DARK HOLLOW WOODS
CONSERVE + PRESERVE

DHW Committee
Meeting Minutes
Friday, June 27, 2025

In Person Attendance: Megan Gold, Phillip Fraley, Phyllis J. Anderson, Shawn Wingrove
Virtual Attendance: Brian Crooks, Jennifer Schneller, Landscape Architect – LSSE, and Roxanne Swan, Plant Center Coordinator – Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania

POLLINATOR GARDEN

It was determined that we need to identify an area for the 20,000 square foot pollinator garden. It could be one contiguous area, or broken up into several smaller areas. Jenn suggested one big area, as it would offer protection for the plants and provide a concentration of species in one area.

Phil asked about deer. It was discussed that dogs deter deer, and if we were to install 10' – 12' deer fencing around the garden, deer could potentially jump over the fence, if they have enough clearance. It was then suggested that perhaps we could install small pockets of areas for fencing. Jenn believes that one contiguous area of garden would be best. There is a way to keep deer from prairie style plantings if planted in a contiguous area.

We need to install benches per the grant application. One suggestion is to use wood from DHW to build the benches. Phyllis mentioned that she met with the Executive Director, and the operations coordinator for a company called LandForce, that repurposes wood from downed trees. Their company is not fully functional yet, but it is something to discuss moving forward. Megan mentioned keeping the woods natural, and we all agreed that if we use wood from DHW, this will blend in with the natural aesthetics.

Phil mentioned ADA requirements and Jenn responded that ADA requirements are set up as to not put an under burden on an entity, providing that the amenity can provide non-expensive materials to provide a pathway for wheelchairs. There are a few paths that can use engineered mulch, that would provide wheelchair access. Brian stated we may have to bus people with disabilities into DHW. Jenn responded that the garden would not be wheelchair accessible because you can't get people to the garden. Shawn mentioned that New London Lane will provide ADA accessibility, and since the trail to VOPP Trail will eventually branch off from the DHW path, it would meet ADA requirements. It was further discussed that perhaps we could work with the Commons HOA to get accessible spots near the path, in the Commons, that would lead to the pollinator garden. Summary: There are materials that can be used that would provide a path to the garden and be able to accommodate a person in a wheelchair.

Phil stated that the area near the meadow is prone to flooding and plants we select will have to withstand occasional flooding. Jenn advised that she can find plants that are flood resistant, that are used on the bottom of rivers. Roxanne of the Audubon Society advised that she is an Environmental Botanist, and can help us identify plants that would help with stormwater infiltration.

A section of the grant identifies that we need to install lighting in the pollinator garden for accessibility purposes. Phyllis mentioned that our parks are open from dawn to dusk, and as of right now, no parks have lights. She suggested solar lights instead of installing electricity to an area to provide lights. She also mentioned Dark Sky ordinances that are becoming the standard for helping to keep the skies in municipalities dark for birds and other animals. Roxanne added that we should minimize lighting in the garden to promote fireflies, moths, and birds that depend on a dark night sky.

We then talked about removal of invasive species. Jenn said we will need to use a bush hog and chemicals to get rid of knotweed. Removing knotweed in the meadow will be much easier than removing it deep in the woods. We should be able to get equipment in the meadow to take out the knotweed and install the pollinator garden. We will need to start with the knotweed because it will take up to a year for it to be removed. Phyllis mentioned that the grant period is from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2026. Once we find a location, we will need to begin to remediate the knotweed soon as possible. We can use volunteers to dig it out. Roxanne advised that there are several methods to remove knotweed. We can begin to tackle top growth first. Then paint and target with herbicide. We should also use this method in the fall. We can make observational checkpoints during each season to determine if we need to spot treat during the year. Finally, after a year, check for rhizomes and any new shoots that may have began to sprout. We would not be able to till the ground because it will probably break up the rhizomes and spread the knotweed even further. We will have to do a systematic approach to removal of invasive species. Roxanne and Jenn both expressed their dismay with chemical application, but to remove knotweed quickly, it is the only way to remove it. Sheet mulch could take up to three years, and to cut it back and inject, could take up to two years. In this situation, the use of an herbicide is best.

Phil mentioned there are some plants that could deter knotweed, but we would not be able to plant delicate plants for at least 10 years. Roxanne prefers all native plants, but Jenn provided a list of native plants and non-native plants to put in the garden. Roxanne offered DHW to come and look at their nursery at the Audubon Society. It is not impossible to set up a late fall planting. Plantings can occur as late as November, because that is when plants establish roots.

Megan advised that she did chemical injection last year and then used foliar spray and avoided other weeds. Then she mentioned an area that is about 125' x 6' has been treated in previous years, where we recently planted the aspen trees. I mentioned that Swissvale got a pollinator garden grant, and we should look at how they installed their garden. https://humaneactionpittsburgh.org/victories/hap-hive-pollinator-gardens https://www.swissvaleborough.com/307/Pollinator-Garden . I was advised that Swissvale's model was for edibles. Megan would like to see masses of colors and similar plants. I asked, just how big is 20,000 square feet, and Shawn said it is about the size of half a football field. Jenn has a similar approach, but first we need to identify a target (ex: rectangle, square, etc.). Shawn will get a survey of the area. Jess took pictures around April 17, 2024, of the pollinator area, which Phyllis will share with Directors. Megan also has pictures of the pollinator garden, which will be shared.

Brian says deer fencing is needed for some areas. Jenn said we can fence some areas but not all areas need to be fenced. Roxanne said, tall plants will reduce deer browsing, and we can use as many approaches as necessary to deal with deer as possible.

Next Steps:
Work with Commons HOA to add ADA spaces for trail
LSSE will do a sketch base plan for starting points
LSSE will do a sharable folder
LSSE (Shawn) will do a logical path layout

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The pollinator garden qualifies for a Penn State Master Pollinator Garden, which we will need to complete the application.
Add Drew Richards to the list of volunteers.