarten Nature Play Classes, Sunday, Nov. 3, 10:30-11:45 am and 12:15-1:30 pm, Grange Farm Garden (24+24)

October

- Autumn Fest, Saturday, October 12, The Greens with Wildlife Ambassadors from the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center
- TinkerGarten Nature Play Classes, Sunday, Nov. 3, 10:30-11:45 am and 12:15-1:30 pm, Grange Farm Garden (24+24)

November

- TinkerGarten Nature Play Classes, Sunday, Nov. 3, 10:30-11:45 am and 12:15-1:30 pm, Grange Farm Garden (24+24)

Administration (Gestram)

- Puja Tucker was hired as the Conservancy's new Business Operations Manager effective September 9, replacing Karen Siler.
- Loudoun Insurance Company was selected as the new benefits broker. Staff are researching new vendors for HR, Payroll and Timecard functions to replace Paychex effective January 1, 2020. Benefits information will be provided in October.
- A comprehensive pest control plan for Conservancy facilities is being implemented.
- The Lightridge group residence is being converted to a single-family tenant house to better meet employee housing needs, improve upkeep and maintenance, and increase rental income. A rent subsidy will be offered to out-of-state seasonal farm employees as needed. The house remained vacant for most of 2019 due to lack of interest from farm seasonals.

Farm Production (Collin Thompson, Farm Manager)

- This year's weather has been a mixed blessing. An overall dry season provided good field access. However, a few weather events led to problems with storage crops which require a long growing season and cannot be re-planted. A few poorly timed storms washed out freshly planted fall carrot and beet fields, leading to displaced and compacted soils and spotty stands of roots. We are working on alternative options but expect yields to be down of these specific crops.
- This time of year, we usually also see disease pressure build, leading to the decline of some crops. While this is expected, the severity and impact are typically unknown. A sharp decline in field tomato plantings means there will likely not be enough volume to process surpluses into sauces or salsas. The final planting following behind that will hopefully yield well and allow us to continue including tomatoes in CSA shares, and potentially do a small run of value-added products.
- We continue to uncover challenges with equipment and facilities due to the lack of past maintenance. We continually improve the processes for maintenance and condition of equipment; there is still a backlog of items, some likely needing more substantial repairs.
- Deer continue to be an issue, and steps are being taken to harvest nuisance deer. We are developing a plan for staff to better control flow of animals in, though the first step is to remove the nuisance animals currently residing within the fence.
- Despite these challenges, the year has been very productive. CSA numbers are strong, with winter sign ups coming in quickly. The personalized CSA model we piloted this year led to greater customer satisfaction. I am hopeful that customers have enjoyed this year's offerings and product quality; year-end survey results will shed more light on that.
- The chickens continue to do well, growing and producing. Hawk pressure continues among the laying hens, but the strategies we implemented have reduced losses substantially. The pigs are thriving in their woodlot, putting on good weight and enjoying the farm scraps from the vegetable operation.

- One area of focus this fall is to take some land out of active production at the Founders Drive farm and put it into cover crops, intentionally leaving them fallow to better handle weed pressure and improve soil tilth and nutrient cycling. This important strategy in organic production will lead to greater productivity and improve overall health of the system. Additional growing areas are being explored at the Grant Farm.

Farm (Swensen): Farm Production, CSA, Retail

Main Season CSA Membership (Sales Capped)	Total	Budget		2018 Shares
Main Veggie Shares:	302	300	100%	253
Family	123			
Personal	179			
Adventurous Eater	63	50	126%	
Meat Shares:	55	30	183%	
Farmers Choice	39			N/A
Chicken	16			13
Milk	47	40	118%	46
Eggs	181	200	90%	219
Flowers	47	50	94%	58
Total Sales (Gross)	\$269,209			

2020 Winter Season CSA Membership	Total to Date	Budget
Winter Vegetables	32	100
Winter Milk	10	20
Winter Meats	4	20
Winter Eggs	22	100
Winter Chickens	3	12

Additional Online Sales	
"Farm Stand Online" Subscribers	124
Boxes Sold (Since 6/21 launch)	34
Box Revenue	\$1,096
"Extra Items" Purchased	\$4,154

Summary

The Farm team is pleased to have met or exceeded the sales goals for the summer season except for flowers and eggs. Online sign-up for all main season share types are now closed. Winter CSA sales have had a strong start after just one Winter marketing email to current CSA members and one social media post. Additional emails to both “warm” leads in the CSA database and to Willowsford residents are planned, along with a structured social media campaign.

We continue to see sales growth and future opportunity in both the “Farm Stand Online” option to purchase a “sample” CSA box, and in the inclusion of extra products as add-ons for traditional CSA subscribers. Items presented so far include Willowsford pork and chicken, frozen bread, honey, fruit from partner farms, bulk portions of vegetables for canning, and excess CSA crops.

The strength of CSA has created a relative scarcity of Willowsford Farm items available for sale in the Farm Stand, with most retail produce this season coming from Tuscarora Organic Co-op. This requires a continued focus on the balance between providing product and preventing waste. The increased selection of shelf-stable foods and addition of gift options, as well as the seasonal shift to hardier crops like winter squashes, will allow us to continue to reduce product loss. Hourly retail labor has been reduced from previous seasons and will remain lean through the close of the market, as we continue to proactively manage operating costs.

Three weeks ago, we began stocking the Boat House CSA pickup with ice creams and snacks available for purchase a la carte. Although this has not yet taken off, we do see modest sales that help to offset the labor involved in staffing a CSA pickup. This gradual start will provide us with insight and data to consider expanding these options next year, particularly during pool season.

Food trucks have been an excellent addition to the Farm Stand programming this season, and we have begun to schedule repeat dates for our most successful partners. Unfortunately, the comparatively low level of foot traffic on Sundays has been an obstacle to scheduling vendors, and Tuesdays and Saturdays remain our strongest days for both sales and programming.

Upcoming Challenges for the 2020 Farm Business Plan

- Identifying and pursuing off-site CSA pickup location partners
- Cost/Benefit Analysis of potential farmer’s market participation as another Direct-to-Customer revenue stream
- Shifting the structure of Meat Shares to allow for preferences and customization as additional Willowsford meat products become available
- Assessing the viability and logistics of a “Fruit Add-On” CSA share
- Finding more productive options for the space in the Farm Garden
- Driving sales and/or adjusting schedules in the Farm Stand to increase revenue
- Recruiting new produce partners to supplement Tuscarora Organic Co-op as their selections become less reliable.

VII. The meeting was adjourned at 5:47pm.