

**WILLOWSFORD CONSERVANCY**  
**Meeting of the Board of Trustees**

January 13, 2020, 5:00 pm  
Sycamore House

**Minutes**

**ATTENDEES**

Board members: Rick DiBella, Mary Hegedus, Greg Licamele, Claudette Papathanasopoulos, Chase Rowan, Avi Sareen, Mark Trostle  
Conservancy staff: Iris Gestram, Executive Director; Collin Thompson; Farm Manager; Ashley Swensen, Farm Sales and Marketing Manager

- I. Call to Order at 5:00pm
- II. Approval of Agenda: motion passed 7 to 0
- III. Approval of previous Minutes [attachment]: motion passed 7 to 0
- IV. Welcome and introductions: Mike Russiello and Bill Atwill attended from the HOA board
- V. New Business
  - A. 2020 Amendment HOA-Conservancy Reciprocal Use Agreement [attachment]

The agreement is being updated to more accurately reflect current and planned usage of the amenities. There are two main changes:

- 1) Since the Conservancy no longer uses the HOA's commercial kitchens for commercial food preparation, the agreement has been amended to reduce the maximum amount the Conservancy shall pay into the reserve replacement funds for the kitchens. The previous agreement required that the Conservancy pay an amount not to exceed \$5,000 annually. The amended agreement requires the Conservancy pay an amount not to exceed \$2,000 annually. The Conservancy is still permitted to use the kitchens for programs with prior approval.
- 2) Because the Willowsford developer is still using the Boat House for marketing purposes, the date on which the Conservancy plans to begin leasing the Boat House from the HOA was changed from January 1, 2020 to January 1, 2021. The amended agreement also specifies that the Conservancy will be responsible for all costs associated with landscaping (except that the HOA will provide regular mowing for aesthetic continuity), operation and day-to-day maintenance of the Boat House. The Conservancy will also annually contribute

a proportional share to the HOA's reserve replacement funds to cover the Boat House. The actual lease document has not been written yet.

Mark motioned to approve the amended reciprocal use agreement. Motion passed 7 to 0.

The HOA board of directors plans to discuss the amended agreement at their meeting on January 16, 2020.

#### B. 2019-2020 Deer Management Program Update

The program was successfully completed without any issues. In total, 125 antlerless deer and 11 antlered deer were taken for a total of 136 deer, compared to 61 in total last season. The higher take rate is a reflection of the proficiency of hunters and improvements to the program. 96 deer were taken by only 4 hunters.

The Conservancy is expecting to receive the final part of the 3-year Smithsonian deer study in the coming weeks. Because of development happening around Willowsford, more deer are believed to be moving to our neighborhood and the population is still increasing despite the management program. The increase would be greater without our program. Deer management to achieve a decrease in the deer density in Willowsford open space is a long-term effort,

The board discussed chronic wasting disease, which has been found in Virginia but not in Loudoun County. If this disease becomes a problem in our region, we may some day shift from controlling the deer pollution to supporting it. For now, though, the population is so high that the Deer Management Program will likely continue for several years before the population is reduced to a sustainable level as determined by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. VDGIF closely monitors deer numbers and deer browse impact in Loudoun County.

#### C. Community Update Meetings

The meetings are scheduled for Feb 19 & 25.

During the meetings, the Conservancy will provide information about the mission of the Conservancy and its current projects.

Board members suggested presenting information and statistics that describe the Conservancy's work, such as: budget spent on trail repairs, tree work, invasive removals and other tasks; the number of features like bridges, boardwalks and other structures the Conservancy maintains. The board also discussed possible ways to illustrate the Conservancy size/acreage to help residents understand the full scale and benefit of the Conservancy.

#### D. Agenda Items for March 24 Agenda

- 1) Conservancy "Endowment"
- 2) Open Space Encroachments / Enforcement of Violations
- 3) Capital Reserve Study

Board members were asked to inform Iris of any additional items.

#### VI. Old Business

##### A. Resident Feedback - 2020 Assessments

Some feedback and Facebook group discussions were noted. A few residents reached out to the Conservancy and HOA board members. The new assessment is in line with what the Conservancy anticipated and had been presenting to residents over previous years.

#### VII. Committee Updates

- 1) Executive Committee:
  - a. The committee approved a 3-year ED Employment Agreement for Iris Gestram
  - b. The committee is preparing a Board Indemnity Agreement. It should be added to the agenda for the next board meeting.

#### VIII. Staff Reports – a written report is entered into minutes

##### 1) Land Stewardship

See attached report. In addition:

Steve Luckett is doing a great job filling in for Patrick until a new Land Stewardship Manager is found. No qualified applicants for Patrick's position have been found yet. It is difficult to get qualified experts to relocate here where cost of living is so high.

##### 2) Farm/Collin:

See attached report. In addition:

This is the 5<sup>th</sup> week of winter CSA. The trial of home delivery is going well.

Livestock are currently being moved to the Grange farm. The benefits of this are reducing staff travel time and improving nutrient cycling in fields. The farm might consider moving livestock back to the Peach Orchard farm in the future if/when the operation reaches scale. For now, the farm plans to lease out Peach Orchard Farm so that the land can be better maintained, and the farm can receive added revenue. The farm that is leasing the land for keeping cattle and potentially other livestock has a similar philosophy to sustainable livestock management. They will abide by Willowsford standards.

Farm is doing a lot of maintenance and repair for 2020 season, including a significant tractor repair.

Seven hogs are being processed in January, with 10 more planned for February. We will hold 3 of the hogs for breeding.

3) Retail & CSA/Ashley:

See attached report. In addition:

The farm marketing plan is up and running for 2020 season. Sales so far are on track.

Ashley is preparing for maternity leave starting in April. She is creating written materials to assist Alexandra Burnham, who will cover her responsibilities while on leave.

4) Programs & Events – See attached report

5) Administration

See attached report. In addition:

Iris is impressed so far with Kelly Payroll, the new, smaller company that is managing payroll, HR and timecards.

IX. Other

X. Adjourned at 6:37pm

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ED REPORT

**Land Stewardship** (Steve Lockett, Assistant Field Operations Manager)

Trail Maintenance

- Staff are completing trail infrastructure surveys in the four villages, inspecting and recording culverts, bridges, stream crossings and other infrastructure to develop and implement preventative maintenance plans. Required cleanings and repairs are completed as inspection progresses. A sample of the detailed Grange infrastructure inventory was shared with the board.
- Trail signage for the new Grove Pinewoods Loop trail is underway. The trail opening is planned for spring 2020. A revised trail map was shared with the board. Trail maps are posted on the Conservancy website.
- The Greens trail brochure was re-designed for in-house printing. With the new Trail App in place, smaller quantities of brochures will be printed in-house saving cost and allowing for quicker updates. A copy of the revised trail brochure was shared with the board. Brochures for the other three villages will be re-formatted for in-house printing as supplies run out.
- Volunteer Mike Kennedy is assisting with blazing The Grant trail system.
- The Lightridge Farm Road tenant house has been readied for move-in of the new tenant, employee Steve Lockett, effective February 1. Hookup to County water and well-abandonment are underway.

Tree Work and Work Orders

- Tree work and work orders continue to be a major focus of weekly work time.

Staff Development

- Assistant Manager Steve Lockett, and Ranger Rob Garvin are completing arborist training to continue managing tree work in-house to lower operating costs and provide residents with prompt and knowledgeable service.
- The Land Stewardship team will attend the NOVA Woods & Wildlife Conference in February.

Firewood

- Firewood and firewood rack sales in FY2019 totaled \$7,750 (\$5,742 budgeted) compared to \$3,700 revenue in FY2018. Thirty-four (34) orders were received in 2019. Staff are consistently splitting firewood and delivering larger quantities to residents.

**Wildlife Management:**

- The 2019-2020 season of the Conservancy deer management program successfully ended on Jan 4. A total of 136 deer were harvested (compared to 61 deer in the 2018-2019 season), including 125 antlerless deer and 11 antlered deer; 45 deer were taken using archery. The four most successful hunters took 96 deer, including 91 antlerless deer. Deer harvest by village\*:

74 deer (54%) - The Grant

47 deer (35%) - The Greens

4 deer (3%) - The Grove (limited 3 days of firearms hunting, 1 hunting zone)

11 deer (8%) as part of Willowsford Farm nuisance deer control.

\*Deer take reflects both deer pressure and hunting effort. The Conservancy will continue to improve the program as well as hunter selection for most effective deer management to reduce deer browsing impact and improve forest regeneration in Willowsford open space.

Completing its 4<sup>th</sup> year, the Conservancy deer management program has an excellent safety and harvest record.

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

- Winter production for CSA and wholesale markets is going well. The high tunnels are full of high-quality product with only minor losses to fungal pressure, which is common in winter months. Winter shares have been robust, and we have a good inventory of storage crops for the remaining shares. Supplemental product may only need to be purchased to add variety to the shares.
- Conversations with potential buyers for the 2020 season include a potential high-volume client that would allow us to sell a larger amount of produce through wholesale channels. This would complement direct-to-consumer sales (CSA, Farm Stand, Farmers Markets) and allow us to plant larger sections of lower-maintenance crops, capitalizing on the economy of scale the Farm is equipped for but cannot achieve with current CSA share numbers. Because of these buyers' emphasis on high-quality and local products, pricing is more favorable than other wholesale outlets.
- The farm is improving efficiency by relocating the livestock to the Grange farm location. This eliminates staff travel twice daily to the Peach Orchard location and permit better supervision of operations and animal welfare. The Grange farm location can accommodate anticipated 2020 livestock numbers. The Farm may consider relocating operations back to Peach Orchard if the livestock enterprise expands in the future. Ideally, livestock grazing can integrate with vegetable production to enhance the soil biology, while we continue to maintain high food safety standards. Peach Orchard farm fields and certain infrastructure would be leased to a sustainable livestock farmer for added farm revenue.
- Staff have performed routine equipment maintenance and made improvements to the main barn and office facilities. These include the installation of a (salvaged) kitchen for staff use, reconfiguring lighting, and redesigning existing spaces to accommodate the egg washing equipment. The goal is to have equipment and facilities ready for the coming growing season and the return of seasonal employees in April.

### **Current challenges:**

- One of our primary tractors is in the shop due to clutch issues. These types of repairs can be costly. Because this tractor is an older model, we are considering

options for repair versus trading in a few pieces of equipment for a tractor that better suits our needs.

- The farm's primary 2019 wholesale buyer continues to struggle. Through 2019, purchasing volume has decreased substantially, and they have been unresponsive to 2020 planning. Willowsford Farm will rely less heavily on this account as originally planned and will focus on developing new wholesale partnerships.

Overall, we are making good strides and are effectively using the winter season to prepare for a successful 2020 farm year.

**Farm Retail & CSA (Ashley Swensen, Sales & Marketing Manager)**

**2020 Season CSA Sales & Statistics**

	2020 Total to Date	Membership Goal		2019 Shares
Main Veggie Shares:	46	350	13.14%	300
Family	10			
Personal	28			
Starter	8			
Meat Shares:	6	30	20.00%	38
Farmers Choice	4			
Chicken	2			
Milk	9	40	22.50%	48
Eggs	29	200	14.50%	181
Flowers	11	50	22.00%	47
Total Sales (Gross)	<b>\$42,221</b>	Budget	<b>\$347,800</b>	
			<b>12%</b>	

<b>Avg Weekly Veggie Basket</b>	<b>\$24.90</b>
Total Veg Income \$28,640	
Avg Weekly Veggie Basket 2019	\$23.90
Avg Projected Weekly CSA Sales	\$1,688.84

2019 Demographics		
Total Household Memberships	369	
Members from WSF	231	63%
Members Other	138	37%

2020 CSA Season sales are off to a positive start, with 24 members taking advantage of a \$20 coupon for season commitments made by Dec 31. A key feature of Harvie, the automatic renewal of previous season memberships, is scheduled to run on Jan 17 with approximately 158 still opted-in for renewal of various shares. Currently, 163 vegetable

shares are already enrolled in automatic renewal. We expect some additional drop off as final email communications are sent prior to the opt-out deadline. Overall, the tool appears to be a strong benefit to Harvie's programming.

Additional marketing this quarter includes:

- Print advertising in Willowsford Life, Brambleton Magazine, and Broadlands 'Our Neck of the Woods', highlighting the addition of the home delivery service and expanded off-site pickup locations.
- An email campaign series targeting warm leads, WSF residents, and prior members who have not yet renewed.
- We continue to pursue additional pickup locations in the Aldie and Leesburg areas.

In preparation for the spring season, we are creating written materials to support the management team, specifically Assistant Manager Alexandra Burnham, with coverage of Ashley's responsibilities during maternity leave. The following staff resources are in production:

- Manuals for Harvie and Shopkeep
- SOPs for CSA preparation & logistics
- Inventory list by vendor with pricing and order pars
- Social media posting guidelines and calendar
- Email response template and FAQs
- 2020 events calendar with remaining planning tasks
- Archive of 8 weeks of prepared CSA/Conservancy e-newsletters and CSA meal plans
- Marketing calendar with artwork/text for submissions through July
- Volunteer schedule, contacts, and list of responsibilities.

## **Business Operations**

Programs and Events:

- 2020 programming kicks off on January 19 with the 6-week Tinkergarten outdoor nature exploration classes in The Grange.

Administration:

- The transition of payroll, HR and Timecard functions from Paychex to Kelly has been completed and the first payroll was processed through the new system. New health insurance and ancillary benefits (dental, vision, LTD and Life & AD&D insurance) are in place and the new 401k plan has been set up with T. Rowe Price, all effective Jan 1, 2020.
- Resumes are being reviewed for the open Land Stewardship Manager position. Assistant Field Operations Manager Steve Lockett is managing the work area while the position is being filled. The new Mechanic position will be posted this week.