



On May 2, Scott Britton, Cook County Board of Commissioners, District 214, will be present along with several of his staff at our volunteer workday. In addition to scheduled work, we will plan a walking tour for our guests.

#### Prospect Heights Public Library/Park District Events

##### Nature Speaks Program

Dana reported that our next speaker is Dan Shilling, and his presentation will be during our Earth Week activities on April 22, 2021 (Earth Day) from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Dan's presentation is entitled "Aldo Leopold Listens to the Southwest."

Dana has heard the presentation and strongly suggests everyone to attend. Dana said it is an incredible presentation with terrific photos and highly informative.

Dana has arranged for Stan Temple from the University of Madison to present "Wilderness Preservation, Natural Resource management and harmony with Nature" as the summer Nature Speaks program on June 24, 2021 from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Stan Temple is also a Fellow at the Leopold Institute; therefore, he is committed to environmental ethics.

Dana has secured Allison Sacerdote-Velat for the fall Nature Speaks Program of September 23, 2021, an unbelievable presentation on buckthorn. The presentation is titled: "Direct effects of an invasive buckthorn metabolite on amphibian embryo survival and development." Allison will cover the full gamut of buckthorn – how, why, what, where. Allison provided a buckthorn presentation at Fermilab about four years' ago and has new material.

Dana felt this would be a remarkably interesting topic for our residents given how they ask the PHNRC about buckthorn, what can be done about it, etc.

Dana released the Earth Week announcement today with additional announcements forthcoming on Dan's talk (April 22) and Mary Lou's bird talk (April 19).

Ed intends to send a press release for the next Nature Speaks Program this weekend and will include our Earth Week activities (April 19 – 22, 2021).

#### Slough Boardwalk Project and Funding

Agnes stated that the Grant application has been submitted.

Notice on funding will be provided late June or early July.

#### Spring Prescribed Burns

Dana met Stantec at the ComEd Prairie site the day they were going to burn; however, a strong North wind curtailed these plans.

Stantec conducted one test burn at the entrance to the east prairie. It was all right, but it was a small patch. Dana informed Stantec that as you get further into the prairie the houses and trees make a wind break. Therefore, Stantec advanced about 200 feet and tried another patch. They did three strips where the path runs through the north side of the path. Stantec put down fire right at the path with the wind blowing against it then went two feet up and dropped fire in front so it became a head fire. The convection from that ring went immediately straight up. We could not continue. The fire lost its convection, and the wind was strong enough that residual smoke was wafting to the houses.

Stantec conducted two additional test burns but could not keep the convection consistent. We did not want to smoke the houses on the south side.

Next steps: Stantec will be monitoring the weather. However, we feel it is too late to burn. Too much has emerged. As an alternative, Stantec suggested mowing. However, we are uncertain.

Stantec's method of mowing would be like the mowing conducted at the Remnant Prairie where the earth is slicked clean. This may not help us at the ComEd Prairie. It has rained, so the soil is soft and, therefore, mowing would cause soil disturbance and encourage weed growth.

How late do they comfortable mowing? How high can they mow? You do not want to mow close to the ground but 6 to 8 inches high to protect the natives. Would the mower grind up the thatch? You do not want to leave thatch to suffocate what is growing. Therefore, we may be back to where we were three years' ago and unable to burn.

Dana will contact Stantec to learn more.

Our burn permits are good for one year from fall to fall and encompass a spring season. StanTec said the ComEd Prairie is in desperate of a prescribed burn because of the sheer volume of cold weather grasses. The best way to eliminate the cold weather grasses is burning. However, best conditions for a burn are a humidity between 20 and 30 percent. Unfortunately, on the day we tried burning, the humidity was about 40 percent. We are very considerate about our neighbors and the houses.

We will have to wait and evaluate the situation, and Dana will contact Stantec to learn more. We hope their proposed mowing practice will not negatively impact the prairie.

We may conduct brush control. We will cut, rake, and remove debris. Last year we used scythes, brush cutters, and string trimmers then raked and moved debris. It was a lot of hard but necessary work.

#### District 214 Micro-Internships

Agnes reported that two High School students, Allison Biewenga (John Hersey High School) and Lauren Steinger (Prospect Heights High School), have started their micro-internship with the PHNRC, which will be for the period of March 31 to May 26, 2021 on Wednesday and Friday mornings for two hours (8:00-9:30 a.m.).

Agnes said Allison and Lauren are wonderful students and seem to be enjoying the Program.

Tours of Morava and the Slough have been conducted, and education on water sheds, tree identifications and diversity in plants have been presented.

Agnes is looking forward to the upcoming weeks.

### 2021 Summer Interns

Dana reported the 2021 Summer Intern program is set. Our interns are Blair Ripley, returning from the 2020 Summer Internship Program, and Blair will be our senior intern.

Colin will be our second 2021 Summer Intern. The interview with Colin was successful, and we feel Colin will be a definite asset working with Blair. Blair is excited to be coming back, and Colin is excited to get started. Colin is available starting the end of May.

PHNRC is awaiting word on funding of the Summer Interns.

Dana said our Summer Internship program has been successful and a huge benefit. This year, we have continuity with a senior intern who will be a mentor for our new, younger intern.

### NEW BUSINESS

#### Earth Day (April 22, 2021) and Earth Week Activities (April 18-24, 2021)

The Earth Week announcement was released this morning. Activities currently planned are as follows:

- April 18, 2021: PHNRC Volunteer Workday (9:00am – 12:00 pm)
- April 19, 2021: Birding Columbia: A 4WD Adventure in the Andes (Mary Lou Mellon)
- April 21, 2021: Tour of the Remnant Sedge Meadow (5:00 p.m.)
- April 22, 2021: Nature Speaks Program: “Aldo Leopold – Founding Voice of Environmental Ethics” (Dan Shilling)

Jill will manage producing and placing signs along the bike/walking path to advertise the tour at the Remnant Sedge Meadow.

Agnes requested assistance with set-up from Commissioners the morning of April 18, 2021. Agnes said we are expecting 20 to 30 High School students, and with our regular volunteers, we may have 40 workers on that Sunday’s volunteer workday. Jill said she would arrive early.

Dana also mentioned that assistance is needed to assemble and erect the folding temporary Greenhouse at 9 Marion this weekend. The transplanted plants will be housed in the temporary Greenhouse.

Dana asked Jill if she had an update on the Library Opening Event. Jill is available to manage the PHNRC table. Dana will e:mail Terri to learn current information.

#### Path Maintenance at Worksites

Agnes said the paths are well worn.

Jill and Agnes worked at the Nature Preserve on March 31 clearing the Preserve and Creek of debris (trash) and cutting and clearing invasives, Pokeweed branches, etc.

The Park District installed the dog littering signage at the two ends of the path at the Nature Preserve. John confirmed signs were posted at the corner of Hillcrest Lake and the corner of the Slough.

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### Seed/Greenhouse Program

Dana reported that Dana and Agnes have transplanted seedlings and created 3,600 individual growing pots. The workday on April 18 will make a huge difference.

Agnes stated that the seedlings are growing wonderfully.

Agnes stated the Greenhouse must have constant vigilance to maintain an accurate temperature and watering the seedlings. Agnes has a Bluetooth thermometer that provides temperature and humidity conditions plus alerts.

Dana said the shade screen for the Greenhouse must be installed. Seedlings need sunlight, but the special screen filters and cuts the intensity of the light. The special screen does not hurt the growing plants; it is a lifesaver to prevent the plants from “cooking.” We must maintain an inside temperature of 85 degrees F. and humidity conditions below 50%.

##### Commissioners’ Site Monitoring Reports

###### Heron Pond (John Kamysz)

A volunteer workday was held at Heron Pond on April 4, 2021 to clear the path and site of debris, invasives, etc.

###### Nature Preserve (Gary Morava) (Pete Hahn)

Pete toured the Nature Preserve on April 8, 2021. As he opened his car door, Pete was greeted by a chorus of birds singing in the rain.

The Spring prescribed burn seems to have covered about 805 of the Nature Preserve. Hopefully, many invasive species have been set back or eliminated. The burn seems to be completed where the most sunlight allows for good native plant species to grow.

The Celandine Poppies are blooming, adding a bright yellow color to the Nature Preserve.

Pete observed that many trees that are weak, diseased, or dying should be trimmed and/or removed for safety reasons. This would also allow more sunlight into the Nature Preserve.

Pete noted that a few of our plantings have been edged and cultivated to the volcano look. While this may look neat and cultivated, it is not good for the plants. Therefore, we must pull back the soil from the trunks and crowns to form the desired saucer look then add mulch.

Peter found his tour of the Nature Preserve to be very peaceful, as he was serenaded by the birds enjoying the spring rains.

#### Remnant Sedge Meadow (Jill Moskal)

Jill reported that over the winter season, she observed a strong coyote presence at the Sedge Meadow most notably by the amount of skat and animal remains on the bike/walking trail.

At this time of the year, the season of growth is just starting.

On April 1, Jill thoroughly walked the entire Sedge Meadow, clearing it of trash before the growing season and to clean it in anticipation of the Tour scheduled on April 21 during Earth Week.

#### Saint Alphonsus (Ed Madden)

A spring burn was conducted at the Saint Alphonsus site on March 27, 2021. Ed observed that the burn was thorough.

Ed further remarked that this area is barren and rather charred from the burn; however, Ed did observe a bit of green popping up from the ground. Ed is confident it is prairie plants emerging from the soil.

#### Tully Park (Jill Moskal/Wendy Dewar)

A successful prescribed burn was performed by the PHNRC at Tully Park on Saturday, March 27, 2021.

The growing season is just beginning; therefore, nothing new to report on what is showing at Tully Park.

Per Wendy Dewar, Tully Park was seeded in December 2020, and seeding included our new 10-foot-wide strip that we added to the sunny area of the park.

Seeding in the forested areas included shade tolerant grasses provided by the PHNRC. The sunny area was seeded with flowering native plants provided by the PHNRC plus seeds gathered from Tully Park.

### Artwork at Hillcrest Lake

Dana was approached by Kate Tully, the Hillcrest Lake area resident who was the driving force or Artist behind the Sunflower Project last summer. The success of that effort was a direct link towards changing the acceptance of the PHNRC at Hillcrest Lake and City Hall.

Kate is looking to do more, and it starts with us.

Kate and Mara have begun creating more outdoor paintings on wood and has a keen interest in incorporating a sign at the Slough/Pollinator park. Her art pieces are amazing! Kate inquired of the type of signage planned for installation at the Pollinator Park. The interpretative signage will be like what has been installed at the Nature Preserve.

The sole purpose of our signage is to educate and somewhat to entertain. Kate and Mara proposed a theme of the birds that inhabit our area. Kate then sent a photo of a 10' x 3' sign she had already painted depicting goldfinches. The sign is two-sided. Kate's preferred location of the sign would be a sheltered area from wind and weather.

Kate also mentioned a different project that would involve more artists this summer that would paint thematic images on old real estate signs and then be placed throughout.

Dana emphasized to Kate that this entails a process and must be proposed and approved by the City.

Dana sent all information to Commissioners for consideration.

At our meeting this evening, John reiterated that a proposal exists to incorporate artwork and signage into the Pollinator park and prairie and shoreline restoration at Hillcrest Lake. Beautiful artwork has been reproduced, but the procedure requires consensus from the Commissioners, submission of a proposal to the City Council, and approval by the City.

John surveyed residents on placing a 10' x 3' painted goldfinch artwork on the north end of the Hillcrest Lake project. Four houses have a direct view of the proposed site. John was able to speak with three of the four residents. The fourth resident was unavailable. Of the three residents John was able to speak with, one is opposed, and two are in general agreement with artwork and signage.

For consideration: Any type of artwork or signage must be maintained and not falling over, looking shabby or unclean. It must be presentable. Some of the artwork located on the west side of the street has been out there since last summer and is falling into disarray. Any artists involved must agree to maintain their artwork.

Another consideration: Cars parked in front of residents' homes and long lines of cars. Last year's summer artwork display involved residents walking or biking. The sentiment of most of the residents is they do not want people parking their cars in front of their homes.

The PHNRC must decide what is appropriate, residents' expectations and concerns, and how to make the artwork and/or signage acceptable and in an ideal location. However, most of all, John said we must not be distracted from the primary objective of the Pollinator Park Project, which is to install pollinator plants and enhance the bird and insect habitat.

All ideas must be proposed and approved by the City.

The homeowner who is opposed objected to the piece of artwork because of its placement in front of his house and perhaps obstructing his view. Therefore, we could orient placement of artwork and/or signage to make it agreeable, such as perpendicular to the Lake. Perhaps the sign needs to be smaller in size, installed at a different angle or installed at a different location.

Dana said he has emphasized to the artist of the protocol: Consensus from Commissioners, survey residents, proceed to the City with a proposal package, which will reflect thorough research and consideration, and then receipt of City approval.

When Dana spoke with the artist and inquired where she envisioned the best place for her artwork, she said she is looking for protection from wind. The site chosen is the location we agreed would be a general picnic area and not near the riparian buffer.

John said if the artwork is a permanent fixture, the proposal must be thoroughly discussed. Is it created from organic materials? What type of paint is used? Will it be sealed to ensure it is impervious to weather conditions?

Agnes said it would be helpful to visually see what artwork looks like in the proposed area. Having landscape design incorporated into our interpretative signage may be pleasing.

Seth felt he has been remiss in understanding the size and type of installation. Seth said John makes a good point on upkeep and maintenance of artwork and signs. Also, if installation is temporary, it can be easily removed. However, if large and permanent, Seth must rethink his position.

Seth further said the artist in the past installation stimulated the interest of more artists to present their work. Therefore, is her current artwork proposal encouraging other artists? Yes, Kate mentioned this to Dana. Therefore, Dana reiterated that all ideas must be proposed and approved by the City Council.

John has previewed alternative sites that are not located in front of residents' homes. John reiterated that the main goal of the Pollinator Park Project and encouraged us not to lose sight of it. The Project meshed very well last year; therefore, as we move forward, we must ensure the intention and attention is to the Pollinator Park. Can we enhance it? Perhaps. John will sample opinions of residents to garner their thoughts.

Dana said installation of interpretative signage is part of the Project. Does it come in the form of a 10' x 3' piece of artwork or a plaque? What is most palatable?

Is there some point where we want to voice an opinion as a Commission? If we do not have consensus from the Commission and residents' approval, the idea will not proceed.

We must move forward organically. The artists may do another temporary summer installation. Our Pollinator Park Project is a multi-year project. It can come about over time and be accepted.

Dana will go back to the artist and send Commissioners new information.

### PHNRC Treasurer's Report

John Kamysz did not have anything new to report on our current budget. PHNRC is still operating on their 2020 budget. Until we have a new budget, our differential is flat.

The City Council will conduct the first reading of the proposed budget at their April 12, and final approval of the 2021-2022 Budget is April 26. The new budget cycle begins May 1.

Data reported that one of our committed volunteers, Linda Waycie, donated \$200 to the Commission because she felt the work we do is important.

### City Civic Meetings and PHNRC Representation

Jill summarized her notes from the following two February meetings:

#### City Council of Prospect Heights, Illinois – March 8, 2021 Meeting

Budget Presentation by Finance Director Cheri Graefen. Finance Director Graefen reviewed the first portion of Fiscal 2022. The discussion was regarding the General Fund.

In Fiscal Year 2021, the City was able to adjust the Budget to reflect the forthcoming budget shortfalls due to the impact of COVID-19. The City estimated approximately 15-25% reduction in the revenue stream. The Covid restrictions essentially hit restaurants, hotels, and video gaming.

Director Graefen said the Good News was that because of the conservative budget planning and some of our strong collections the projected fund balance of 04/20/2021 will be a (\$163,000) versus the Budget-anticipated \$1.1 million shortfall. This is a positive variance of about one million dollars.

The Capital Fund is planned for the next few years; however, the numbers are showing that the funds in it will only last for two years with the current funds of the City. Fiscal 2022 has \$3.4 million in spending. The City is expecting additional grants and stimulus money.

The Police Pension contribution is up 17% over Fiscal Year 2021 to \$1.2 million. There are expected updates once the pension consolidation is completed by June 2022.

Director Graefen said the City is looking at a 1% increase in the water rate. This is the lowest increase over the past few years.

In Fiscal Year 2022, there is a projected shortfall of (\$766,000). Expected Revenues of \$8.5 million and expenses of \$9.27 million. This shortfall is due to the ongoing COVID impact.

In Fiscal Year 2021, revenues were budgeted at \$7.733 million, and the actual number as \$8.121 million. Expenditures came in at 7% under budget. Director Graefen stated that the City did not use the \$3 million it had in reserve for an emergency.

In Fiscal Year 2022, it is expected that the General Fund will receive \$8,513,000 in revenue and that income tax, sales and use tax, and cannabis sales tax will increase. However, ordinance and traffic fine violations will taper off in part due to compliance. It was noted that the Tourism District revenue will decrease. In the past, this has helped pay for police services in the area. The hotels have taken a hit during COVID, and it may take years for them to return to their normal numbers.

Expenditures: The expenditures will be 4% over last year to about \$9.2 million. Director Graefen noted a \$60,000 increase over last year in legal fees. Other fees that were rising include the Police Pension Fund contribution, parking lot operations cost \$55K in FY 2021 will now cost the City \$100K in FY 2022, and public safety (salaries, benefits, and healthcare) costs will rise.

City Administrator Wade said that it has been a challenging recession and noted that the COVID relief money of \$340,000 was extremely helpful to the City. More COVID relief and stimulus related money is expected. Joe Wade noted that the Mayor and City Clerk are constantly updating the Staff regarding new grant opportunities.

Mayor Helmer said that he attended a presentation by Congresswoman Schakowsky regarding the potential receipt of \$2 million of unrestricted stimulus money that the City would be able to use for Arlington Countryside flooding. Mayor Helmer has requested that everyone attend the check signing event when it is arranged.

Joe Wade added that the Arlington Countryside project has been studied for forty years. Thanks to the Council's approval of an engineering recommendation, the stimulus monies are in line to be granted to the City as a "shovel-ready" project.

Mayor Helmer requested that the next Workshop Meeting include the topic of using 33% of the cannabis sales tax income collected to be applied to flooding and drainage.

#### City Council of Prospect Heights, Illinois – March 22, 2021 Meeting

Treasurer's Report – Cheri Graefen: Revenue is 84% of Budget; Expenses are 65% over budget. Income sales and use taxes are strong. Vehicle Stickers are up due to collection efforts. City Hall has seen an influx of people coming in to purchase their Vehicle Stickers.

Field tax revenue is up. Additional allocations from the State are expected.

Director Graefen said the City was near the end of the budget year. The budget is on target, and we are finishing strong. The City is getting ready to start the new budget year.

Budget presentations (second half): The Governor's proposed budget for the State shows a 10% cut in local government funding. This is not good; it is a significant cut. It changes how unemployment is taxed. We will experience a \$300,000 cut.

Capital Fund: The Capital improvement Plan is reflecting "big" dollars over the next five years. A lot of projects are in progress and are planned for the coming years. The Capital Fund is front-loaded at \$16 million. It is an aggressive plan for 2022-2024 and covered by Grant funding and awards, which will help us accomplish our plans. The City is anticipating applying for an additional \$8.5 million to accomplish current plans – finish the Schoenbeck Sidewalk Project and Sewer Fund project.

Contributions of \$8.2 million; net remaining funds are \$5.6 million.

Solid Waste Fund: No greater sources of deterioration on our streets than the solid waste trucks caused by the weight of the trucks, starting, and stopping, which causes the street to rumble.

Old Willow Road Seminole Project: We are progressing through the IDOT bidding project. The Project will start around Memorial Day and be completed by the end of summer. We are seeking a Surface Transportation Grant. The City is contributing \$77,000 of the \$800,000 project cost.

Stormwater Project and Drainage Improvements: Requesting \$400,000 specifically from the State for this Project. The project is ready to go to bid.

Willow Road Construction Project: Elevation of Willow Road and Owen Street. Met with neighbors along Hillcrest Street, who have opted out of the Project. The City Engineer had a phone meeting with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. We are working with the MWRD and Cook County Transportation Department.

Future sidewalk projects involve Camp McDonald Road, Willow Road and Wolf Road.

Dan Peterson said the owners of Nikko's are looking for a new restaurant concept with an early fall opening. Fry the Coop is doing well.

American Water: Water rate has increased this year by 1%. Last year the water rate increase was 1.7%.

Consent Agenda: All items listed on the Consent Agenda are routine by the City Council and enacted by one motion. No separate discussion is held unless a Council Member or citizen so requests. Memo and Resolution Approving a Contract with Clarke Aquatic Services for Hillcrest Lake 2021 Lake Management Services for \$4,935 was passed by a vote of 5-0.

April 12, 2021 – First Reading of the Proposed Budget.

April 26, 2021 – Final Approval of the Budget.

The next meeting of the City Council is scheduled on Monday, April 12, 2021 at 6:30 pm and is entitled City Council Workshop Teleconference Meeting.

#### Prospect Heights Park District – Board Meeting of March 23, 2021

The Prospect Heights Park District Board Meeting of March 23, 2021 was cancelled due to the number of anticipated absences.

The PHPD Board met on Tuesday evening, March 30, 2021. Information from that meeting is forthcoming.

#### Prospect Heights Park District – Board Meeting of February 23, 2021

Updates to my notes on the PHPD Board Meeting of February 23, 2021 are as follows:

Dana Sievertson and Agnes Wojnarski of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission presented an overview of a Boardwalk Project for the Prospect Heights Slough. NRC's plan was to enhance the public enjoyment and accessibility of the Slough and Hillcrest Lake. They noted that increasing trails and connectivity is also a focus of the Park District's Master Plan. The one remaining key piece of the project is the creation of a boardwalk system to provide increased access in the portions of the Nature Trail that are prone to reduced foot traffic after rain events. The proposed Boardwalk Project looks to address that issue and provide a solution to that problem.

The Project is looking to create approximately 400 linear feet of boardwalk. The boardwalk would sit on the ground and be tethered in place by anchored posts so the system would be allowed to rise and fall with the water level but moored in its original position.

The Project is being proposed as an Eagle Scout Project with fabrication and installation completed under the supervision of the NRC and the Scouts.

NRC is asking for the Park District to approve the Project and participate in the application for a Com Ed/Green Regions Grant and contribute \$500 to the Project along with the City.

The presentation was also presented to the City of Prospect Heights City Council on 02/22/2021, and the project was approved 5-0.

The Commissioners expressed concern about the Park District's liability. Dana and Executive Director Christina Ferraro addressed the concerns related to the concerns about liability.

This item will be placed on the PHPD BoD 03/23/2021 agenda for continued discussion and approval.

Announcements to the Public

None.

Visitors' Comments

None.

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission is May 13, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. Central Time.

ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business to come before the meeting. Therefore, the meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.

Jill E. Moskal, CPS  
PHNRC Commissioner and Recording Secretary