



**MINUTES**  
**Meeting of the Board of Trustees**  
March 16, 2021

**Attendees**

Conservancy board members: Claudette Papathanasopoulos, Mark Trostle, Avi Sareen, Greg Licamele, Chase Rowan, Rick DiBella. HOA board members: Harry Pugh, William Atwill, Frank Blackstone. Staff: Iris Gestram, Taryn McFarland, Jamie McArdle

**I. Call to Order**

Meeting was called to order at 5:02pm

**II. Approval of Agenda**

Motion to approve agenda passed without dissent.

**III. Approval of Minutes [attachment]**

Motion to approve minutes from January 18<sup>th</sup> board meeting passed without dissent.

**IV. New Business**

○ **NOVEC Substation Mitigation Project, The Grange [attachment]**

Iris presented to the board the information that NOVEC shared with the HOA and Conservancy. The Conservancy does not support the data center or substation. The Conservancy's role is to try to mitigate the impact to the community if the data center and substation are built.

The Conservancy proposed a buffer between the substation and the community per the attached plan. The plan includes reforesting 3.1 acres with 3–5-gallon native trees, planting a smaller area behind residences with larger trees, a deer fence, 2 years of irrigation and 5 years of maintenance. The plan also includes underplanting an area where there is existing forest. In total, the Conservancy proposes planting 840 trees at a total cost of \$145K, which would be fully covered by NOVEC.

The site is ecologically challenging, but the Conservancy selected species that will likely do well in the site and Taryn is looking for additional strategies to improve the soil to better support the plantings. The substation will drain toward the west, away from Willowsford. According to NOVEC, construction is planned to begin in the first quarter of 2022 and will take approximately 18 months, ending in the second quarter of 2023. If the plan proceeds, planting will start this year in fall.

The HOA will continue working with the community, County Supervisor Buffington's office and the companies involved to encourage shifting in the location of the substation away from the community. The Conservancy board will follow the process, and staff will adjust the buffer plan as needed moving forward.

- **Reserve Study**

The Conservancy is undertaking a reserve study that will look at a replacement schedule for the organization's assets. This study will be used to inform the Conservancy's investment strategy. The investment strategy might be different from that of a typical HOA because of the nature of the Conservancy's assets. For example, a major storm could cause much damage and expense to the Conservancy's woodland areas which are not typically included in assessment studies. The Conservancy's aim is to have contingency funding available to cover these types of expenses.

- **Farm Manager Hiring**

The Conservancy is still interviewing for this position. In the meantime, there is a crew in place for the season and staff is talking with a farm consultant to get additional support for the team until a new farm manager is in place.

## V. Old Business

- **2021 Board Election and Transition [attachment]**

The board discussed the attached and came to the following agreements:

- Cut-off date for new owners to have closed on their home will be March 24.
- Candidates with open-space violations must work toward a resolution by April 21 (start of voting) to qualify.
- Resident board members will provide updated profiles for the website that will include their professional experience, board term and village of residence.

- **Hartland Reciprocal Trail Use**

Hartland proposed a joint trail system that would connect Willowsford trails in The Grant with new Hartland trails and establish a reciprocal use agreement between the communities. Based on discussions with the Conservancy board, HOA board and staff, the community decided to decline the proposal at this time. Hartland is removing references to any potential sharing of trails from its materials and maps.

## VI. Committee Updates

- **Finance Committee Report [attachment provided Monday, 3/15]**

- **2020 Audit**

The audit has been completed and is in the process of being signed. The Conservancy received an "unqualified opinion", which is desired because it means the auditor did not find anything of concern.

It was a big lift by Conservancy staff to supply all the information for the audit.

This is a voluntary exercise, and the effort by Iris and the team is much appreciated by the finance committee and board. The next audit will be a similar amount of work because accounting regulations are changing, and the process will need to be updated.

- **Feb. 2021 Financial Statements**

Iris reviewed the statements with these highlights:

- The Conservancy finished the first two months of 2021 with net revenue over budget by \$30K.
- Some of this surplus was driven by retail sales for Valentine's Day, which was a special opportunity.
- Builder fee revenue was higher than expected for the period, but resale income was low.
- Cash flow continues to be strong.
- Significant cash is in savings and the Conservancy will be diversifying its investments.

**VII. Staff Reports [attached]**

**VIII. Other**

- o Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 18, 5:00 pm, Zoom Call

**IX. Adjourn**

Meeting adjourned at 6:44pm.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Land Stewardship** (Taryn McFarland, Land Stewardship Manager)

Trail Maintenance

During the first quarter, the Land Stewardship team completed significant maintenance and improvements of the trail system in all four villages. This work was expected as much of the trail maintenance is completed outside of the growing season.

The Trail Maintenance Survey has been completed including evaluation of several hundred trail features and their regular maintenance needs. Additionally, 91 trail features had been identified as in need of improvement. In 2021, the team already completed about 15% of the planned trail maintenance and 11 of the trail improvements. This includes completing repairs on 90% of our bridges and boardwalks and completing maintenance on all culverts. We are periodically employing the seasonal farm hands and deer management program volunteers to help complete work.

The Pinewoods Loop project is planned out and ready to begin once conditions are dry enough to perform work. It will take about 3 weeks of work in dry weather to finish.

Land Management

In response to the proposed NOVEC substation south of The Grange, the Conservancy team developed a reforestation plan to mitigate potential impacts if the project moves forward. A need for the planting was raised by the residents of Paddock Gate. The goal of the reforestation project would be to secure funding from NOVEC in order to provide canopy cover as quickly as feasible under the conditions to help screen out the substation and adjacent proposed future development. (proposal draft included in Board package)

The Blue Larkspur meadow restoration project in The Grant entered its next phase in March. It will be seeded with a native grass and forbs mix and undergo monitoring for invasive plant control.

In February, the Land Stewardship team removed a considerable amount of autumn olive, a highly invasive shrub, from around Hidden Meadow. The autumn olive stumps were painted with herbicide as part of a trial to determine the effectiveness of autumn olive removal in winter. The purpose of the experiment is to find successful ways of performing invasive removal during the winter while more staff time is available.

The Bluebird Monitoring program is about to begin. Minor changes in volunteer management this year include transitioning to a website that facilitates volunteer sign-ups and communication.

### Work Orders

Incoming firewood orders have slowed in February. This is expected as there was a high volume of orders in December and January. Wet, windy weather has delayed non-emergency tree work orders until it is safe to do removals. These are a priority to be finished as soon as weather permits.

### Miscellaneous

February is when the team performs equipment maintenance and at this point it is 95% complete. While weather often prevents work on trails, the team uses this time to clean and inspect equipment and machinery and perform annual inspections.

The employee tenant houses have also been inspected and received maintenance as needed during the transition of farm employees/tenants. Repairs largely consist of small improvements and repairs to keep the homes well maintained.

In February, Conservancy staff presented two Native Plant webinars. Information from the programs will be used to update the Conservancy's 'Home Habitat' web page, aligning with our 2021 goal to gradually update web content.

Willowsford Conservancy continues to work with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) to offer additional programs including an amphibian walk, a pollinators presentation, and a bird monitoring walk. Experts from LWC are also assisting Willowsford Conservancy with bird and amphibian monitoring and data collection. Data from those surveys will help us manage our wildlife habitat with specific species goals in mind.

The Conservancy is receiving reservations for amenity rentals. Cedar Pond Pavilion opens April 1 followed by the Grant Family Campsite and Hidden Meadow Event Field on May 1.

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

### Production

The 2021 season is underway, with field work commencing and the greenhouse almost fully planted. The dry and warm weather has allowed us to get equipment out into the field for an early start.

As the team goes through a transition in management, Collin worked to provide a good foundation through training, documentation, and remote support. The team is taking initiative to implement the plans in place.

The Conservancy is actively looking to fill the Farm Manager and Production Manager positions; several candidates have been interviewed via phone; one in person. In the meantime, we have put together a strong team of year-round and seasonal farmers to execute the plans in place.

In an abundance of caution, the farm has lowered the CSA capacity to 350 vegetable shares (down from 400) to reduce production pressure during the transition, focusing on product quality and providing room to absorb potential crop issues or other challenges. Any surplus production can be sold online or through our wholesale partners.

Maintenance of farm equipment has largely been completed, with only a few pieces that need additional attention from outside shops. This continues to be a large demand for the farm, due to the large collection of equipment currently being managed. The Farm continues to “right size” the equipment and to evaluate potential items to sell or trade, based on the vision and scope of the operation moving forward.

Sales

Current CSA membership levels are similar to levels at this time last year, and we are confident that CSA sales goals will be met. Both egg shares and the new customized meat shares are sold out. Of the 325 vegetable shares sold, 137 were auto-renewals. Further email campaigns and a 7-day paid social media advertisement coinciding with National CSA Day generated an additional 42 memberships, for a current total of 327 veggie shares sold.

With the limited number of shares remaining, next steps will include a social media countdown, “last call” email to Farm Stand Online subscribers, and a second call to action in e-blasts for “Refer A Friend”.

Other spring marketing has included a successful push for sales of additional items during the last weeks of Winter CSA, particularly Valentine’s Day baked goods. Extras sales between Feb. 12-19 totaled \$3,600. We have also had a successful 2021’s Feathered Fosters promotion which sold out quickly at 100 bookings, generating \$3,000 in program revenue.

2021 Share Sales	Total	Goal	
<b>Main Veggie Shares:</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>350</b>	93%
Family	95		
Personal	152		
Starter	80		
<b>Meat Shares (Sold Out)</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>50</b>	122%
Family	17		
Personal	44		
<b>Eggs (Sold Out)</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>200</b>	102%

Flowers	71	80	89%
<b>Total Sales (Gross)</b>	<b>311,872</b>	<b>381,071</b>	<b>82%</b>

Administration

The Conservancy completed the **audit** of the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years. A preliminary report presented by the auditors, Mitchell & Co., included recommendations for minor improvements.

The Conservancy moved into its **new office in the Boat House** in January. Some furniture has been and is being added as needed to supplement existing furnishings while maintaining the general appearance of the building interior. During COVID, meetings will continue online and by limited appointment. Once restrictions are lifted, the Conservancy plans to post regular business hours.

Between December and February, the Conservancy worked with Conservancy trustees and HOA staff and board members to explore a proposal by the **Hartland** developer to enter into an **agreement for a joined trail system**. It was decided to decline the proposal with the following response: "Thank you for the Hartland developer's interest in creating a joint trail system between the Hartland community and Willowsford, and for sharing the draft agreement. After careful review of the proposal by the Willowsford Conservancy and Willowsford HOA boards and staff, we decline the proposal at this time, seeing little benefit to the residents of the Willowsford community, the Conservancy, or the HOA. We ask that the Hartland project refrain from building trail connectors or access points between the Hartland and Willowsford trails, and that the project and marketing materials refrain from suggesting in any way that the trail systems are connected or Hartland residents are invited to access and use the Willowsford trails."

Staff are working with the Board election committee on planning the **Conservancy board election** scheduled for May 6. A vendor, TIE, has been elected to manage election administration.

Staff are working with Reserve Advisors on the completion of a **Reserve Study** which, in turn, will inform investment planning for reserve funds.

2021 Programs and Events (as of March 15, 2021)

JANUARY

- **Winter Planning for Your Garden** – Live Webinar, Jan 21, 6:30-8:00 PM  
Julie Borneman, owner, Watermark Woods native plant nursery.

FEBRUARY

- **Native Plants for the Home Landscape Part I: Perennials, Grasses & Small Shrubs**  
Live Webinar, February 4, 6:00-7:30 PM; Iris Gestram and Taryn McFarland, Willowsford Conservancy.
- **Native Plants for the Home Landscape Part II: Trees and Larger Shrubs**  
Live Webinar, February 11, 6:00-7:30 PM; Taryn McFarland and Iris Gestram

- **Bears in Your Backyard: Becoming BearWise in Willowsford** – Live Webinar, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 4:00-5:00 PM. Jordan Green, District Wildlife Biologist for Northern Virginia, VA Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR).

#### MARCH/APRIL

- **Foster a Feathered Friend**, March 20-27  
Willowsford Farm. Limited to 100 registrants. Sold out.
- **Earth Day Volunteer Opportunity** – April 22
- **Amphibian Walk**, Nature Walk with Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, April 25

#### MAY

- **Amenity Rental Season**: Cedar Pond Pavilion, Hidden Meadow Event Field and Grant Family Campsite are open for residents April/May 1-Oct 31.
- **Native Plant Sale**, Sunday, May 2, 9AM - 2 PM; Farm Stand & Garden, The Grange Watermark Woods native plant nursery.
- **Spring Farm Market**, May 2, Farm Stand, The Grange
- **Willowsford Farm CSA Season**, May 25 – November 20
- **From Farms to Woods**, May 27, 4:00-5:30 PM, Pinewoods Loop, The Grove Nature Walk, Steve Lockett, Andrew Richardson, Willowsford Conservancy

#### JUNE

- **Fishing for Beginners**, June 11, 5:00-6:00 PM at Willow Lake, The Greens Willowsford Conservancy and Trout Unlimited's local chapter
- **Camping 101**, June 24, 4:00-5:30 PM at the Grant Campsite, Andrew Richardson, Willowsford Conservancy

#### JULY/AUGUST

- **Woodland Walk**, July 8, 4:00-5:30 PM, Pinewoods Loop, The Grove Taryn McFarland, Rob Gavin, Willowsford Conservancy
- **Water Conservation and Ecology**, July 29, 4:00-5:00 PM, Grange Wet Meadow Meadow Walk, Taryn McFarland, Willowsford Conservancy
- **Advanced Fishing**, August 13, 5:00-6:00 PM at Willow Lake, The Greens Trout Unlimited and Willowsford Conservancy
- **Pond Life**, August 24, 4:00 -5:00 PM at Cedar Pond Pavilion, The Greens Nature Program, Taryn McFarland

#### Summer Camp

- o Discover Camp Week 1, Week 2 (ages 9-12), Dates TBD, 9 am-2 pm (20)
  - A Day at the Farm (Monday), Grange Farm Garden & Farm (Ashley Swensen)
  - Nature Exploration, Friday, The Grange and The Greens (Conservancy staff)
- o A Week at Willowsford Farm – Week 1 (ages 5-8), Mo-Fri, TBD, 8:30 am–2:00 pm; The Grange Farm Garden & Farm (Swensen) (20)
- o A Week at Willowsford Farm – Week 2 (ages 5-8), Mo-Fri, TBD, 8:30 am–2:00 pm; The Grange Farm Garden & Farm (Swensen) (20)

#### SEPTEMBER

- **6<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Bonfire & Camp-over**, Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 11-12, Hidden Meadow Event Field, The Greens (300 max)
- **Meadow Walk**, September 16, 4-5 PM, Grange Wet Meadow, Taryn McFarland.