

MINUTES

4th Meeting, Friends of Auerfarm State Park

4-H Education Center at Auerfarm (158 Auer Farm Road, Bloomfield)

Wednesday, October 19th at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting Attendees:

Stephen Bayer, Sen. Beth Bye, Sten Caspersson, Christine Evenson, Glen Evenson, Dominick Galletti, Eileen Grant, Eric Hammerling, David Mann, Sharon Mann, Nick Miller, Christopher Shepard, Vikki Reski, Beth Schiro, Linda Vossen, Jay Willerup

1. Introductions and Reintroductions

Most of the attendees had previously attended one or more meetings, but there were a couple of new friends including Christine and Glen Evenson (Christine had formerly been a tenant at the farm) and Sten Caspersson (community member involved with the Wintonbury Land Trust).

2. Review of Minutes from September 20th Meeting

No changes were made to the minutes from the September meeting. CFPA has created a webpage for people to access info from these meetings.

3. Q&A on Friends Group organizational models/structure, activities, etc.

Eric Hammerling introduced Eileen Grant with the Friends of CT State Parks/Friends of Harkness Memorial and Jay Willerup with the Friends of Heublein Tower to talk about their organizations, how they were established, etc. Both Friends groups do not have paid staff and are run by interested community volunteers.

Eileen told the story of how Harkness Memorial was established in 1952 and how the Friends of Harkness were formed in 1994 in response to a budget crisis, frustration with neglect of facilities, and a proposal to set-up a “band shell” on the site by Governor Weicker. Friends of Harkness have a Board of 4-10 members, 3 trustees, and ad-hoc committee chairs. They have had as many as 1,000 members, and have active volunteers who contributed over 12,500 hours in labor for the Park through work on gardens, greenhouses, lectures, and programs for the public.

Jay talked about the history of Heublein tower, and the proposal to develop Talcott Mountain that inspired the protection of the State Park. The Friends of Heublein Tower were started in 1985 by Pat Heublein with a mission to “restore, recreate, and educate.” They hold two major fundraisers a year, the “Hike to the Mike” and “Tower Toot,” and are not a

membership organization. They are doing more work with volunteers as the core group has limitations.

When Eileen and Jay were asked what they would do differently if they were started again from scratch, they gave similar answers – better documentation. There was a “gentleman’s agreement” between the Friends of Harkness and the State that could have been better documented, and there was a “gap in knowledge” created when the past co-president of the Friends of Heublein Tower retired and moved. As Jay said, “what happens today is tomorrow’s history.”

When they were asked about whether they write grants, both Friends groups said that they had, but that this was an area where they could do more and certainly welcomed volunteer expertise. Both Friends groups are relatively active through social media. There was further talk about natural partners (neighbors, park users, garden clubs, media, etc.) that could further strengthen community connections for each Friends group.

Eric also briefly presented the structure for the Friends of Goodwin Forest. CFPA is the fiscal sponsor for the Friends of Goodwin Forest which is memorialized in a fiscal sponsorship agreement. There is a President of the Friends Group and Committees that are particularly active on forest/wildlife educational programs, gardens, and trails. Committees are self-sustaining, fairly independent, and the full-group meets quarterly. There are around 100 paying members of the Friends of Goodwin Forest, and there is the ability to have a “joint membership” with CFPA that provides membership benefits from both. There is no Board or Bylaws for the Friends, because those aspects are covered by CFPA’s Board and Bylaws.

4. Other issues/questions

There was a quick recap on the “special values” that Auerfarm State Park offers to the public (the following were mentioned and are in no particular priority order):

- Potential for connection/partnership with an adjacent Farm and Education Center;
- Potential for Trail to Talcott Mountain;
- Showcase of Outstanding Birding/Wildlife;
- Potential for Youth Camping opportunities; and
- Proximity to Hartford/Diverse Communities.

5. Next Steps?

The determination was made through general consent that there should be additional information presented by another Friends group, and that the Friends of Auerfarm State Park could then assess whether one model or another would potentially be best for a group dedicated to Auerfarm State Park. The next meeting was set for November 15th at 6:30 p.m.