

Clifford Park Food Forest Community Meeting/Design Presentation
Resilient Hartford
September 9, 2021

Resilient Hartford Members Present: Frederica Graham, Dylan Kreis, Leah Mosenthal and Chair Kye Cochran.

Resilient Hartford Liaisons Present: Jon Reid, Planning Commission and Ally Tufenkjian, Selectboard.

Staff Present: Matt Osborn, Town Planner.

Others Present: Sue Buckholz, Sandie Cary, Becky Cholet, Ruth Fleishman, Marlena Furness, Earl Hatley, Sally Mansur, Barry McCabe, Rebecca Osborne and consultants Cat Buxton and Karen Ganey.

The Community Meeting/Design Presentation was held in Room 2 of the Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction, Vermont. The meeting also was accessible remotely via zoom and most folks attended that way. Cat Buxton announced that the meeting is being recorded.

Welcome: Resilient Hartford Chair Kye Cochran opened the meeting at 6:33 p.m. and welcomed everyone. Introductions were made. Kye stated that the purpose of the meeting is to present the design plan for the Food Forest and get feedback.

Background: Kye Cochran provided background on Resilient Hartford. The Commission was established by the Selectboard in 2014 with the charge of helping to make Hartford a more resilient community. She noted that the RH sponsored Resilience Week in 2016 and 2017 and transitioned to sponsoring resilience workshops in 2018 and 2019 and held Potato Fest in the fall of 2019. Although Potato Fest was planned to be an annual event, Covid-19 resulted in cancellation of the event in 2020 and 2021.

Kye Cochran provided background on the project noting that the idea came from RH member Dylan Kreis and former Parks Foreman for the Hartford Parks and Recreation Department. The goal is to convert some park turf areas to other more sustainable uses such as a food forest in order to reduce the amount of turf to maintain. This project fits in with RH's goal of being more independent regarding food production and security. Kye added that Clifford Park Food Forest is a demonstration project and that she hopes to see food forests at other Town parks.

Introduction to Consultants Cat Buxton and Karen Ganey: Kye Cochran introduced consultants Cat Buxton and Karen Ganey. Cat is a cross-pollinator from Sharon, Vermont focused on ecosystem resilience. Her business, Grow More, Waste Less is empowering and connecting communities to affect positive change from the ground up. Karen owns an ecological landscape design business, Permaculture Solutions that is based in Norwich, Vermont. Karen designs gardens that maximize biodiversity and ecosystem health. Cat and Karen have extensive experience working with grassroots organizations and volunteering on community projects.

Acknowledgement: Karen Ganey started her presentation acknowledging that "the land is sovereign homeland of the Abenaki Nation and People. Since ancient times, the Abenaki know that they have always been here, are still here, and will always be here. We pay our respects to them, and to the wisdom of their elders and their culture."

Clifford Park Background: Karen Ganey noted that the property was obtained by the Town of Hartford in 1976 from Erwin Clifford with the plan that the property to be used for recreational purposes. Erwin used the property for agricultural purposes. Previously, the property had been used for farming and once was the site of a dog food processing facility. The Park consists of 12 acres. Karen Ganey presented slides of the Park following the Irene Flood of 2011 and the recovery and replanting of trees along the White River in the years following the flood. She noted that the soil is in very poor condition and needs the addition of organic matter.

The Plan: Karen Ganey reported on the 2020 survey about alternative uses to Clifford Park and Ratcliffe Park. The survey was administered by Resilient Hartford and resulted in 167 responses with strong support for alternative uses such as a food forest. She noted that the Parks and Recreation Department identified two areas within Clifford Park for alternative uses. She talked about opportunities for variety and ecosystems that have many benefits and provided an overview of the food forest concept.

Karen Ganey noted the community mission of the food forest:

- Create an accessible and inclusive space for the community to come together to grow food naturally and regeneratively.
- Restore soil health.
- Create a food forest with mostly native, fruit bearing shrubs, trees and perennials.
- Nurture opportunities to learn good stewardship of our environment.
- Create space where people share knowledge and skills.
- Provide a space for reinvigorating the human soul!
- Nurture wonder, pride, belonging, abundance, relaxation, peace, and FUN!
- Create habitat for pollinators, wild fauna, migratory birds, and wildlife.
- Strengthen the wildlife corridor along the White River.
- Explore how input intensive parks can be transformed into low maintenance and regenerative social and environmental ecosystems.
- To work cooperatively with Abenaki community members to learn about traditional ecological knowledge

Karen Ganey noted that it has been a holistic design process. There were three design workshops over the last two months. She noted that the project will take several years to complete and the first phase will begin this fall with several nut trees and fruit trees with guilds. For fruit trees, Karen recommends plum but also noted that pear, peach or cherry trees also would be fine. She thinks that there are already plenty of apple trees. As for nut trees, Karen is thinking of Yellow Bud Hickories, Burr Oak, Basswood, or Butternut. She noted that planting fruit trees and their guilds in September is fine, but it is highly recommended to plant nut trees in October. As a result, there will be two plantings this fall; one September 18th and the other sometime in October.

Public Comments: As a lawyer, Sue Buckholz expressed concern about liability of people climbing trees to pick cherries or other fruit. Cat Buxton suggested using short varieties. Karen Ganey noted that the fruit trees will be 2-3 years old and 5-7' when they are planted.

Frederica Graham suggested blueberries as a guild plant for the plum trees. Cat Buxton agreed and suggested low-bush blueberries. Karen agreed and noted that there are lots of berry options. Frederica also suggested erecting an educational display for the food forest. Others agreed.

Sally Mansur stated that she likes the idea of plum trees. Marlena Furness and others agreed.

Barry McCabe noted that there is a prominent deer herd that lives in the neighborhood. Cat suggested wire cages to protect the fruit trees. Sally Mansur offered to donate several.

Sandie Cary noted that there is a snowmobile trail that runs through Clifford Park and suggested coordinating with the Hurricane Riders to avoid conflicts. Dylan Kreis noted that most snowmobilers typically stick to the trail. Barry McCabe noted that he has seen snowmobilers riding in the field so we should be mindful of it to protect the food forest plantings.

Next Steps: Karen Ganey noted that the next step is to develop a materials list and cost estimate and then to stake out the site. The tree planting is scheduled for Saturday, September 18th from 9:00 a.m. to noon. She noted that it should be a fun event.

Cat Buxton reported that she talked to Matt Dragon, Natural Resources Class teacher at the Hartford Area Career Technology Center and he is interested in having his class work in the food forest.

Dylan Kreis thanked Karen Ganey and Cat Buxton for their work on this project. Others agreed.

Adjournment: Kye Cochran thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:44 p.m.