



## **Board of Trustees Meeting – September 26, 2023**

### **Meeting Minutes**

Board members in attendance:

- In person at the Boat House: Claudette Papathanasopoulos, Chase Rowan, Greg Licamele, Karyn Moreland
- Via Zoom: Avi Sareen

Staff members in attendance: Andrew Dunham, Sophie Lambert, Taryn McFarland (via Zoom), Sarah Uhrig. Brian Keating (contractor) also joined by Zoom.

#### **I. Call to order**

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm. This was followed by a welcome from Claudette.

#### **II. Approval of Agenda**

Chase moved to approve the agenda. Greg seconded. All were in favor.

#### **III. Approval of Minutes**

Chase moved to approve the minutes from the April 23, 2023, board meeting and Karyn seconded to accept minutes. All were in favor.

#### **IV. Resident forum**

None

#### **V. Old Business**

- Strategic Plan Implementation
  - Claudette shared that she and Sophie interviewed a firm that will be a good fit to complete the Strategic Plan implementation. Other board members seemed agreeable to the idea. Tentative date is Nov 13<sup>th</sup> which is to be confirmed.
- Advisory Board



- Chase shared that the existing board could be augmented by an Advisory Board to fill some gaps that exist in skill sets (e.g. legal), but with only one empty seat it makes sense to consider an auxiliary group. Chase will create materials to have a discussion about how the advisory board will function, which will be shared at the November board meeting. Advisory boards are an action item in the strategic plan.
- Employee Manual
  - Staff presented the current status of the Employee Manual, which includes changes to voting and social media section since the April board meeting. Additional changes include an update to the Purchasing Policy agreement and other sections, such as pandemics, extreme weather, and benefits.
  - Staff agreed to finalize the employee manual to present for the November board meeting.
- Amenity Use Guidelines
  - Staff shared proposed draft Amenity Use Guidelines for the Conservancy based upon the HOA's guidelines, but geared towards our amenities with the intention that the document become an appendix to the HOA. Greg made suggestions of improvements to language.

## **VI. New Business**

- Clubs
  - The HOA has asked the Conservancy to consider how we want to address a new club – the Bee Keeping Club. The HOA-run Mountain Biking Club and Archery Club either actively use or have their amenities on Conservancy land.
  - The Board would like to understand the guidelines that existing HOA clubs follow and any guidelines we could adapt for the Bee Keeping Club. Discussion centered on the importance of all Willowsford clubs being jointly publicized to avoid confusion.
- Loudoun Invasive Removal Alliance
  - Claudette gave an update on a new initiative spearheaded by our HOA. A number of HOAs in the county are putting together a letter to the county regarding removing invasives. The HOA has signed on and wants the Conservancy to be involved so Claudette and Taryn have provided review of language. Avi inquired if this would result in new standards for what our HOA and residents can plant.

## **VII. Staff Updates**

- Operations & Programs Update
  - Sophie thanked Jamie for the successful 2022 audit completion. The report will need to be approved and the tax return needs to be filed. Matt has been gearing up to improve our chart of accounting and tracking procedures.
  - Sarah joined the team as our new Program & Engagement Coordinator.



- The teams have held various educational and engagement programs, including yoga at the farm stand and nature-focused programs and the Land team is gearing up for the Bonfire.
- Land Stewardship Team Update
  - Taryn shared that a lot of time has been spent improving and investing in the trails, completing the obstacle course in The Greens, making improvements to Hidden Meadow, and starting up native plant sales (and Sam has ideas for how to improve production and have earlier sales next year).
  - Taryn reviewed how effective the controlled burn was at the Wet Meadow. They learned it is VERY expensive to contract out, but VERY effective. Controlled burns are essential for invasive species management and most organizations do it in house. Taryn proposed that the Conservancy invest in equipment and leverage our staff person who has experience with the method. Staff agreed to look into insurance implications.
  - NOVEC's berm in The Grange was seeded but unfortunately the seeds did not take as expected. Our contractor will be reseeding and will plant trees in October. Irrigation will be installed in the spring before the growing season.
  - Staff also discussed the current status of tenant house repairs and renovation work and strategies underway to make a plan for the two houses in that category.
  - Taryn continues to search for a firm to do pond dam remediation when that need arises.
- Farm Team Update
  - Andrew shared improvements that he has seen as a result of cover crops and using the laying hens to add fertility to the soil. Yields have dramatically increased in the last couple years.
  - Progress has been made with the cooling enclosure addition on the packing shed. The electrical connection has delayed the project, but the new cooler should be in use by end of the year. This will increase the shelf life of the farm's produce and use labor more efficiently.

## **VIII. Financials & Budget**

- Finance Committee
  - Karyn presented an overview of the YTD financials for 2023. Discussion covered a few areas where there were discrepancies between what was budgeted for 2023 and then less staff being in place or other changes resulting in differences between the approved budget and the actual numbers. While farm stand sales have been stronger than budgeted this year, CSA sales were lower. Production is not an issue, but the team would like to invest in marketing and engagement to improve CSA sales for winter 2023 and in 2024.
  - Discussion also covered the donation to the organization and the NOVEC grant as important sources of revenue. Staff and board discussed the possibility of making quarterly reforecasts for the budget and the need to revisit the reserve study.
- 2024 Budget



- Staff shared an overview of the draft 2024 budget, including a proposed small increase to the assessment fee and the assumption of number of home sales and average sales price. Discussion covered recent trends in home sales, Zillow trends, and neighboring projects. Staff recommended that CapEx needs be covered from alternate funding sources.
- Farm Budget – Revisited sales projections from 2023 that can be met or exceeded with marketing and engagement strategy (in Willowsford and to neighboring communities), decommissioning or selling infrastructure/equipment that is no longer effective or needed, and a continued focus on improving soil health and quality of produce and efficiencies for staff.
- Land Stewardship Budget - Relatively similar to the last year, firewood sales are good and native plant sales should increase in the next year, continued savings and freeing up of staff time by contracting out trail mowing.
- Land Stewardship CapEx
  - Taryn shared that the Fleetwood Barn office space is too small for the staff to fit comfortably and that the team has cost effective strategy to make a small addition. In addition, a 20-foot utility trailer would enable the team to be more efficient as they could move the two ATVs at the same time. The board approved these two CapEx purchases to take place in 2023 (Chase moved and Greg seconded).
  - Items proposed for consideration in 2024 include replacing the Rhino UTV and log splitter. Cedar Pond Pavilion needs roof/railing/benches/posts to be fixed.
- Farm CapEx
  - Andrew shared the vision of how infrastructure improvements can enable the farm to shift from production-focused farm to a farm that can allow more engagement and align with our strategic plan. For example, currently school buses cannot drive up to the farm due to the narrow driveway and lack of turn around/parking. The board agreed that these items need to be considered and that more time would be needed for discussion.
- Next Steps
  - Staff agreed to share a revised budget with the board on Oct 4<sup>th</sup>. In addition, the amenity use guidelines and purchasing policy would be approved over email and the audit report and employee manual would be presented at the November board meeting.

## **IX. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:56 pm. The Board proceeded into Executive Session until 8:50 pm.