

Westbury Community Garden
General Meeting - Board Minutes
April 15, 2025
6:30 – 8:00 p.m. via Zoom

In attendance, Debbie Gordon, Shelly Johnson, Dorthy Smith, Steve Goldberg, Marcia Hartman, Kat Elder, Ray Sher, Julie Fordes, Hazel Potvin, Steve Goldberg, Don Finley, Betina Wolfowicz

- I. Meeting called to order by the President, Debbie Gordon.
- II. A motion was made to approve the March minutes as written and distributed to the board by Dorthy Smith
- III. A motion was made to approve the March Financial Report as written and distributed to the board by Marcia Hartman
- IV **Old Business – Security issue** -. Debbie spoke with Marie Antoinette Harvey, Community Engagement Coordinator with PIFF, after Debbie spoke to a Pct 5 constable regarding vagrants sleeping on the property. He suggested PIFF put up signs saying No Trespassing, especially on the containers and carport. The Officer said, “They should call the constable if they find anyone sleeping there after putting up signs.” They should also indicate that it’s PIFF/Westbury, 12581 Dunlap, Houston, Tx 77035. All of the farmers should have the constable’s number in their phone.

Site Maintenance – The wooden bench, on the east side, of the garden was moved to below the hill making it invisible from the garden beds, previously it was on the north side of the trees and now it’s on the south side. We assume it was done by visitors to the garden after dark. Debbie will check into anchoring it so it can’t be moved.

Weed Letters – Shelly Johnson received a lot of feedback when she sent out weed letters. Some of the member’s beds and vacant beds have 3 different types of Amaranths, mint, Malabar spinach, Bermuda grass, and nutgrass in them. This is requiring Ray Sher to take a lot of time cleaning out vacant beds. We need to take a hard line on nutgrass growing in member’s beds, because it will only get worse if not removed. Debbie has been calling some people about the condition of their beds. If you volunteered to take care of a vacant bed, please remember to take care of it weekly including the aisles surrounding the bed.

Founders Breakfast 3/22/25 – We made \$20,000.00 in donations. It was well worth the effort and expense from just the community exposure, the earnings and

the fun had by all gardeners. Let's remember the Toolbank was a great resource to use in planning this event.

- V. New Business - Wheelchair Bed** – The City of Houston, grant money \$7,500 will pay for the curb cut, driveway apron and pad. This does not include the ramp since this has to be in compliance with the grade of the driveway which is not in yet. We need to do this by the end of May because the city of Houston's fiscal budget year ends then. Betina Wolfowicz, Hazel Potvin and Shelly Johnson will form a committee to go to Rice University and check out the various wheelchair beds and report back. Hazel also talked to Dr. Novak, at Rice, regarding the different types of materials and styles. He did indicate that it needs to be 24" high so the wheelchair can roll under it to a certain point. Once the bed is installed, we need to anchor it. Hazel, suggest we form another committee to investigate different types of material, a shade cover and make sure there are rounded corners on the bed. The bed will also need to be anchored to the concrete. Before pouring concrete, you need to know how the bed will be positioned so it doesn't shade the neighboring bed, how to anchor it and where the shade cover will be before pouring the concrete. It should of course be sturdy and hold up to the elements. There is still a lot of planning that needs to go into the construction of this bed.

Electricity PIFF – PIFF has talked to Center Point Energy and they are asking us for permission to have electricity installed on their side which will run to a **CoolBot** (concrete block structure with an air conditioner in it.) where they will store their vegetables. The wires will run underground from one or two poles. From their drawing they sent Debbie it looks like it might be cutting off part of the Prairie. PIFF said they would follow the advice of Center Point on where to place the poles. Debbie has no objection to the electricity but we need to make sure the poles are kept close to the property line (east side). Perhaps, at a later time, we can piggyback off this to have electricity at the WCG garden. Debbie will email the drawing, she received, to the board.

Ninth Annual Tomato Tasting – Memorial Day Weekend – May 24, 2025 (Saturday). As a fundraiser we will be doing a raffle. Debbie has made a postcard (as a promotional thing) to hand out at the Tomato Tasting event information on one side, will be our name, address and website on the other side information with on how to join the garden, how to volunteer, donate money and our email address. She plans to attach a seed packet of basil (goes well with tomatoes) to the postcard then attach it to the grab bag and give them out at an outreach event. Debbie plans to attend The Painted Tree boutique and hand them out there as she works in the WCG booth. If additional cards are needed, she can easily print them up on her home computer. If you would like some to hand out at any event you are attending, they are available.

Planting and Maintaining Vacant Beds – Ray Sher said, that volunteers and gardeners have done a fantastic job clearing 10 beds. The problem is maintaining them. He ordered 250 sweet potato slips and plans to put them in some of the beds and southern peas in the others. There are some gardeners that would like to adopt a bed or take care of a bed. If they plant in the bed then the produce would be donated to a food pantry. It's inviting because it means someone is going to be looking after that bed. But it also means that any weeds that come up in the bed and in the aisles must be removed. Shelly Johnson stated that some of the people who want to do this have already received 10-day letters and have not addressed the issue appropriately. She is opposed to some of this. What do these people think they are going to grow in the summer that they can donate to a food bank? Maybe southern peas, but most people will not plant them because you have to shell them and a food bank is not going to shell them either. Roy and I do but most people won't and sweet potatoes don't come in until the fall. So realistically you can grow okra, maybe, and basil. Betina Wolfowicz, Betsy Longoria and Amy Herrmann have adopted a bed, D10 but do not want to spend all their time pulling weeds and are currently doing 3 Sisters, corn, pole beans and squash. The objective is to prevent weeds from growing in the bed even though no produce is expected from these summer crops. Weeds are removed from the aisles surrounding the bed by Betina, Betsy and Amy. Kat Elder suggested we cover the beds with cardboard. Shelly said that was a bad idea due to ants. Shelly said sweet potatoes and southern peas are known to inhibit nutgrass. They tried it one summer and it works. Ray would like to plant 2 rows of sweet potatoes down the middle of each empty bed, if everyone agrees. We won't do the mound down the middle; we'll just plant the slips in the center of the bed. We can then call on individuals to water these beds. Shelly said all the sweet potatoes that are planted now need to be removed due to disease, nematodes and weevils. Also, they are not going to yield a significant crop. Shelly said this is something we need to put in the Newsletter to notify all gardeners. Debbie said she would volunteer to be on a team to water and weed. Ray and Shelly will work out details of watering and weeding empty beds.

Labeling Tools – Hazel Potvin suggested we label our tools with spray paint. She would like orange and green. Debbie Gordon will purchase the paint and we will try to do this on a workday.

Mural on Shed 1 – Debbie Gordon has been talking with an artist and she also found that the Houston Arts Alliance has a grant that will cover the cost of the artist (her fee). This grant, requires that we involve the community. The artist suggested an online forum that we as gardeners could fill out or ask the surrounding community for their input but we may not want to. The artist would like our input on what kind of imagery we would like i.e., butterflies, native plants or certain vegetables, and do you want to see people doing things. She will take the input and develop the design then present it to us for changes. She will work with us to get a design we like. Another requirement of this grant is that we have

a community culture event with the unveiling of the art or some other event. Maybe we could call the event, Rooted in Wellness and Connection. The artist realized that we are as much about community as we are about gardening. The artist suggest that we do a paint by numbers on parts of the shed then have people come and paint certain areas of the mural. She has done this before and it worked out really well. She of course would be doing most of the painting; only certain areas would be available for individuals to paint. She loved that we emphasized native plants, that we have pollinator gardens, and that we have a lot of environmental conservation goals. This is the anniversary year of the neighborhood of Westbury. Westbury will be 70 years old. The Civic Club president, Lindsey Pollock was very interested in having this mural painting idea be a part of the Westbury events, celebrating 70 years. Debbie thought this was a nice idea and thought we could have an International Food Festival to talk about the diversity of Westbury. The artist will probably be painting in October and November. The grant for this runs October 2025 to October 2026. There are 3 categories. One being community, ours would be community. We can continue to do our information gathering and making suggestions about the imagery until October.

Soil – Debbie will purchase soil for E10 and top off E5 then E3 and E4. Debbie needs help with estimating the soil amount for the 4 beds. Shelly indicated that some of the other E beds needed soil too plus B10. We'll do the E beds first then if we have soil left over, we'll do the other beds that need soil.

Chip Drop – Debbie has been trying to get a chip drop. She requested 2 trucks loads but has not heard back from them. She thinks she needs to start over.

Pavilion Reservation – Bouquets Garden Club has reserved it for May 22, 2025 starting at 10:00 a.m. Debbie will supply Hazel with some postcard to hand out. Steve Ewing will be the guest speaker giving a talk on bees. We will purchase an ad in their federation directory to support the federation and to promote the garden.

Booth – Painted Tree - The videographer for our Founder's Breakfast, has a booth at the Painted Tree Westchase (Westheimer) on May 10 and will let us have a guest spot next to her. Debbie will hand out postcards and try to sell honey, honey almond soap and other things. Maybe Julie Fordes has some herbal tea left over from Herb Day that we can make and give out to customers to draw them into our booth. Tracey Schreiber will help Debbie with setting up the booth.

VI. Reports

Bee Committee Report – Steve Ewing – April 15, 2025

A lot has been happening in the last 30 days.

Celebration

I took part in the Garden's 15th Year Anniversary and it was a lot of fun. HUGE THANKS to Debbie and all the many folks that made it a special day. I had a table with an observation hive (thanks to Amy Hunter for the loan of her bees), and the large photos. There was a steady stream of folks coming by to look at the bees and learn about our apiary. And lots of kiddos got bee stamps on their hands and "I Love Honey" stickers for their shirts.

New Bees

I did a bee removal of a swarm from the Mariposa Pecan Park Apartment Complex in La Porte last week. And it was an "easy-peasy" removal. The bees were 4' off the ground on a branch, so I just clipped the branch with the bees on it off, then gently lowered the branch and bees into a box and took them to the garden.

The next day, there were some bees in my garage where I have some of the empty hives from last year. I put some honeycomb and bait in the box, put it beside my garage and an hour later, a swarm of bees moved in! Once they get settled in, I will move them to the garden.

Thanks to the garden and with the help of Cathy Findley, her cousin's son with a truck and Mike Blaha, we have added 10' to the apiary, which will give us more room to move around in the apiary. The way the bees are coming in, we may have it filled up sooner than expected.

New Home

In the next few weeks, Cathy Findley and I will be transferring the bees from the compost bin to a new Top Bar Hive. We will also be changing the layout of the apiary, moving the hives into the new space.

Community Fundraising Report – Debbie Gordon – April 15, 2025

Fundraising

Awarded

- Dept of Neighborhoods Super Neighborhood Grant Program (\$7000)
 - ❖ Work must be completed and reported by end of May
- Native Plant Society of Texas - \$600 for planting bioswales with swamp milkweed
 - ❖ Work/report deadline October

Submitted

- Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant / National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (federal); Deadline 1/30/2025

❖ Financial Audit – required

- Faye and William Cowden Charitable Foundation \$5000

In Progress

Next Grant Applications

- The Brown Foundation, no deadline
- Ben and Jerry's Foundation, no deadline, rotating
- Native Plant Society of Texas Houston Chapter 1/31/2025 \$2,000; For bioswale plant material. **NPSOT withdrew this program for 2025.**
- O'Quinn Family Foundation

Harris County Precinct 1

- ❖ Harris County funding is dependent on restrictions the Texas State Legislature may or may not apply to Toll Road funds. (Now in session.)

Founders' Breakfast and 15th Anniversary Festival

Summary

- Funds raised - \$5371.60
- Expenses - \$2696.98

May 10 Boutique Outreach Event

- Raffle gift
- Grab bag small gifts – Seeds, Tomato Tasting Invite, WCG Info

Tomato Tasting

- May 24, 10:00 – 12:00

Shed Mural

- Houston Arts Alliance grant

- Arts and Culture Event – October
- Westbury 70th Anniversary

Education Committee Report – Julie Fordes – April 15, 2025

We had a meeting on Zoom. Only Debbie Gordon, Maisha Tianuru and Julie Fordes were in attendance.

Our current plan is to develop gardening hints to be published in the newsletter and on the website. They will follow the seasons and give a cross-section of what should be planted, harvested, and taken care of. Once this is established, we don't need to reinvent the wheel every time we want to communicate information to the gardeners.

We plan on using Google Docs to gather primary source material for each of the information categories. All members of the Education Committee will be able to submit information for each month. Once we have enough to work with, select members of the committee will edit and put the entries in order.

Membership Committee Report – Ray Sher – April 15, 2025

1. Unoccupied beds

- a. B10, C10, D10, C11, C12, E2, E3, E4, E5

2. New and Prospective New Members

- a. Renee Edwards and Kirstene Butler are new members gardening in C3. They are newbies to gardening, so be friendly and offer help. Shelly and Roy have worked with them.
- b. Shelli Perkins did an orientation. She will volunteer for a year, learning about gardening, and then join the garden.

3. Renewals for the 2025 gardening year

- a. We have Gardeners Agreement from everyone.
- b. All gardeners have either paid their 2025 membership in full or are on a monthly plan of paying.

4. Volunteers and members of the Clear the Bed team have mostly cleared B10, C10, C11, C12, E4 beds and aisles and partially worked on E3. These beds and aisles will need several more clearings before they are ready for new members.

5. Sweet potato slips have been ordered to plant in vacant beds. Southern peas will also be planted.

6. Taking care of vacant beds is a community effort. All members of the garden have responsibility to help care for these beds and aisles – weeding, helping to plant the cover crops, watering the cover crops and keeping the vines out of the aisles. The harvest of potatoes and peas will also be shared.

7. Publicity is in the Westbury Crier about beds being available. In addition, Shannon has posted on several local Facebook pages.

Orchard Committee Report – Isaac Spencer – April 15, 2025 – No Report

Pocket Prairie – Hazel Potvin – April 15, 2025

I am glad to say that I can finally write a true report on the Pocket Prairie. On Sunday, Noreen and Peggy Sweeney and I met to survey the prairie. Peggy brought a trash bag and a special spear for stabbing trash. She filled 3 bags and emptied them into the Metro waste cans. We saw the usual suspects: spiderwort, bluets, prairie pinks, lots of green milkweed and a good smattering of *Oenotheroides* and the slender milkweed. We look for the puccoon that is usually the first bloomer in the spring. There are lots of *rudbeckia* and *coreopsis* which the bees like for their flat landing surfaces. WE can see that there will be plenty of *Maxmillian* sunflower and the *liatris* and *Onotherapies*. *Prairie parsley* is getting ready to bloom. The *baptisia* and *Mexican hats* are in bloom and will soon be joined by *Salvia Azurea*. It was a joy to discover what is over there. Next month we will look for the orchids. As usual, the prairie needs rain. Unfortunately, the new mowing service cut down the wildflowers that we were trying to get going in the back field. One I was particularly interested in was the leftover sunflowers from Debbie's maze project. The Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia*) had reseeded. It is a real favorite of the Monarchs as they migrate through. I will arrange to meet the mowers the next time they come through and make sure they know what not to mow so we have a friendly natural property that can support butterflies and birds. I gave a lot of tours of the prairie last year. If you want a personal tour, please contact me or take a tour on your own and take a picture of something and I can ID. it for you.

Site Maintenance Report – Wayne Slaikeu – April 15, 2025

Thanks to Steve Goldberg and Don Finley, a new entrance sign was installed, the damaged cistern sign was dismantled, and the heavy picnic table was moved to a better location. Thanks to Ray, a lot of useless metal was removed from between the sheds and the side of the shed 2.

A hose was stolen and to prevent more hoses from getting stolen, we will put hose locks on more hoses that are in places vulnerable to being stolen.

I have noticed tripping hazards in the aisles. We need to inform gardeners to keep their aisles clear of tripping hazards and that unnecessary items such as bags of soil or leaves in their bed attract ants, putting a burden on our overworked pest control manager, Margaret Mitchel.

Specialty Garden Report – Kat Elder – April 15, 2025

Front Butterfly Beds:

Many Committee members worked very hard to get these beds, slowly recovering from winter freezes, looking as attractive and maintained as possible prior to 3-22-25 15-year celebration. Only the masses of Texas Bluebonnets, Pink Eve Primrose and some added Zinnias (thanks to Shelly and Roy Johnson!) were in bloom in March.

I was very pleased that keynote speaker, Jaime Gonzalez told me that he was quite impressed with the plantings, most especially with the placements of all of the two varieties of Coneflowers. (Had to admit that they're very happy there, have spread and grown too close and some will need to be moved to our other pollinator beds).

In his speech, he also mentioned the healthy environment of the WCG Spring plantings and nature Sounds from our singing /chattering Purple Martins, busy in their house behind the podium.

ASAP: Site Maintenance must carefully remove the (obtrusive) banner from the north BF bed.

B1 Pollinator Collection:

A few Committee members helped me get this bed, also recovering from late freezes, maintained, adding the Johnson's Zinnia seedlings for color.

Apiary Pollinator Bed: without ANY outside volunteer help, a few in the committee (mostly Margaret Mitchell!) worked to weed, remove overgrown native Frogfruit groundcover to allow spring blooming plants and some seeds to emerge. In April, Shelly and Roy Johnson pruned away the dead Pink Coral Vines to enable room for the newly emerging vine growth.

Last year I noticed FAR LESS bees on the blooms. Also, less bees at shallow water dishes. Steve said this decline is occurring across the US, unknow why... and FAR LESS Monarchs and Skippers and Pipevine Caterpillars.

The East Field needs to remain UNMOWED in the critical Spring in order for Milkweeds, Sunflowers, Buttercups and our other pollinator plants to emerge. It is disturbing to see TWO destructive mowings in the east field in the last 2 months!!!

WCG does NOT need Grassier expensive and expansive lawn area!!!! Who is in charge of ordering and supervising mowing that WCG must pay for?? Must we mark or rope off the field boundaries???

Treasurer's Report – Marcia Hartman – April 15, 2025 – see report that was distributed to the board.

Volunteer Coordinator Report – Betina Wolfowicz – April 15, 2025

We have had a steady flow of volunteers coming every weekend in April. They are very motivated people who are taking care of vacant beds and aisles under Ray Sher's guidance. On April 26 we will have the Ohio State University volunteers and if we finish early clearing vacant beds, I will assign them to other needed areas. More volunteers coming in May but they have not yet confirmed.

Compost:

We now have compost that is ready, but not much. Thanks to the new gardeners we keep working hard on turning waste into fertile soil. We may be getting a sunshade on it this summer.

VII. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Dorthy Smith – WCG Secretary