

Switzkill Farm Board Meeting

Town of Berne
PO Box 57
Berne, NY 12023

Date: February 7, 2017

Board members present: Ted Kunker, Lee Jones, Richard Ronconi, Diane Kingston, Craig Angard, Charles Burgess (on remote), Karen Schimmer (Town Board Liaison), and other interested citizens.

Ted Kunker called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Review of Minutes: The minutes from 1/3/2017 were reviewed. Mr. Jones moved to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Ronconi seconded and the minutes were approved, 6-0.

Correspondence: None

Old Business:

Town Board Update: Ms. Schimmer reported on plans for the construction of a primitive-style cabin using Town funds and donated labor.

Grants Committee: Mr. Kunker discussed the McHenry Award - a \$5,000 grant due on March 10th for a heritage farming summer internship. Mr. Ronconi will contact SUNY Cobleskill regarding candidates. Helen Lounsbury and the committee are continuing to work on other grants.

Treasure's Report: Mr. Jones asked Mr. Burgess to provide a funds report from Forever Rural. He also presented the Board with 2015 and 2016 income reports and a \$5,400 2017 projected income based on rentals on the property. Expenses were discussed.

Working Group on Land: No report.

ADA Compliance Update: Mr. Kunker suggested scheduling a work day to install the ramp. Ms. Schimmer suggested planting vegetation around it.

Calendar Update: The Board discussed progress on a domain name and linking the calendar and the website.

Friends of Switzkill Farm Update: Mr. Kunker asked Board members to keep looking for possible volunteers. Mr. Angard said he'd contact the Friends of Thacher Park for info on setting up a group.

New Business:

Switzkill Fee Schedule: The Board reviewed the most recent version of the fee schedule (see attached). There was discussion regarding the amount to charge overnight guests and whether to supply linens. It was decided to charge \$30/person for an overnight stay. Breaking out charges for non-profit, for-profit and civic sporting events was discussed. The Board decided to forward the fee schedule as is. Updates/changes will be made accordingly.

Beavers in ponds: Mr. Kunker reported that there is evidence of beavers and associated damage around the ponds. The Board discussed leaving the beavers alone vs. the benefits of removal. Mr. Kunker told the Board that the Town was providing \$150 to stock fish in the ponds through the Cornell Cooperative Extension program.

HESO Update Presentation: Representatives from the Helderberg Earth and Sky Observatory discussed a 3-phase plan of operation for establishing an observatory at Switzkill Farm. Phase One would be a Dark-Sky Observing Park, followed by Phase Two – a small, temporary observatory, and Phase Three being a full-scale large observatory. HESO is looking at the fall of 2020 for a “grand opening.” HESO Board Members want to host more events to increase public awareness of location and plans. Ms. Schimmer asked HESO if they could provide specifics on upcoming events for the 2017 Event Calendar. According to HESO, it needs written support and permission from the Town so it can proceed with securing a Dark Sky Certification and starting Phase One. A feasibility study needs to be completed. A list of projected programs and projects for Phase One was reviewed (see attached). A Facebook page called Friends of the Helderberg Observatory is up and running. Access to the Park at night is a necessary part of Phase One.

Review of 2017 Programs: Tabled until March.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Hill Brown
Switzkill Farm Board Secretary