*Bedford Farmers Club*

*Minutes from the Meeting of September 14, 2022*

*Our New Way Garden, Purchase NY*

President Mary Farley welcomed everyone to Our New Way Garden, where members sheltered from the sun under a tarp set up adjacent to the farm stand.

Secretary Sheila Crespi presented the minutes from the July 20th meeting, held at the home of Ellen and James Best. Their gardens were created by native plant pioneer Sara Stein and feature meadows, wetlands, moss gardens and a woodland, as well as a vegetable garden. The Bests open their property to the public each year during the Garden Conservancy’s Open House Days, to inspire others to create native environments as an alternative to the traditional suburban landscape. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

Treasurer Roger Vincent confirmed the Club’s solvency and circulated two clipboards – one for BFC dues and attendance and one for people to sign up for Our New Way Garden’s mailing list.

Historian John Stockbridge looked back 100 years to the Club’s minutes from August 30, 1922. The “meeting of the year” typically attracted the largest annual turn-out and was enlivened by the presence of the ladies who, John believes, were only admitted as members in the 1890s. President Wood, grandfather of Jim Wood, introduced the speaker, Alva B. French, on the topic of Westchester County. Mr. French’s talk – all without notes – touched on many changes in the county from periods spanning the Mohicans to the English, from the Revolutionary War to the current days of the 1920s. Some highlights were the first courthouse established in White Plains in 1756 which saw many important cases, including one argued by Aaron Burr; the milestones erected by Benjamin Franklin when he was Postmaster; the monument in Tarrytown that commemorated the site of Major Andre’s capture; and the contributions of John Jay, who authored the first constitution of New York State as well as the treaty with Great Britain, which Mr. French considered the greatest paper in the archives of our country. Other prominent figures included James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving and Horace Greeley. Mr. Alva also noted the steady growth of the county: the assessed value of property in Westchester in 1867 was $40 million; by 1922 the figure was $648 million.

Mary then made a couple of announcements. First, on Thursday, October 6th, the Bedford Garden Club will host a program at Historical Hall on tomatoes, featuring William Alexander, author of the book, “Ten Tomatoes That Changed the World.” Second, she wanted to bring to everyone’s attention a fascinating article that appeared in The New York Times on the royal beekeeper at Buckingham Palace, who had to tell the bees of Queen Elizabeth II’s passing and let them know that they would have a new master. The tradition of “telling the bees” is very old and legend has it that misfortune might follow if not carried out. The article was accompanied by several lovely period illustrations of the bees being told.

Ellen Best followed with Timely Tips. As the season comes to a close, she offered advice on how to prepare your garden for the following year by harvesting your summer crops, planting some short-season fall crops, and covering the soil to prepare to keep it healthy over the winter months. Leaves, hay, lawn scraps and wood chips are all good candidates for mulch coverage. Planting cover crops – such as oats, radishes, mustard and peas – will also help ensure healthy soil by keeping roots in the ground. Cover crops that die over the winter become their own mulch, which you can plant right into in the spring. The tillage radish is a good choice. It has an extremely long root that breaks up the soil, and it absorbs nutrients that it will release back into the soil when it breaks down. It sprouts quickly and has an attractive leafy green top.

In response to a question about planting clover to replace a traditional lawn, Ellen noted its advantages – it feeds the soil and is a pollinator-friendly plant – but cautioned that once clover is planted you’ll never be able to get rid of it. She said that some gardeners plant it along the edges of their beds or in pathways where they can control its growth. Her advice: make sure it’s only where you want it.

Mary then introduced our host and speaker, Amy Benerofe, founder of Our New Way Garden (ONWG). The mission of the organization is to promote the development of local food systems in Westchester, and to make produce available to people with insufficient means or opportunity to purchase or grow their own. She recognized the importance of local agriculture when she began purchasing produce at Purdy’s Farm, whose owner struggled to keep it afloat. When he passed away, the farm collapsed under its debt and a valuable food resource was lost. Later, when Amy and her children participated in a SNAP challenge, she realized how difficult it was to eat healthily at SNAP price points, and she and she and her children often went to bed hungry. Our New Way Garden brings together these two threads.

After the demise of Purdy’s Farm, Amy and a friend started their own vegetable garden. Eventually, Amy connected with Pepsico to use land the company had acquired in Purchase where Our New Way Garden is now located, and she credited Carl Chaleski, Director of Global Real Estate at Pepsico, for being a champion of their work and enabling them to stay on the site. Last season Pepsico established an employee vegetable garden on the site and set aside third of the land for ONWG’s use. They planted a winter cover crop to help condition the soil, which yielded over 500 pounds of pea shoots that they donated to local food pantries. This season has seen the addition of a farm stand to build a market and sell the products of outside vendors.

The original garden on King Street now serves as their market garden. Old Oaks Country Club in Purchase is the site of a 4 ½-acre farm that supports their solidarity share CSA program. People with shares in the CSA buy produce and then make a tax-deductible contribution which enables ONWG to donate substantial amounts of fresh food. Currently, the farm produces about 20,000 pounds of produce, of which about half is donated. In addition, two private landowners in Bedford have welcomed ONWG onto their properties.

Amy is working to establish partnerships with other organizations in Westchester to reach out to populations experiencing food insecurity, and continues to seek ways to expand local agricultural operations. After the presentation, Amy took our group on a tour of the grounds and into the gardens, where we were able to pluck a few remaining pods of okra off the plants. Eating them raw, they were delicious.

The afternoon was capped with donuts and cider, and shopping at the farm stand.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Sheila Crespi*