

A meeting took place in the Washington Grove Conservation Meadow on 09/18/24 with Ryan Colliton, Vegetation Ecologist from Montgomery Parks, to discuss the planned restoration program. Attending were Mayor John Compton, Town Council members Barbara Raimondo, Kriss Grisham, Rob Gilmore, and Peter Nagrod. Meadows Committee members included Bruce Daggy, Georgette Cole, Donna Shriner, Joan Mahaffey, David Stopak, Anne Vincent, and advisor Ernie Kawasaki. Additional residents included Dennis Kirschbaum, Terri Johnson, Kathy Fletcher, Barbara Leng, Kathy Lehman, Lisa Kokes, Dane Clark, Liz Gillanders, Diane Garoni, Deb Tarasevich, Marida Hines, and Dan Tutas. Apologies if we left anyone out.

Ryan outlined the background to the restoration program. Meadows are not well protected in Montgomery County, especially compared to forests. The meadow at Washington Grove is a precious resource. It is a mid-size meadow with a distinct ecology, now under threat from reforestation if we do not act. The size of the meadow is important; it will be able to support a greater diversity of flora and fauna than most smaller plots in urban areas. Still, it is probably not large enough to allow obligate, ground nesting meadow birds e.g. bobwhites to nest, but they may pass through for feeding. According to Ryan, most of the species that we are losing in Montgomery County depend on meadow habitat.

Parks recognizes a meadow as an “open, herbaceous habitat with less than 25% tree cover”.

Parks assessed the meadow and determined that tree removal from the center was desirable and permitted without the need for regulatory exemption. Accordingly, a tree reduction program is proposed to take place in two stages of about 37 trees in each stage with the focus on the red cedars that are in the center of the meadow. Additionally, the meadow shows an excess of goldenrod. It is proposed to increase plant diversity by adding a variety of natives, mostly flowers but some grasses.

Because of proximity to a major road and housing, meadow clearance by the preferred method of burning cannot be done. Instead, once annual mowing is recommended in early Spring to minimize disruption to wildlife and the spread of seeds that would happen with mowing in the fall.

After mowing and any timely weed warrior events, plugs (seedlings) will be planted to increase biodiversity. Plugs will be supplied by Pope Farm, labor by Parks and volunteers. The method is not to go to bare dirt but to spade in each plant individually. It is hoped that many native species can be introduced to provide a variety of color year-round and in doing so many more pollinators will be attracted to the meadow. A plant list has been supplied to the Committee (attached).

Other native trees such as persimmon, American gum, black walnut etc. will continue to be mowed annually. This keeps these trees as an acceptable shrub-like component of the meadow.

Parks will also soften the edges of the meadow as it transitions to the forested perimeter by restoring the ecotone. The understory will be enhanced in the tree line between the two meadows. Additionally, Parks plans to leave groups of trees for nesting and wildlife protection.

Rachel Carson Meadow has been actively managed by Parks. The expectation is that the biodiversity exhibited there (over 45 native species planted for a succession of color all year round), can be largely accomplished at Washington Grove. This is advantageous to pollinators as well as a source of beauty.

John Compton stated that legally, Montgomery Parks has a mandate to maintain the meadow for 99 years. The County was granted an easement on the property which includes, from the original approval of the preliminary plan of subdivision, the dedication of the Meadow for the express purpose of maintaining and protecting the Town's historic setting. This both prevented the land from being developed for housing and protected the view-scape for the setting of the historical town of WG. For more explanation read Bill Roberts' letter in the town's archives. (Bruce added that denser tree growth was maintained in the proposal near the Shady Grove Crossing development to this end.) To date, the town has worked well with Parks and it is beneficial that the parties continue this cooperation.

Some residents expressed dismay at any tree removal for aesthetic or wildlife reasons, while others appreciated a more open aspect including the sight of bare trees in winter and the preservation of meadow species. Some questioned whether road noise would be more intrusive. (It won't; this was addressed by Bob Booher in last TC meeting. He worked with a sound engineer who advised WG about the potential sound impacts of the ICC). Some wanted a compromise plan to remove the minimum number of trees consistent with the definition of a meadow. This idea was not supported by the mayor who felt that neither objective would be realized. Some debated whether rust disease was present among the trees. It is -- galls are visible now and the rust is apparent in the spring. Some preferred the removal of deciduous trees or male cedar trees. Ryan advised that the trees have not been sexed which would be required if the female, berry bearing cedars are to be preferentially retained.

There will be no cost to the town, Parks will cover all costs of tree removal and replanting. A grant has been applied for from Sustainable Maryland.

Other than Weed Warrior events the Conservation Meadow would not be widely advertised. Parks recognizes it to be too small and local to receive many visitors. Consequently, parking is not expected to be a problem.