

Chesapeake Arboretum Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

May 18, 2020

4pm Virtual Meeting (Zoom) in accordance with the Amended Ordinance adopted by Chesapeake City Council on April 28, 2020

Board Members Present:

Richard Pippin
Linda Bradley
Phil Johnson
Deb Pearson
Roxanne Stonecypher

PR&T Staff Present:

Mike Barber, Director
Kevin Kaul, Parks Manager
Meghan DeSanto, Secretary

Board Members Absent:

Michelli Booker
Dee Zagurski

The meeting was called to order at 4:07pm. R. Pippin provided direction on how to interact during the Zoom meeting and read guidance from the City of Chesapeake Amended Ordinance adopted on April 28, 2020 (in regards to virtual board meetings).

Secretary M. DeSanto took attendance.

No Citizens present.

Approval of Minutes – No changes were made to the January minutes. R. Pippin shared that the minutes and recordings of minutes will be available online.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

R. Pippin extended well-wishes to all and hopes that everyone stays safe. Virtual meetings will continue as necessary for the foreseeable future. Committee activities can still proceed while following social distancing and other safety guidelines.

Programs/Operations: Nothing to report.

City Council: Nothing to report.

Invasives: The invasives are still growing. L. Bradley said she has not made any new plans regarding removal and has not completed any new removals but has recently taken pictures. An invasive workshop had been scheduled with Master Gardener interns but because of the current Covid-19 restrictions this was not allowed to take place.

Volunteers: D. Pearson wanted to know if Autumnfest had been canceled. M. Barber stated that events have not been canceled that far ahead and staff are still planning for Autumnfest, unless the group [Board] wants to cancel it. The event would just look different this year because of Covid-19 guidelines. R. Pippin agreed that it is too early to cancel Autumnfest, it is best to table that discussion for now until our next meeting as we do not know what the future holds.

D. Pearson spoke with Bob about a tree that broke in half during the last storm. She asked what he needed to address this. M. Barber advised that this would go through Kevin [he gave a thumbs-up to this] along with any other volunteer matters.

Historical: P. Johnson, R. Stonecypher and D. Pearson met at the Arboretum on February 29th to discuss historical restoration. The Committee recommends waiting until house renovations are complete before completing restoration work, in particular since many time periods must be considered for the design. Aside from the house, the next priority the Committee recommends is a barn restoration for classes and events.

R. Stonecypher inquired about the status of a PRT Planner who would complete a site layout from old maps. M. Barber shared that an architect signed off on an evaluation of the house the previous week. A purchase order should be issued soon, which includes a site layout. Once the purchase order is issued, additional meetings will be scheduled with the Historical Committee and K. Kaul and A. Elezovic (the Park Planner).

Capital/Projects/Trails: No Committee updates. M. Barber reported that the money previously promised for projects has not changed and that we are in good financial shape to move forward at this time.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Standard Operating Procedures: The Board reviewed the redline version of the SOP with changes made during the January meeting.

P. Johnson made a motion to approve the SOP. D. Pearson seconded the motion. The amended SOP was approved and the motion passed. The SOP will be revised by the Secretary and sent to the Board.

Staff Reports: K. Kaul reported on Bridge C: the contractor delivered materials but because of rain they have to wait to avoid damage to the trails and grounds. The biggest problem to tackle has been damage from the recent storm. It heavily damaged the trail system and took four days for the team to clear and reopen them for walking. The storm water department needs to be brought in to deal with debris in the ditches as well. Bob has been out but please reach out to Kevin for assistance. Chuck the ranger tech has been doing a great job, and he has had help from another ranger tech from Northwest River Park. Currently there are opportunities for individual volunteers but not for groups.

M. Barber reported that there has been lots of discussion with Arboretum neighbors in regards to fallen trees on properties. PRT works with these as they are reported, and as far as can be done legally. It can take a while to complete these processes because of the need to determine ownership, surveying or arranging for contractors rather than staff.

There have also been fishing incidents where neighbors are approaching fishermen to request proof of their fishing licenses. They don't have jurisdiction to do this, and they have been counseled to contact us [PRT] so we can handle any issues and avoid altercations. K. Kaul reiterated the importance of this, as our park rangers and police officers are dealing with confrontations that are occurring. M. Barber continued that it's important to tell us so we can handle the issues; sometimes it's just a matter of educating residents and users. If the problems continue, we might need to put up a fence. Cooperation and working together is necessary.

Additional updates include that the Sheriff's inmate crews have resumed duties with Phase 1. They've helped with work at the Arboretum. Work on the Western Branch Trail and Marjorie Rein project has continued as well. PRT hasn't slowed down in its work and continues to provide essential services. Staff from various PRT locations such as the community centers have been able to contribute to other operations like housekeeping and grounds maintenance. The department has also been providing virtual education on social media to the public. Phase 2 will see more facilities open up with some differences like physical distancing.

D. Pearson asked if something could be passed around to her neighbors that provides information about fishing-related rules. M. Barber said we could put something like that together that outlines 'Dos' and 'Don'ts'. D. Pearson also talked about people coming through her yard to access the lake. The two Arboretum entrances are not very obvious so many people use her yard, which she said was not a problem for her. M. Barber responded that they shouldn't be going through private property and that we can't encourage this. D. Pearson is willing to meet with staff to review these sites in person.

NEW BUSINESS:

L. Bradley brought up the issue of tree trail signs having to be constantly replaced. She asked if some kind of enforcement could be used to stop this from happening since the signs are of educational benefit and relevance to the Arboretum's mission. K. Kaul replied that after replacing the signs a few times, the problem seems to have stopped, which was instigated by kids vandalizing the signage. He said PRT would look at different ways to post the signs, and that the best move is to continue putting the signs back, and to not give up. Enforcement could only happen if individuals were caught in the act of vandalism. M. Barber shared examples of dealing with graffiti; similar things occur citywide, and we have to be resilient. The more we continue to fix such damage, eventually the culprits will get tired of vandalizing signs, etc. R. Pippin reminded everyone to call the proper authorities instead of confronting someone doing something they shouldn't be doing.

R. Stonecypher shared what she saw on her visit to state and federal parks in Florida: there were various park signs that she thought would be a good addition to our parks. She noticed signs talking about watershed management, invasive reduction and tree trails, as well as signs with maintenance and emergency contact information. K. Kaul asked for her to send them electronically. M. Barber added that different strategies work for different parks. We (Chesapeake PRT) are always open to new ideas and seeing what other are doing.

P. Johnson shared that he's been watching YouTube videos posted by museums and other parks around the world. There are fantastic virtual tours, and other videos about things like planting and pruning. Educational videos could expand the reach of the Arboretum. R. Pippin agreed that it is a good idea, lots of organizations have been following this example during this time. M. Barber said PRT has done about 15-20 environment-related videos shared on Facebook. This includes some interpretive walking videos in the parks created by Meghan Roberts [PRT Outdoor Recreation Specialist]. Many videos are in production, but there hasn't been an Arboretum-specific video yet.

R. Pippin asked if P. Johnson would like to oversee Arboretum videos, and P. Johnson agreed to this. M. Barber offered that PRT has all of the equipment needed to produce videos. P. Johnson will coordinate with K. Kaul to set up filming, which will be soon since the Stewartia have bloomed early. The Secretary was asked to put this topic on the agenda for the next meeting.

In regards to new videos, L. Bradley asked if virtual tour videos would have to be limited to four minutes. M. Barber replied that a video time limit is best practice when considering a person's average attention span, but it can be more than four minutes. Sometimes breaking a video into parts is an option.

COMMENTS:

P. Johnson complimented PRT staff for their outstanding work [during the pandemic]. D. Pearson agreed with this sentiment, such as the work done to clear the Arboretum trails after the recent storm. She believes promoting the Arboretum through social media videos is a great idea. L. Bradley added her compliments to PRT staff and also supports additional virtual videos. R. Stonecypher also complimented PRT on their maintenance efforts. She said it is great that a landscape architect will become a part of the city (referring to the news from the previous meeting).

R. Pippin continued the sentiment that PRT staff have done a great job and are appreciated. He advised everyone to be careful while out and about, he mentioned a juvenile copperhead was seen in the Arboretum. K. Kaul stated that they are extremely common.

The next meeting will be July 27, 2020 at 4 pm. It will be a virtual meeting unless changes to current Covid-19 restrictions allow otherwise.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 pm.

Minutes submitted by Meghan DeSanto.