

Westbury Community Garden Board Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2026

The board meeting was called to order at 6:36. Members present were Debbie Gordon, Julie Fordes, Steve Goldberg, Martha Hartman, Cindy Chapman, Shannon Vitek, Kat Elder, Katherine Jager, Betina Wolfowicz, Don Finley, Peggy Sweeney and Nirjhor Rahman representing Plant It Forward.

Old Business

March minutes were approved by acclamation.

The March Treasurer's Report was approved by acclamation. Debbie remarked that the treasurer transition was going smoothly with reimbursements proceeding well.

The Mass SMS/MMS Software discussion (enabling texting through LGL to send garden news) is being tabled for the foreseeable future.

New Business

Guest Speaker-Nirjhor Rahman

Nirjhor joined Plant It Forward as CEO in 2024 after working abroad for several years in government projects and being drawn to Plant it Forward

(PIF) as a first generation immigrant whose father came to work in the U.S. as a horticulturist at Texas A&M.

He explained that PIF values WCG as one of its earliest partners. It has become necessary to make significant changes to the PIF model, which was underpinned by federal funds, to adjust to current circumstances outlined below:

- Many DEI programs, which supported PIF are frozen or gone. A major loss was their \$2 million grant for a large local farm
- Grants which enabled the Food Bank and other customers to buy large farm shares are eliminated.
- The many programs that assisted Houston's traditionally large refugee resettlements have been defunded.
- Private purchases of food shares had grown in the pandemic but are not profitable now.
- PIF farmer wages remain at \$12 to \$14 hourly- poverty level- after 14 years.

The new model- PIF 2.0- brings the following changes:

- The PIF farmer definition is opening up. It will still be the underserved farming on underutilized land but will expand to include groups besides refugees including possibly those in programs for previously incarcerated people, students in HISD programs, and previously unhoused people among others.
- Plot sizes will increase. They will consolidate properties and have plans to acquire 10 acres in North Houston .
- Individual farmers will become part of crews at PIF farms and earn a \$20 hourly wage.
- As a single entity, PIF can pursue certifications, sell at scale and connect with larger markets including restaurant groups, SYSCO, hospitals etc.

PIF farmers will still be growing food but at a living wage. They want to continue to farm in Westbury. Two farmers will be leaving their plots and those plots will be used for teaching and training.

Several board members had questions:

- Marcia asked about the contract signed by the three gardeners and wondered who would be responsible for the upkeep of the area and other obligations.
The responsibility would fall to Nirjhor and David, the Farm Manager.
- Kat wondered about the increased number of cars and if the farmers' sheds would be there.
Farmers could possibly carpool from the PIF office. Debbie pointed out that in our Master Plan the farm drive and access would be on the South side of the property.
- Debbie asked if they still wanted cold storage on the property.
Nirjhor said they'd love it.
Debbie pointed out that moving sheds and waterlines is included in our grant

All other questions/concerns were directed to the chat or emailed.

Compost Construction and Shade Structure

Betina reported that Accenture requested a possible project for their workday on April 25th. They would have 20 volunteers and donate materials. They agreed on expanding the compost area, mainly the materials area on the northwest side.

Don helped Betina locate a supplier for the necessary kennel panels. Accenture picked them up in League City and delivered them to WCG.

Franco volunteered to lead the project and Betina welcomes other volunteers. Accenture donated costs of \$800 and some pitchforks and shovels. Roy Johnson had previously gotten rid of the hackberries growing in the site.

This project was accomplished on April 25, 2026.

Tree Trimming Donation/Schedule Work

The Livingstons, who have long maintained the shade trees at WCG, moved from Westbury. They donated their trimming tools to WCG and want to donate a gift of \$1300 for tree trimming. They will also shred the trimmings for mulch and grind some stumps northwest of the dumpster.

Debbie wondered about the best time for trimming. She will consult with Virginia Livingston.

The Livingstons will be included on our donor sign.

Members voted on the tree trimming prior to the work completed on April 29, 2026.

Allotment Garden and Do Not Pick Sign Verbiage

Debbie wants to form a subcommittee for small Do Not Pick signs and information on allotment gardens. She recruited Kat to take the lead in getting the signs. Kat reported that the corrugated plastic small signs she had gotten previously were reasonably priced and fairly durable.

David Waddell, new gardener and HSPVA staff, said his Art students might be able to contribute to graphics.

Kat pointed out that we needed a new sign by the bees.

Hazel remarked on the premature picking of lemons when they look like limes. Debbie said there are signs in Trailer 3, some in Spanish, addressing the picking of fruit.

Kat and Debbie will work on this project.

Debbie has since shared with the board a brochure about allotment gardens in Spanish and English that she, Shannon and Betina created.

Tropical Milkweed Policy

The board voted to forbid tropical milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*, in WCG beds because of the parasite it carries that harms monarchs.

Hazel had reported plenty of native milkweed in the pocket prairie.

CostCo Donation for Volunteer Appreciation Week /Earth Week

Debbie had applied for a \$250 donation from CostCo, but has not heard anything. Kat volunteered to apply for a Sam's donation. Board members pledged food donations for volunteers at Saturday's workday.

The Extraordinary Caterpillar Documentary Screening. May 2 / 3:00

Debbie reports that one third of the tickets had been sold and information sent to TX Master Naturalists, and The Lazy Gardener. She will also send notice to the Herb Society. Doors will open at 2:00 with concessions to sell-popcorn, candy, sparkling water.

WCG and the Houston chapter of NPSOT are sharing the cost of the venue at \$250 and the licensing fee of \$215. We need to sell 47 seats to break even.

Native Plant Makeover of the Company Onstage Landscaping

The planting will be done in two triangular areas bordering the parking lot and walkway. The NPSOT made a plan for the garden as a joint project with WCG.

A motion was introduced for WCG to spend no more than \$150 on a garden at The Company Onstage. It passed unanimously.

The project will require planting volunteers and watering volunteers. Debbie had volunteered to do several weeks of watering in May and June and will happily share that job.

Both projects were successfully completed April 30 and May 2, 2026.

Demographics Report

Debbie had sent the board the most recent demographics on WCG since we have gotten 11 going on twelve new gardeners thanks to the efforts of our membership team, Shannon and Nadia. Interestingly, this new influx of gardeners shifted our age demographic from 70% of people over age 60 to 58% of people over 60.

Julie remarked on the enthusiasm of these new gardeners and the successful question and answer model of the recent Spring Planting Class at the garden. There was much hands-on activity and she thought it was an efficient delivery of knowledge.

Shannon answered a question about mentors for new gardeners and Hazel volunteered to be a mentor.

Interesting Financial Statistics

Debbie reports that 75% of our 2025 income was fundraising. Bed rental was about 10%.

WCG T-shirts

We will be selling existing T-shirts through our online Custom Ink account which allows each person to individually buy a shirt of their choice and then all shirts are sent to WCG. These will be the shirts available:

- The lime green WCG logo shirt with two possible print choices on the back- We Grow Our Own or Growing Community Through Gardening
- The Green Tomato Road shirt with the tomato art on the front

We hope to sell 20 of each. The price will depend on quantity. There has been interest.

Volunteer Houston Award

Betina had nominated Debbie for the Volunteer Houston Award to be presented at City Hall. Betina read her nomination letter. The board congratulated Debbie on this well-deserved honor. Debbie also received advice about asking the mayor for free city water since our status is much like a city park.

Earth Day- Wednesday, April 22. Girl Scouts Field Trip

Julie talked about the Girl Scout first graders from Parker coming to WCG for Earth Day, which is 56 years old. The girls will rotate through various activities including reading a story, planting strawberries, using herbs and learning about recycling.

Other New Biz

Someone suggested starting on Tomato Tasting Jobs since that is May 23. Debbie is sending Outreach emails about jobs. She hopes Shelley will run the tasting as in the past.

Julie suggested encouraging everyone to procure raffle items. Debbie will put it in the newsletter.

Kat has plant items to donate for the apiary area and will contact Steve Ewing.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52.

Please find the committee reports below.

Steve Ewing-APIary

- We put the new members of the Bee Committee to work a few weeks ago. Xiang Thao and David Waddell joined Shelly Johnson to feed the bees. While the blooming flowers have provided lots of pollen, the dry weather has restricted the amount of nectar that is available to the bees. And obviously that means low amounts of honey are being made. The group, with mentors Theresa Strong and Cathy Findley, poured the sugar syrup into feeders for each of the hives
- While feeding the bees, the group learned a lot about the bees, the colonies and even spotted 2 queens in the process! I was very pleased with the enthusiasm and willingness of the group to get into the business of the colonies
- Theresa Strong and I made a presentation to the 4-year old classes at the Bellaire Methodist Church. We also brought an observation hive for the kiddos to look at
- We have 3 more presentations already scheduled for May.

Volunteers-Betina

We had 2 groups of Volunteers on March 28: a bible study group of about 15 people from the Hope Church, and the Food Justice students of Dr Jager at the University of Houston downtown. We also had 3 individual helpers who came to us through Volunteer Houston.

Luckily the non-members' visit happened on volunteer day which does not happen too often these days. Therefore we had experienced leaders to guide several tasks and a lot was done.

Kat Elder and Peggy worked on several specialty gardens, Kat Jager worked on fire ants treatment, specialty gardens, and vacant beds. Hazel worked on fire ants treatment and orchard trees. Myself I led the bible students weeding around the elevated beds, and covering them with cardboard and much. We had individual students who together with Bing, Catherine and me shifted compost piles. Julie and collaborators from the Herbal Society worked with volunteers on the herbal beds. New member Nick also came to work with his family and his child was delighted to be treating for ants!! Debbie also came to take pictures and video.

It is possible I forgot to mention some of you. I was busy weeding. It was one of the most engaged work days thanks to motivated participation.

We also had a generous donation from Accenture, a consulting company through Riya Satra, leader of the ecology resource group. They donated three kennel panels to expand the outdoor storage area, and all the hardware to install them. Riya went to League City in person with a rented U-Haul to deliver them to us on Saturday April 18.

Volunteers from this company group will come **Saturday April 25** to install them. Franco will lead this activity, and Seth and Don have been invited to lead as well. There will also be a few teenage volunteers and the routine garden maintenance tasks.

Accenture is also donating pitchforks and shovels and there will be other activities for them to do such as work around the orchard trees.

The total donation is about \$753.

Westbury Community Garden is amazing! Thanks everybody for making it possible.

Betina

Julie
Fordes-Education/Herbs

Education Committee Report

April 2026

We sponsored a Q and A session this past Saturday under the pavilion. We had a dozen garden members attend. All were new members. Roy and Shelly answered a variety of questions, most of which centered around pests. We had a hands-on demonstration of identifying the eggs and removing the squash borer from the stem of some zucchini. We also learned how to mitigate damage and remove army caterpillars from plants. I am glad we tried this format and I think we will do it again. It is very adaptable, and the topics are always timely because they are gardener driven. We were also able to reinforce the need for new cover crops.

We will add information to reinforce these topics on the website.

We will celebrate Earth Day Wednesday evening by leading a Girl Scout troop in several eco-centric activities that should be lots of fun.

Herb Committee Report

April 2026

We have **consistent workdays/gatherings** on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays. This is working well, and I am very excited about how many WCG gardeners are active on the Herb Committee. Quite a few of our new members help at all the workdays.

The herb class on March 21 was well attended. We will have a follow-up salve making session at my house to use the oil that the participants infused with home-grown calendula.

We continue to harvest herbs and put them on the bench by the compost area for gardeners to take.

Fundraising/Outreach-Debbie Gordon

FUNDRAISING REPORT

April 21, 2026

FUNDRAISING

GRANT APPLICATIONS

In Progress

Costco

\$250 requested for Volunteer Appreciation Week

The Guild Shop

Outreach event for seniors (over 60)

Exercise, speaker, planting activity, scavenger hunt, farm-to-table lunch

BOMD

Mural on shed

Making-of Video

Garden Club of Houston

Mural on shed

Making-of Video

River Oaks Garden Club

Mural on shed

Making-of Video

Farmers Bank & Trust

Tools of the Trade

\$2500 in garden and beekeeping tools, MicroLife

Dealy Family Foundation

Texas only. LOI due Jan 18 (submitted);

Application due Aug 1.

Submitted

Harris County Precinct 1

Applications open Jan 1

Apply Jan 5 – Feb 28, 2026

Awards – May-June

If awarded, 18-month timeline. Construction Q3-Q4 2027.

Total cost: \$890,000; Requested: \$845,500; WCG Match: \$44,500 (5%)

COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

Levitt MusicFest

- o Booth cancelled due to lack of volunteer help
- o No booth fee
- o Debbie helped man the WAIC/WCC booth for 2 hours.
- o Distributed WCG and Tomato Tasting info

The Extraordinary Caterpillar documentary screening (Homegrown National Park + The Caterpillar Lab)

- o The Company On Stage, 5720 Bellaire Blvd.
- o WCG co-hosting with NPSOT Houston
- o Saturday afternoon event; May 2, 3:00; ticket price \$10

Membership-Shannon Vitek/Nadia Kahn

April Membership Committee Report

04/21/2026

1. Unoccupied Beds

- a. E2, E10
- b. E2 is currently being used for donation crops by Betsy Longoria
- c. E10 has been evaluated and needs repair

2. Existing, new, and potential gardeners

- a. A10 has been leased to Makayla Patton. She joined the Herbs, Orchard, and Speciality Garden Committees.

- b. C6 has been leased to Mridula Kamra. She joined the Herb Committee.
- c. D5 has been leased to Michelle Hughes and Danielle Davis. Michelle joined Fundraising and Danielle joined Community Outreach.
- d. E3 has been leased to Dorothy Rose. She joined the Herb Committee.
- e. A previous gardener, Gina Grattan, reached out inquiring about membership, requesting a sit-stand bed. She will be offered E10 once repairs are complete and she completes an orientation.
- f. We will be filling garden beds based on a wait-list when they become available.
- g. Felecia Henry has been added to the wait-list.

3. Volunteer hours

- a. A garden-wide reminder to keep up with logging volunteer hours will go out at the end of the month
- b. Would like to explore a 'quarterly prize' for most volunteer hours for that quarter and a yearly prize for the most volunteer hours

Orchards/Pocket Prairie-Hazel Potvin

ORCHARD REPORT, APRIL 2026

MULBERRIES ARE RIPE. YOU CAN PICK BY HAND WHAT YOU CAN REACH. I HEARD THAT SOMEONE SPREAD PLASTIC ON THE GROUND AND SHOOK THE BRANCH. I ALSO HEARD YOU COULD USE AN UMBRELLA TURNED UPSIDE DOWN TO COLLECT SHAKEN BERRIES. JUST REMEMBER THAT MULBERRIES DO STAIN SO HANDLE WITH CARE AND LET US KNOW WHAT YOU DID WITH THEM.

2. THE LITTLE BABY FIGS ARE NOW SHOWING ON THE BRANCHES. USUALLY JULY IS THE HARVEST TIME. IF YOU JUST CAN'T WAIT, KROGER HAS SOME BOXES OF DRIED FIGS YOU COULD TRY. WE WILL BE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT KIND OF FIGS WE HAVE BY EXAMINING THE CROP. THE FIGS NEAREST THE SIDEWALK ARE BANANA FIGS AND THE BUSH IS STRUGGLING. WE WILL DO A LITTLE MORE PRUNING ON IT.

3. OTHERWISE THE ORCHARDS ARE DOING WELL AND I AM VERY THANKFUL FOR THE RAIN.

4. THE PERSIMMON I THOUGHT WAS DEAD, IS NOT. KELLY JUANG SHOWED ME THAT THE BUD TIPS HAD A GREEN TINGE AND THEY HAVE NOW LEAFED OUT. YAY!

HAZEL

POCKET PRAIRIE REPORT, APRIL 2026

PEGGY SWEENEY AND I DID THE TOUR OF THE PRAIRIE LAST SUNDAY AND HAD A GOOD TIME LOOKING AT ALL THE WONDERFUL PLANTS THAT WERE MATURING SINCE THE RAIN. WITHOUT EVEN GOING TO. THE PRAIRIE YOU CAN SEE ALL THE LITTLE PRAIRIE NYMPH IRIS BLOOMING IN THE GRASS OF THE ORCHARDS AND THE FIELDS. THESE ARE CALLED HERBERTIA AND LOOK FULLY IN BLOOM IN THE MORNING AND START TO CLOSE IN THE LATE AFTERNOON OR WHEN IT IS CLOUDY.

WE ALSO TALKED ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE PRAIRIE IF THE MASTER PLAN GETS FUNDED. WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS IS THAT A PLANT RESCUE TAKES PLACE AND THE PLANTS ARE DUG AND WITH. SAVED FOR RELOCATION OR MAYBE WE COULD HAVE A SALE OF SOME OF OUR PLANTS. IT IS TRULY A GREAT COLLECTION OF NATIVE PLANTS.

ANOTHER THING WE WILL DO IS SEED COLLECTING SO THAT WE CAN REPLANT SEEDS WHEN THE PROJECT IS FINISHED.

THERE IS A LOT OF MILKWEED. SOME HAS BLOOMED AND HAS PRODUCED SEED PODS. IT SEEDS ITSELF WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM ME OR PEGGY.

WE DISCUSSED CLUMPS OF GRASS. THE ONLY ONE IDENTIFIABLE NOW IS THE GRAY GREEN INDIAN GRASS. MOST PLANTS NEED TO BE IN BLOOM TO BE IDENTIFIED. I AM NOT GREAT WITH GRASSES. WE DO KNOW WE HAVE A FAIR COLLECTION OF NATIVE TEXAS GRASSES LIKE LITTLE BLUESTEM AND SWITCH GRASS BUT THEY BLOOM LATER.

I WOULD BE GLAD TO SCHEDULE A TOUR IF PEOPLE WILL SIGN UP FOR ONE. SUNDAY IS THE BEST DAY BECAUSE THERE IS PLENTY OF PARKING. SPACE. JUST CONTACT ME IF YOU WANT A TOUR.

HAZEL

Don Findley -Site Maintenance

Greetings, contained below is the activity report for March/April 2026.

* Continued inspection of site hoses, faucets, washers and backflow devices.

* Replaced water hoses on beds B7 and C 7

Also replaced sprayer and backflow device

On C 7

* Replaced sprayers on bed C2 and E5

* Placed camera warning signs in several different areas of WCG property (front area of pavilion, tree near front driveway, bulletin board area, compost area ,storage container doors)

* Placed security camera near pavilion area facing garden(will install several more in coming week)

* Trimmed low hanging branches in front driveway and compost area

Specialty Gardens-Kat Elder

April 20,2026

Butterfly Beds and B1 Pollinator Collection beds are looking beautiful! The Spring flowers and seedlings are emerging. March Workday volunteers helped to remove weeds, Bermuda , excess native petunias & pink evening primrose, clearing areas for spreading zinnias, Indian Blanket, Mexican hat & other seeds & transplants. Always make great progress but never fully complete the goals. Hoping for rain; the WCG watering team's once weekly schedule may not be sufficient for seedlings/transplants.

Shelly, Peggy & I have transplanted Bluebonnets & Black-eyed Susans in the compost/ mulch around the N40 trees. I'll be asking SG Committee members to assist in watering thirsty new plantings as they're tending their beds. Invited majority are absent at workdays.

N. fence Apiary Pollinator Bed needs more tending! It's covered in pale pink Evening Primrose, flowering Frogfruit ground cover & invasive wild Poinsettias, with most of my water saucers & Markers gone or moved. Will move excess natives there as volunteers are available, including some excess Coneflowers . Added Margaret's short green expanding hose there (2 quality commercial grade hoses have been stolen. Even expensive locks are too small & can be broken by a determined thief). Don is testing taping new hoses to make thefts more difficult.

I have native American Beautyberry bushes, Hummingbird bushes & a Dwarf Pink Barbados Cherry bush to donate to the Garden, with Admin. approval of designated locations & available volunteers to plant.

Any new Persimmon sprouts or Hackberry trees emerging in beds or orchards will be killed (including those spreading, which can't be extracted around the main Compost fencing).

Purple Martins: thankfully we've had a good number of late arrivals who are busy expanding the WCG colony & providing Martin Music & chatter. Unfortunately they haven't taken to the larger, better accommodated, new apartment housing ; some House Sparrows have.

Kat Elder

Specialty Gardens Chair

Purple Martins Manager

