

Two Coves Community Garden General Membership Meeting Minutes

Saturday, November 21, 2009

The meeting was held at the Astoria Library.

GARDEN SECURITY

The meeting began with an update by Bernard regarding another break-in in the garden. The chain was cut at the western gate. Nothing seemed to be missing from the shed, but Michelle's rosebush was stolen from Vanessa's plot. Michelle had just moved her rosebush there to move it out of the way of the winter construction in the garden. It was not know whether anything else was stolen.

There was discussion of whether a police report should be filed and who should file it. Jodie stated that a police report must be filed whenever a crime occurs. Others worried how it will reflect on the garden to the Parks Department if we keep having problems. Jodie stated that she thought we should also call the Parks Department and let them know about the problems with break-ins that the garden is experiencing. Vanessa volunteered to handle reporting.

Shirley reported that people were trying to pull up the bike racks.

There was discussion of asking the Parks Department to assist with security issues in the garden, but no clear idea emerged of what to ask them to do. Michael suggested that the garden consider purchasing a security camera. Issues were raised about the feasibility of a camera: Where would the line go? How would it be powered? Who would monitor it? How much would it cost? Bernard volunteered to look up the price of a security camera.

Lauren asked, even if we get a picture of someone on a security camera, how will we know whom it is? She also suggested installing a fake camera. Chris stated that it would take several cameras and quite a bit of infrastructure to cover the perimeter of the garden.

Stacey motioned to table discussion of cameras, and the motion passed.

The idea was raised of putting barbed or razor wire over the fence. Several people stated that they did not think barbed wire would work and that it looked very unfriendly.

Stephanos stated that he thought that barbed wire and security cameras were not in the spirit of

community. He stated that he accepted that there is going to be some theft in the garden.

Vanessa stated that she felt that there was a difference between the garden sharing and with people tearing things up in the garden.

Bernard stated that he believes it is one person or a small group of people who are repeatedly breaking in because he does not believe that many people own bolt cutters.

Jesus reported that there is a problem with the lock on the west gate. It is very hard to close.

WINTER CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Vanessa spoke to Edie Stone who reported that there is no definite date yet for closing the garden and beginning construction. It is possible that we may be able to place the compost under the 59th Street Bridge.

The construction company has said that it is too costly to change the route of the piping in the garden, so it will remain as it was originally laid out. It was agreed to move forward with the original plan so as not to hold up the start of construction.

ELECTIONS

Steering Committee Elections were held beginning with discussion. Members running for Steering Committee were: Eric Matthews, Ina Brennan, (Junior) Avcadio Vasquez Soto, Michael Powers, Rosyln (Lucious) Sexton, Jesus Diaz, Garrett Ramirez, David H. Turner and Vanessa Jones-Hall.

Each candidate present read their written statement and/or made a few remarks (a copy of all candidate statements is at the bottom of this document).

Eric:

Eric could not be present as he was at work, but his written statement was read for him.

Ina:

Ina added to her statement that she thought there should be a better way to contact other gardeners. She thinks people should have their names on their plots. She thinks that there should be more follow up on members who don't maintain their plots. She wants more communication.

Stephanos said that he thought Ina did a good job of maintaining the flowerbed at the front of the garden.

Jodie stated a question that she had for all candidates: What should be done about Wesley as he is still coming to the garden?

Ina said that she did not know what to do unless everyone came together. She said perhaps we could get an order of protection.

Junior:

Junior stated that there is a lot of arguing in the garden, and he wants us to work together. We need to work together like a community.

A question was raised about the rocks put down around the trees in the common area. Several people did not like that Junior did this and asked Junior if he would be willing to be discuss decisions such as these before acting and be open to ideas about different ways of doing things. Junior said yes.

Michael:

Michael stated that he felt that there is controversy in the garden due to a lack of involvement by the general membership. He stated that he wants to appoint someone to contact every member of the garden. He stated that he felt that there would be no problem with Wesley if every single garden member voted to take away his membership. He said that Wesley perceives that a few people are kicking him out.

Vanessa asked Michael how his relationship with Wesley would affect how he deals with him as a Steering Committee Member. Jodie asked Michael if he thought that the rules did not apply to Wesley.

Michael stated that he thought that if a person is antagonizing, that there is a problem. He said he thought that everyone must conform to the rules of the garden or be expelled. He said that his personal opinion was that Wesley did not belong in the garden.

Jodie asked what he would do about it? Michael answered that he thought there should be another vote on Wesley's expulsion and that he would vote for Wesley to be expelled.

Stephanos asked if Michael thought we should revote on everything? Others raised similar issues re: a revote. If we decide that the Wesley vote wasn't valid, are all other votes that have taken place in the garden invalid as well?

The discussion during Michael's remarks was especially heated and there were a lot of people talking over each other.

Roslyn:

Luscious could not be in attendance, but her statement was read for her.

Jesus:

Jesus stated that he felt there was a lack of communication in the garden. He said that he thought there needed to be someone in the garden constantly. He stated that we need to stand together on security issues. He also suggested having contests for growing vegetables.

Regarding the Wesley issue, he stated that he was in support of the vote that already happened. He said that we just need to enforce it.

Nitsa asked if we could remove Wesley's stuff from his plot as he is no longer a member and has not removed it himself.

Garrett:

Garrett stated that he is ready to do whatever the garden membership supports to get Wesley out of the garden. Jodie asked what is his suggestion for a first step. Garrett stated that he supports dismantling Wesley's former plot.

Michael stated that he thought it did not make sense to dismantle Wesley's plot as it would create the potential for violence.

David:

David stated that he believes that the garden has spoken regarding Wesley. He stated that he believes that the members who come to meetings and participate are the members who decide what happens. He said that enforcing the Wesley vote is difficult. He thinks that the garden members should work together to come up with a solution. He thinks it would be hard if a Steering Committee is elected that is divided on this issue.

David also suggested the idea of enforcing a minimum amount of participation by members in meetings and also rotating the days that meetings happen to give more people an opportunity to participate.

Bernard asked David if he will still be involved in the Community Plot if he is elected to the Steering Committee and how did he see it evolving. David said that he would be involved, and that he sees the Community Plot as providing “insurance” for gardeners who have a problem with their own plot.

Vanessa:

Vanessa stated that she has had a lot of flack and nastiness directed toward her because of Wesley. She said that she always dealt with Wesley fairly and based on his actions. She stated that having and revolving differences in the garden is part of what makes us a union. It is up to each person to be involved. If you are not involved, you can't question decisions. She stated that once a decision is made, it is final.

She stated that Wesley has been notified that he has been expelled and she suggested that anyone who sees him the garden should call the police. She also stated that as a member of the garden and a leader in the Astoria Houses, she believes we have more important issues than Wesley.

Stephanos asked Vanessa if she would actively pursue connecting the garden and a NYCHA program at Astoria Houses. Vanessa said she had been involved, but that renovations had stopped some of the gardening that was happening. She stated that she has promoted the Community Plot at Astoria Houses meetings.

Voting took place and Bernard counted the votes and Emily verified. Results were released later in the evening via email. All candidates were voted onto the Steering Committee except Michael Powers.

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

Ina Brennan

I am nominating myself in order to be of greater use in our community garden. I have one of the raised

beds and the flower plot at the entrance of the garden. I would like to see more organization and planning as well as more communication among the gardeners.

Eric Matthews

I am nominating myself to run for the Steering Committee. I do not have a plot, but I have been active gardening in the Community Plot, helping where possible and I coordinated the 2009 Harvest Festival. It is important that we can gather together and strengthen our sense of community. I intend to coordinate and help produce more events and work to see that the garden continues to be a peaceful and beautiful place.

(Junior) Avcadio Vasquez Soto

I am nominating myself to run for the Steering Committee. I am an experienced handyman that can repair lawnmowers, tools and wind-damaged tents when needed. I will offer my technical skills to fix what is broken. I will also clean and maintain the garden. I want us to work as a community.

Michael Powers

I am nominating myself to run for the Steering Committee. As an avid gardener at Two Coves Community Garden I feel that I can offer my wisdom in gardening to share with the community. I can offer help in the various projects for maintaining the garden and offer support during events. The particular issue I have been involved with recently is seeing that all sides of a dispute are acknowledged. I believe it is important that as a community we are compassionate and fair.

Roslyn (Luscious) Sexton

I am nominating myself to run for the Steering Committee. I would like to see more children, senior citizen and handicap programs in the garden. It is important that there is more focus on improvements such as a more specific agenda for the community of Astoria. I would also support more events to bring the community together

Jesus Diaz

I want to see the Garden grow better and more. The Garden needs me. I'm here all the time and can represent the gardeners. It would be a good idea to have a growing competition -- we might get some publicity.

Garrett Ramirez

I would be honored to continue to represent you on the steering committee. I have been involved in the garden for three years on a variety of projects, from giving workshops to negotiating with city officials to growing okra. My priorities include ensuring the end of renovation before March 2010, involving more youth with the garden, improving relations with the surrounding neighborhood, raising funds for a better compost system, and growing bigger squash.

David H. Turner

Over the past year while on Steering Committee I've collaborated on several tasks in the garden that I'm looking forward to continuing: I helped reduce the largest plots to make room for more gardeners; created a map of the garden to systematize the plots and added new gardeners as members; helped successfully maintain our community-managed control of the garden when the garden's future was in jeopardy; helped create the community plot in order to allow non-members the opportunity to both work and share in the fruits of our labor! As Two Coves develops out of its infancy and stands on its own I want to make sure it grows up in a safe environment with lots of positive stimulation and interaction with the community.

Vanessa Jones-Hall

I am running for re-election for the Steering Committee of the Two Coves Community Garden of Astoria. I love what I do in and for the garden. Running for re-election will allow me to better serve both my communities, the garden and the Astoria Houses. I can see the beautification that the garden has brought to my community and there are more residents of Astoria Houses interested in joining the garden. I specifically push their involvement with the Community Plot that I wish to become more involved with this coming harvest season. I also push the benefits of the Two Coves garden and how it will provide an outlet of Bridging the Gap Across Generations and Cultures. Union brought together by the love of Gardening.