

Newark Street Community Garden Spring 2019 Meeting

Maureen convened the meeting at the Cleveland park Library at noon on April 13, 2019, a quorum being present. [Attendance sheet attached.] She began by welcoming new gardeners, of whom there were several present, to our community. The purpose of the meeting was to give updates on the operation of the garden and to seek input and volunteers as needed.

Membership. Beth Kaplan, to whom Steve Gordon has passed the Membership Chair mantle after 12 years of service, was unable to be present, so Lynn Rothberg made the presentation. Lynn explained that she is the one who assigns plots to new members as their names come up on the waitlist. She makes sure that they are current DC residents and, in accordance with new DPR policy (one plot per household), that they each have a unique address. She tries to find out how much experience they have, encourages novices to seek advice from fellow gardeners, and gives them a heads-up about the condition of the plot they are getting. The membership Committee has a detailed tracking system of members to ensure accountability. Mary Gautier maintains the master list of gardeners.

There are 220 plots (not counting the few remaining wall plots), and as of the meeting date all have been assigned. One hundred thirty-four members opted to pay the non-work fee, leaving 86 obligated to do 10 hours work a season on workdays or at other times. She noted that many who pay the non-work fee do, in fact, help out in various ways. The number of plots assigned from the wait-list this year was 30 (including 8 in the fall). The wait list currently has 124 names. Five who were offered plots asked to defer and two on the waitlist were in the same household and so got a single plot. Of the names on the wait-list, 79 were added in 2018 and 44 in 2019. In recent years, many people on the wait-list who were offered plots declined them, because their circumstances had changed since signing up; this year we had a better acceptance rate, perhaps because the wait-list time is shorter.

Treasurer. Hillah Culman gave a summary of the treasurer's report (full report attached). She noted that our fiscal year runs from October 1, so the report for this year reflects receipts from membership but not many of the ongoing expenses during the growing season. The cash on hand is still larger than usual, but we anticipate spending on critical infrastructure. The water system has been hobbled together over the years and is in critical shape. The city provides water, but we are responsible for the pipes and faucets. Although we drain the system in the fall after the water is turned off, we have a recurring problem of dog park people turning on the water back on, which results in damage. Other than the water system, our major expenses are for the social committee, membership mailing expenses, and tools.

Hillah, along with Paul Basola, has also taken on Social Committee responsibility.

Board members

Maureen explained that after Steve Gordon resigned as board member, Beth Kaplan was appointed as interim board member and will serve in that capacity until the fall meeting elections.

Therese Fergo, who was elected last fall, said she was there to help in any way she could but was particularly interested in working on communications, taking that over from Bill Bonner (see more below). She encouraged people with questions to use the list serve and to check the website. She also stressed that we all should work together; e.g., if you see a garden gate open and no one there, close the gate.

Jane Brookstein offered to help Therese with communications.

Cathy Winer was recognized as scribe and as past Social Chair. She said she has had a plot for about 35 years, and is hoping for another 35 years.

Plot monitoring (a/k/a Rules) Bill Bonner has been in charge of Communications, but is now taking over Plot Monitoring. Last year, we got behind on plot monitoring; this year we will be on top of it. The usual practice is two citations, followed by reclaiming the plot. Plot monitoring ensures that the garden as a whole, and each plot, stays nice and is cultivated. The bulk of each plot should be used for growing, not as a patio. A seasonal chair is fine, but don't furnish it like your living room. An important rule is keeping a chip strip between plots. There is no requirement to keep fences between plots – Bill encouraged gardeners to take them down to make it easier to keep the border strips weeded.

May 1 is the deadline for getting your plot under cultivation. A new gardener asked what that meant. The garden should be weeded and prepared for planting by May 1; you needn't have plants up and growing throughout the entire plot by then. Bill will do a walk through shortly after May 1 to make sure there is compliance.

Volunteer coordinators Arisa Koyamoto and Deborah Linde volunteered last fall to take on the task of keeping track of volunteer hours worked. We need to make sure gardeners who didn't pay the non-work fee actually perform their ten hours a season, as required under our rules and by DPR. In the past we had an honor system, but we have noticed that only the same small cohort of volunteers actually shows up for workday. There will always be a sign-up list at workday (note to Arisa and Deborah: it is kept in the black binder in the office area of the shed.) In addition, Arisa and Deborah will be working on a system for posting tasks on a sheet in the shed for people who come at other times, and a system for keeping track of work performed.

Veggie compost Paul Basola is in charge of the veggie compost system (the three enclosed bins along the end of the wall, as distinguished from the large open pens along the woods). He said that more people seem interested in it than are actually using it. He offered to do train interested people (the city provides the bins and requires users to be trained to use the system properly). He noted that some repairs are needed; he has contacted DPR but hasn't gotten a response yet. Based on his experience, he provided some advice to current and prospective users. Do not add citrus (too acid), cheese, meat, or bones. Remove stickers from fruit and tags from teabags. Crush eggshells, cut up big things, and really chop up avocado skins.

For the regular compost, Paul suggested that we have a nearby "plant cemetery" for bad plants that shouldn't go into compost, e.g., wiregrass and invasive weeds. Too many people don't bother to bag up those items and put them in the trash cans, and instead add them to the compost. Also, if you notice plastic in the compost (pots, plant labels, etc.), pick it up even if it isn't yours.

Beekeepers There are once again beekeepers for the hives at the front of the garden. The hives are city-managed (not our responsibility), but we are the beneficiaries.

Children's garden Susan Akman runs the children's garden and also arranges for trash pickup and delivery of wood chips. The children's garden is for young children, each of whom comes with an adult. They come at announced times to plant, water and harvest (no weeding) and are very enthusiastic.

Susan also arranges with the city for bulk pickup after our garden work days. Please place items for pick-up down by the access road, street-side of the woodchip pile. Try to put wood and wire in separate piles, and flatten nails, etc., for the safety of the collection workers.

When placing items in the trash cans along the fence, please bag everything, no loose plant materials. Try to remove as much soil as possible before bagging to keep down the weight (e.g., let the weeds dry out a day before bagging). We have a store of paper bags in the shed, environmentally better than plastic.

We have two woodchip piles, the old one near the wall and the new one along the access road. Try to take chips from the street-side of each pile – that makes room for the next load. Care of Trees donates the chips. If access to the old site is blocked by parked cars (which is common), they dump at the new site. When taking chips, remove any unwanted big sticks and place them at the side.

Historian. Peggy Lewis is the garden historian and also in charge of the beautification plots along the Newark Street side of the garden. She likes to have a “lead” volunteer for each beautification plot. These plots are intended to improve the view of the gardens from McLean Gardens.

ANC update Angela Bradbury is the ANC (advisory neighborhood commission) rep for the garden area. She said that the construction of the homeless shelter was expected to be finished in January 2020 and the first families to move in in March. Because families are expected to be there only for 60 days or so, the turnover makes it impractical to offer a plot for shelter use. Also, they will have meals brought in so won't be able to use direct food donations from the garden.

Bill noted that, as part of the garage constructed, the city added some electric outlets to the garden side for our use (bring your own extension cord). There was discussion about the flooding problem last year between the garage and the shed. The city says it was not their fault, just the result of last years abnormal rain. Someone suggested having the city pay for a raingarden if the problem reoccurs; others said that maintaining a rain garden without causing a mosquito problem was tricky.

Communications Therese and Jane offered to lead an effort to improve communication within the garden and explore ways of sharing expertise. Several gardeners offered to help with this. There was a good discussion of sources of expertise and how to get the word out. One gardener suggested a closed Facebook group. Others suggesting making better use of the list serve (Bill proposed adding every gardener's name to the list serve). The garden shed is another place to post info. An additional suggestion was to work with Jon Mormino (who is webmaster but was unable to attend the meeting) on upgrading the garden website. Others emphasized that there should be one place where all key information was available – announcements, reminders, seasonal tips on gardening problems, links to garden resources like the USDA Extension service, etc. Interested people agreed to get together with Therese and Jane and Jon to brainstorm together and get better systems in place quickly.

Miscellaneous. Russ Kramer mentioned that he had sent photos of plots with furniture and wood piles – did Bill think they were out of compliance? Bill said he would check it out. Russ also mentioned that the DPR website, which previously included a description of each community garden and contact names, now only includes websites for each community garden. Maureen agreed that was unfortunate but not something within our control.

Someone asked whether vacant plots could be cleaned up before being reassigned. Lynn explained that when a plot was a real wreck, we used garden workdays to do that. Otherwise, she works with the new gardeners to ensure they know what they are getting and how to prepare it properly (e.g., dig and pull weeds, don't just break off at ground).

The meeting wound up at 2:00 and members adjourned to the garden for new member orientation, laying out the hoses, veggie compost training, and other tasks as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Winer, Scribe