

SOUTH RUSSELL VILLAGE PARKS COMMITTEE MINUTES OCTOBER 21, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Martha Bistriz, Ruth Cavanagh, Gregg Gamm, Greg Studen

Absent: Ted Kruse and Libby Sharkey

GUESTS: Mayor Bill Koons, Kelly Estes and Carrie Schloss from the ad hoc for safe bicycle and pedestrian transport committee, Pete MacDonald, from the Western Land Conservancy, Kaitlin Petrow, a resident of South Russell, Rich Washington, a landscape architect from CT Consultants and Tim Young, the South Russell Street commissioner

The meeting was brought to order at 6:30. Mayor Koons asked the people present to introduce themselves and share why they were attending this meeting. He then explained the plan to do a 10 acre burn on part of the E. Washington Street side of the park next Spring. That location was chosen because there is only one house nearby. The Geauga Park District will facilitate the burn. Their personnel have coordinated field burns in other parks in the area. This will take place in March or April 2025. Prior to the burn, Tim will mow double wide paths as a buffer for the burn.

Pete explained that South Russell park is comprised of 87 acres. Seventy-seven acres are under strict easement restrictions. Ten acres on the E. Washington St. side of the park has looser easement restrictions and has a "governmental use" allowance. Funding for the purchase of the park land came from Clean Ohio funds. Currently, the field may be cut and the cuttings taken off anytime after August 1. The land is protected habitat for the Bobolink. Bill Timmons has been haying the field and taking the grasses to use for animal bedding. He is paid approximately \$4000. Pete further explained that other parks have land management plans in place which include periodically burning sections and rotating that activity from year to year. He said that early successional habitat is rare and a good thing. He also offered that US Fish and Wildlife has funding available for purchasing flower/pollinator seeds. It takes about three years for sections of colorful blooming pollinators to establish themselves. Rich suggested that annuals seed could be added to the mix.

There was a discussion of whether or not to mow the fields. The idea of rotating sections of the fields to be mowed or burned on a rotational basis was suggested. Greg Studen recommended making a park land management plan.

Pete shared that Paul Pirot (sp?) is the local expert on burning sections of field in order to give native species a head start and allow new growth. In addition pollinators and annual flowering plant species could be planted such as purple cone flowers, bee balm, cosmos to add color and expand the variety of pollinators. Pete explained that not using a tractor and gasoline to cut the field would be a cost benefit.

It was agreed that goals be set for the park land management. One idea was to have a section of the park not be cut and let it go back to woodland. Another idea was to plant designated stands of trees to add shade and visual interest.

Ruth let everyone know that notice about the planned burn in the Spring, will go out to South Russell residents prior to the burn. Often the date of the burn is determined only a couple of days ahead due to weather. There was a concern that the burn would possibly kill small animal species and ground nesting birds. Greg G. explained that the burn is very slow allowing for some animals to get out ahead of it. There will be some casualties unfortunately but with mowing there are probably more.

Ruth asked for directions as to next steps.

Bill said they would begin to refine a master plan at the next council meeting.

It was noted that wind is an issue near the pavilion. Trees could be planted strategically near there to help mitigate that.

Pete will let us know more about the timing on the US Fish and Wildlife funds that may be available to help the village purchase seeds.

Greg Studen recommended a concrete land management plan for 2025 be formalized.

Another meeting to continue this discussion will be set for after Thanksgiving.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Bistriz