

LPCA Meeting Highlights – May 14, 2014

Natalie Roy presided over the meeting in John Goldner's absence.

Garden Group

Kit Putnam provided an overview of the Garden Group's activities. Each month there is an article from the Garden Club in the Lyon Park Citizen, our neighborhood newsletter. The club has been meetings in the homes of members, and they have been meeting on the third Wednesday evening during the month. In an upcoming meeting, the club will meet in Ted Hobart's garden, and they will cook some plants from his garden.

Kit directed attendees to the tree raffle, and encouraged people to put their names in for the drawing tonight at the meeting to win a small tree. Bess Zelle mentioned that the Tree Canopy program is happening now, and encouraged people to participate.

Native Plant Discussion

Jen Soles from the Gulf Branch Nature Center came to speak about native plants. She herself is a Lyon Park native, and mentioned that each of us should plant at least one more native plant in our yards. The native plants are important because they are part of the local food chain; non-native species are not eaten by native bugs. It helps keep everything in balance. If you want a diverse bird and bug/butterfly population, you need the native plants in your yard. Natalie asked why some of the native dogwoods don't do well; Jen answered that we have brought in non-native dogwoods with pests or diseases that trouble the native version of the species. Jen passed around a native azalea and no one in the room recognized it as an azalea - indicating that many of us have non-native azaleas in our yards. 95-97% of our country is now not natural, and our small nature centers cannot maintain the diversity of our native plants. This is why maintaining native plants in our suburban yards is critical. A few natives in each yard will make a huge difference. She recommended a book "Bringing Nature Home" as a wonderful resource.

You won't find many natives at Costco or Home Depot. There are now several native plant sales in Arlington. There are local nurseries that specialize in native plants. Green Spring gardens has natives, and their plant sale is this coming weekend (May 17-18). Native plants can be ordered online as well, and delivered to your house. Another challenge for natives is that not everything in your yard will be green year round.....there are seasons for native plants. Start slowly by putting in one native plant at a time – you don't have to dig up your garden. Also, you don't have to be so specific – it doesn't have to be an Arlington native, it can be a plant native to Fairfax or the mid-Atlantic region.

Kit mentioned that Gulf Branch has a pollinator garden, and members of the Garden Club wanted to create a pollinator garden locally. Jen suggested that the best time to plant new plants is in the Fall – you aren't trying to keep them alive during the Summer with constant watering, and the Fall rains will help them establish themselves and root.

Question: Are magnolia trees native? Some are - Sweet Bay Magnolias are native. The Star Magnolia and the ones with large, white flowers are not native.

Arlington Blvd Re-Planting Status

Brooke Alexander is a former Lyon Park resident who now lives in Ashton Heights, and got up to speak about alternatives to non-native plants, and had brought a wallet-sized version of the native alternative list to hand out at the meeting. She worked on the Rosslyn-Ballston sector plan options in the 1980s. She introduced our Lyon Park neighbor, Dean Amel, who is the chair of the urban forestry commission. Brooke came to speak about conversations with VDOT to put in native plants along Arlington Blvd. Before VDOT removed them, we had some Oak-Hickory forest remnants left that were small areas of bio-diversity along Arlington Blvd. She had contacted VDOT before they started taking down the

trees and she, Bill Anhut and Carrie Johnson attended a meeting with them. VDOT presented a finished plan for landscaping, and had already contracted a company to execute the plan. They planned a lot of plants, none of which are native in the area from Pershing to a bit past Courthouse Road along Arlington Blvd. They continued to have conversations, and enlisted the assistance of Delegate Patrick Hope, who has asked if any trees planted could be natives. Delegate Lopez introduced a bill that would require VDOT to comply with the local requirements for tree replacement, but it was tabled. The equivalent of 396 trees was removed by VDOT, and VDOT was planning to plant 19. Brooke will be knocking on doors asking if owners close to that area of Arlington Blvd would consider taking trees under the Tree Canopy Fund Program, and would love help securing assent from owners. Brooke identified an area that had no plants being planned, and got a native plant group to donate the plants. VDOT agreed as long as she would take responsibility for the liability, do the planting, take on the maintenance, and remove the plants and trees if VDOT determines the plantings are not workable.

Natalie asked whether the group is getting the support of neighboring Civic Groups. Dean mentioned that Ashton Heights has been supportive and has written letters – would a letter from Lyon Park be helpful. Brooke answered yes.

The conversation turned to the area where the large dirt mounds along Washington Blvd, called “The Buttes” by Dean Amel. Bill Anhut had established conversations with VDOT, and they committed to plant native plants on The Buttes. They committed to creating a plan, and will contract separately. The plants will be insured for a year or two. Dean requested that they not put in a few small caliper trees, but put in several small trees to increase the likelihood that some will survive past the first several years. Grasses will help stabilize the slope.

How will the Chesapeake Bay ordinance impact the runoff from the Washington Blvd buttes? Are they exempt from the requirements? There was discussion, but those in the room were not sure of the answers, so that is a point of further discussion with VDOT and review of the plan.

Brooke then discussed bees and the loss of diversity if we lose natives. There are 400 species of bees in the local area. There are 4,000 types of bees in the United States. There are 40,000 types of bees worldwide, but they are still being identified and named.

Kit coordinated the drawing for the redbud. Julia Young was the winner and will be planting it in her yard soon.

The meeting was adjourned by Natalie at 8:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen McSweeney, LPCA Secretary