



Conservancy Field Notes: September 2020

Updates from Resident Board of Trustees

The mission of the Conservancy is “viable, long-term use of the land, integrating farming, recreation, conservation and education to enhance the quality of life for the residents of Willowsford..”

Willowsford Neighbors,

Happy Fall! We hope this finds you well and healthy.

We held a Conservancy Board of Trustees meeting last week and like we have before, we wanted to share some of the highlights below.

Regards,

-Greg Licamele

-Claudette Papathanasopoulos

-Chase Rowan



CONSERVANCY AT THE CROSSROADS

As we move into a new season outside, it's also true that Willowsford Conservancy is nearing a point of change in its nearly 10 years of existence. A few factors are coming together (as expected) over the next six to nine months:

- Willowsford is nearing final build out with approximately 60 lots remaining to be sold.

- With final build out near, the Willowsford founder time period is drawing to a close. Much like the HOA board, the Conservancy board will transition by the start of summer 2021, so election information will be available in early 2021.

- With all this change comes great opportunity, which is why we as the current resident board members are encouraging a strategic planning and community visioning process to begin in 2021. As all homes will be online, all residents in place and a new board selected, we can engage in a conversation about the Conservancy's role and priorities over the next three to five years. We want to honor the founding vision and will lean on the current president of the Conservancy board (and Willowsford's overall lead designer), Mark Trostle, to provide background, context and wisdom even after he and his colleagues depart the board in the first half of 2021. We are grateful to Mark and team for continuing to be present as this transition begins next year, recognizing the vision and support that has been established for many years now. As this strategic planning and community visioning process unfolds next year, we'll be sure to share updates.



2021 BUDGET

It's budget season as the Conservancy prepares its draft proposal for 2021. With the uncertainties of COVID-19 still at our doorsteps, along with the future of strategic planning on the horizon, which will help identify priorities to consider in years to come, Conservancy staff are approaching the budget process with the intent to keep resident assessments at or close to the current rate of \$40/month per household. For many years, the idea had been to reach about \$50/month.

A draft budget will be reviewed by the board in a few weeks, with discussion and adoption of that budget set for our November meeting. As always, the HOA board will have a chance to provide its feedback. We invite residents who have questions to reach out to staff at info@willowsfordconservancy.org. If you're interested in the [Conservancy's balance sheet as of July 31](#), take a look at it online.



THE FARM STAND

COVID-19 has led to many changes in all of our lives, businesses, schools and so much more. The same is true of Willowsford Farm. It has been an outstanding year as CSA shares sold out even after 50 more shares were added. The coming winter shares were essentially sold out within 48 hours. The farm is an extremely beneficial part of our life in Willowsford.

However, as farm operations evolve and emerge from the challenges and opportunities of COVID-19, efficiencies continue to be identified.

One area is the physical Farm Stand itself in The Grange. For nearly 10 years, it has served as an iconic location in our community -- a place to gather, meet neighbors, meet the farm team and purchase produce and goods that have filled our kitchens (and stomachs!). The previous model of placing dozens of carrots, tomatoes and other items out for purchase multiple days a week in a retail setting was sometimes a hit or miss proposition with no consistent predictability of sales. The Farm Stand never opened this year due to COVID-19 except for CSA share pickups and a few outreach programs, and the stand transitioned to online sales. That model will continue into 2021 -- the retail portion to buy produce and goods in person will not be an option next year. The Farm Stand will continue to be open for CSA pickups, and for education programs.

As Ashley Swensen, farm sales and marketing manager, noted in her report, "...we have seen that retail sales through our online platform, Farm Stand Online, have the potential to equal sales from the (physical) Farm Stand. Based on income to date, and the reduced overhead, staffing and product waste, the farm plans to transition solely to online sales for 2021. We believe the financial viability of the farm is better served by strengthening marketing and execution for Farm Stand Online and transitioning the physical Farm Stand to a space for CSA and community outreach."

As resident board members, we know this may seem like a non-Willowsford thing to do as the agrihood component of our life is central. We support this change because a new way of delivering service in 2020 is now as viable as when the stand started in 2011. For example, there are now more than 1,200 people part of Farm Stand Online, which provides residents the ability to order, customize and choose exactly what you want days in advance, therefore providing more predictability, less overhead, less waste and more efficiency. There's now CSA share home delivery, too. The model has changed, like so much else in our lives this year. However, we recognize the value of the physical Farm Stand, so as the strategic planning process mentioned above kicks off in 2021, the future of the Farm Stand and surrounding garden area will be a key discussion point to envision for 2022 and beyond.



WILLOWSFORD DESIGN STANDARDS

For more than a decade, Willowsford has stood out in Northern Virginia and across the country as a model for a new way to plan, live and integrate with nature.

As resident board members, we have taken a fresh look at Willowsford Design Standards through a unique nature lens that's part of the Conservancy's mission for the 2,000+ acres of open space it manages. This lens could possibly open the door for more

residents to follow ecological best practices that lead to more homes serving as mini conservancies on the other 2,000+ acres of Willowsford.

At our September meeting, we began the conversation. To better align Willowsford Design Standards with Willowsford's natural setting and the compatible mission of the Conservancy, a framework of ideas was outlined to infuse standards with more ecological context and practices.

For example, in 73 pages of the current Willowsford Design Standards, the Conservancy is only cited twice, and there are opportunities to more clearly link and show the connection among design standards, conservation and nature so Willowsford continues to stand out as a unique place to live that encourages ecological options beyond the usual HOA rules in communities across Northern Virginia and the country.

This proposal will be a partnership with the HOA board, the Design Review Committee, and staff. As we work on more details and discuss the ideas with the HOA and DRC in the coming weeks and months, we'll finalize a draft framework to share with the whole community in the future. Nothing in these proposed changes is designed to restrict options, but in fact open up even more options to integrate with nature around our homes.



OTHER QUICK UPDATES

At each board meeting, the Conservancy's executive director, Iris Gestram, and her team provide a detailed report of operations, opportunities, and challenges. Here are a few updates of note:

- In January 2021, the Conservancy office is scheduled to move to the Boat House in The Greens. The Willowsford development team will be moving out, similar to how Tenant House in The Grange was available to convert to offices for the HOA. The development team will be leaving most of the interior furnishings for the Conservancy, easing the financial transition from the current Conservancy office in Ashburn. The Conservancy will lease the Boat House from the HOA for \$1/year for the next 25 years, while covering all operations and basic maintenance expenses and contributing to reserve funds for necessary future major building maintenance.
- A significant amount of trail infrastructure repairs have been made this season, following priorities established in a recent trail maintenance survey. If you see issues on the trails, be sure to alert staff at info@willowsfordconservancy.org.

- In August, a new meadow restoration project began in The Grant to restore 1.5 acres of fill dirt into a warm-season grassland.
- The Conservancy has received grant funding, in partnership with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, for a riparian planting project in The Grove scheduled for October.
- Tree work orders continue to make up an increasing share of the workload, with future years projected to see even more tree orders as extreme weather events and long-term effects of development on tree health take hold.
- It's fall, so be sure to stock up on firewood from the Conservancy -- wood that is from our land and not imported from elsewhere, which could introduce tree pests and diseases to our community. Check the www.willowsfordconservancy.org website for details.
- Campground rentals in The Grant and The Greens have been very popular! Check the website for the available remaining dates (Conservancy campgrounds close Oct. 31).
- A huge thank you to all the volunteers who are helping out on trails, at the farm, conducting wildlife surveys, removing invasive plants and so much more! Your help is not only generous, but also a great benefit to all of us across Willowsford.
- With COVID-19 precautions in place, the Conservancy was able to offer several in-person programs including a parent-child fishing class with Trout Unlimited; two "Container Gardening with Native Plants" workshops; family friendly farm volunteer opportunities; and a Native Plant Sale supporting the Conservancy's "home habitat" education efforts.
- Be sure to check out two new Conservancy YouTube channels:
 - [Willowsford Farm featuring farm manager Collin Thompson](#)
 - [Willowsford Conservancy featuring land stewardship manager Taryn McFarland](#)



PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST

Willowsford residents are surrounded by unique and ever-changing natural settings each day. To showcase nature in Willowsford, all residents of all ages are invited to participate in a photography project that spotlights our community's shared experience. Themes are provided each season, so for Fall 2020, send your photos of the following to info@willowsfordcoservancy.org:

- Conservancy Trails
- A Garden for Wildlife

- Views of Water and Sky
- Joy and Radiance

And we're pleased to recognize these fellow residents as winners from Summer 2020, announced in the Sept. 4 Willowsford Buzz weekly email:



Image submitted by Bill Corbett



Image submitted by Newsha Nazmi



Image submitted by
Alana Hess



Image submitted by Chaitanya
Chandra



Image submitted by Abhishek
Singh