

MINUTES OF Environmental Sustainability Council Habitat Restoration Task Group

PURPOSE OF MEETING: To be briefed by City of Falls Church Green Space Manager Jeremy Edwards on the state of habitat restoration efforts in the City's parks and green spaces and to discuss ideas for new initiatives to support these efforts and engage volunteers.

DATE OF MEETING: **January 22, 2020**

PLACE OF MEETING: **Falls Church City Hall, Dogwood Room**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: **Amy Crumpton AT 7:06 pm**

THOSE PRESENT:

<u>Habitat Restoration Task Group:</u> Member: Amy Crumpton Member: Melissa Teates Member: Priscilla Gutherie Member: Sam Beatty Member: Stacey Evers, ESC liaison	<u>Staff</u> Name: Jeremy Edwards, CFC Ops Name: _____ Name: _____ Name: _____
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OTHERS PRESENT: David Braun, Jo Allen, Susan Matchett, Ruth Ann Castillo, Linda Kamel, David DeCoste, Peter M. Mecca, Charlie Adams, Dennis Szymanski and Mary J. Frase.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

Amy Crumpton welcomed the attendees and described the Task Group's goals as 1) supporting the work of the CFC Urban Forestry and Green Space Ops crew led by Jeremy Edwards on park and green space wildlife restoration, 2) supporting the dedicated volunteers essential to the restoration process and 3) developing public outreach through education and citizen science initiatives to expand participation in and understanding of the City's ecological health. Crumpton acknowledged that accomplishing these goals could be done in a variety of ways with many moving parts and invited the attendees to advise how to focus new efforts and reinvigorate older ones.

The City of Falls Church has been certified as a National Wildlife Federation Community Wildlife Habitat since 2015 through the incredible dedication and persistence of Sandy Tarpinian to document restoration events and other efforts such as the Neighborhood Tree Program plantings and Earthwatch events for the City's Healthy Habitat initiative begun in 2005. About 170 Falls Church residents and one church have certified their yards through the NWF Backyard Habitat Program over the past twenty years. This program requires that a site owner self-certify that their garden has food, water, cover, a place for wildlife to raise young, and that they are committed to using sustainable gardening practices (i.e., no pesticides, leaving leaves). This program is one that the Task Group could expand upon to assist Tarpinian and encourage more public participation in restoring and retaining wildlife habitat.

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Jeremy Edwards provided an overview of 2019 efforts by his crew to continue to improve the City's parks and greenspaces as wildlife habitat and essential green infrastructure through public planting and invasive pulling events with volunteers - 12 events with 280 volunteers in all - as well as with expert urban forestry management practices. The crew installed a new mulched path running through Howard Herman Park and worked with contractors to clear invasive woody plants from the north side of Four Mile Run in Isaac Crossman Park. One of the new efforts in 2019 was, at the request of neighborhood residents, the planting of green space on Cedar Street, a "paper" street off Fulton Avenue that extends to the W&OD bike path.

For Spring 2020 public events, Edwards posed the following Saturdays: March 21 (Howard Herman Park – invasive pull), April 4 (Howard Herman Park – invasive pull); April 18 (Fellows Property – planting and invasive pull), May 2 (Larry Graves Park – invasive pull), and May 16 (Isaac Crossman Park – planting). Other City events to note will be the April 4 clean-up day and April 25 Arbor Day and Neighborhood Tree Program planting.

In 2019, the City acquired the 2-acre Fellows property on Oak Street across from TJ Elementary. Edwards and his crew have been removing invasive plants and pruning trees. The house and barn are slated to be demolished soon and the City's Parks and Rec Department will call a public meeting in the spring to solicit public input. Interim use of the site is slated as a parking area for the temporary Mary Riley Styles Library while the new library is being constructed. Edwards said the site would be good as a native plant demonstration garden featuring low-light plants. For now, Edwards will treat the site as a native plant demonstration garden including a tree arboretum and replace invasive ground covers with native plants, particularly around trees and in some areas that are prone to erosion as the planning process unfolds. There was discussion that the Task Group could assist Edwards with the Fellows property by 1) helping him obtain a baseline inventory of plants and any wildlife if possible, 2) developing a group recommendation to the ESC on the best use(s) of the property to fulfill habitat restoration and green infrastructure goals for the City, and 3) participating as individual residents in the public input process.

The dual-path construction of parallel bike and permeable paver pedestrian paths along the W&OD bike trail through Falls Church is a future City Master Plan initiative that will offer an abundant green space restoration opportunity. Melissa Teates promised to keep the group informed on the construction process timing. Replanting along the bike path might be an optimal project to seek out funding and partnership with NOVA Parks or other organizations. Edwards noted that the W&OD would be an optimal location for a utility line arboretum as well as for meadow plants.

Edwards raised some administrative and logistical issues that he faces. The City has not identified funding for habitat restoration within the City budget; instead, he leverages the costs for native plants and volunteer events against the general landscaping fund that he manages. VPIS has been consistent in providing about \$1,500 a year for plants and has on occasion provided more. This issue raised the possibility that the Task Group might help Edwards identify sources of outside grant money for which the City could apply. In terms of logistics, the new high school construction has meant loss of the debris management site that Edwards and crew used for leaf composting and wood chip mulch. Edwards oversees the City's wood chip delivery program and the Task Group could help him with publicity on it. In terms of leaf collection, this issue is one that the Task Group could reinvigorate education outreach to encourage residents to

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leave some proportion of leaves to decay on their properties (for insect, plant, and soil biome health) and not to pile leaves in the street for collection but on the edge of their yards (so as not to enter into storm water drains).

Edwards is constantly in search of new plant species to add to biodiversity and new sources of native plants for restoration projects. He welcomed suggestions for new native plant growers as well as attendee expertise on plant suggestions and on the biodiverse composition of the plant communities being restored. Crumpton asked whether succession of mature native tree species growing within Falls Church should be a proportion of all plantings each year. Currently, a number of residents provide Edwards with seedlings from their properties which he usually plants in parks where space is available. Developing a program or process that encourages transferring seedlings among residents could offer more trees for planting on private properties. Collecting seed from mature trees - particularly those deemed "specimen" or Champion Trees - to plant in parks, to grow in pots, or to sort and donate to Virginia's Department of Forestry by mid-October each year would make public family-friendly events. Charlie Adams of the GMHS Environmental Club suggested that seed from trees cleared on the current high school site for the new commercial development might be a way for students to take a piece of their school's history to plant in their own yards.

At present, Edwards gathers natural resource baseline inventories regarding plants in the parks by using spreadsheet databases to document the tree inventory and the native plant species planted within the parks. Crumpton has led iNaturalist City Nature Challenge events in several of the parks and has created projects for Howard Herman Park, Isaac Crossman Park, Cherry Hill Park, Cavalier Train Park, and Berman Park within iNaturalist to help document the plants and wildlife. The use of iNaturalist to engage public participation and initiate citizen science dovetails with an interest by Edwards to obtain certification by the Audubon-at-Home Wildlife Sanctuary Program for the City's parks. AAH certification requires documenting observations of 10 species within a three year period. Members of the Task Group could help Edwards collect those observations via iNaturalist or via eye witness and fill out the paperwork. At present, there are only four home owners in the City who are certified as AAH sanctuaries. Attendees Mary Frase and Amy Crumpton have had their yards certified and they are both AAH Ambassadors trained to meet with homeowners to assess their properties. The Task Group could employ this program, along with the less stringent requirements of the NWF's Backyard Habitat program, to reach out to homeowners to amplify habitat restoration and reinforce habitat greenways or corridors throughout the City.

The group brainstormed other possible events to engage the public – The Great Garlic Mustard Pull or a Garlic Mustard Festival in May, assisting FC Garden Club plant sale or holding special events/talks with them, literature at VPIS table at Farmers' Market, table at July 4 event, table at Falls Church Fall Festival, participation in the World Wildlife Fund's Turn Off Your Lights (March 28, 8:30-9:30 pm) as a kick off for Intl Dark Sky Assn project on outdoor lighting to protect wildlife, spread publicity on FCGC talks open to the public, expand the outdoor Cherry Hill landscaping talks (composting with Sandy Tarpinian, native plants, invasive id and removal, weed or wildflower).

Minutes approved 02-12-2020

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The attendees agreed to meet again on Wednesday, February 12 to continue discussions and focus on selecting initiatives on which to move ahead. Crumpton and Evers will draft minutes and a list of potential projects and tasks to circulate before the next meeting.

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. 2019 Program overview of Falls Church Habitat Restoration
3. 2020 Planned tasks for crew and contractors
4. 2020 Spring event schedule for volunteers (max 5 Saturday events, 5 weekday events)
5. Plants species and sourcing for restoration projects
6. Volunteer projects to assist restoration efforts (not an exclusive list)
 - Natural resource baseline inventory (iNaturalist, other techniques)
 - Removal of invasive plants via RIP teams
 - Community certifications: Audubon-at-Home Wildlife Sanctuary (possible for each park), Bee City USA (possible), NWF Community Wildlife Habitat (certified), Tree City USA (certified), others?
 - 2020 CFC Spring events: Arbor Day and Neighborhood Tree Program (April 25), 2020 City Nature Challenge (April 24-27), plant sales, others?
7. Building volunteer capacity
 - Volunteer tracking and data entry
 - Public communications
 - ARMN Park Steward Program to develop leadership
8. Building partnerships (i.e., Plant NOVA Natives, Tree Stewards)
9. Scheduling future task group meetings

MEETING ADJOURNED AT: 9:02 pm

SIGNATURE OF RECORDERS Amy Crumpton and Stacey Evers