

New Hope Improvement Association Board

Meeting Minutes

May 16, 2017

Present: Gail Boyarsky (President), Suzanne Sauter (Secretary),
Members-at-large: Walter Fowler, Alice Freeland, Steve Herman, Jim Worrell
Members and Guests: 25

The President, Gail Boyarsky brought the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. She announced upcoming events including the June Board Meeting on June 20 at 7 p.m., the Ice Cream Social on July 16, and a talk by the historian David Southern at 7 p.m. on August 15.

The purpose of the meeting was a talk given by Mr. Dan Derby, Superintendent of Orange County Parks, about Blackwood Farm Park and Hollow Rock Nature Park. Dan Derby joined the Orange County Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation in 2004 as Superintendent. He opened his talk with a map and a brief overview of the Orange County Park system.

Then he proceeded to discuss some of the history of the 152-acre Blackwood Farm Park. Several members knew three of the children of Herbert and Alice Blackwood who owned the farm in the 20th century, namely John, Nannie and Mary. So, they were interested in the acquisition of the park and its opening two years ago. Mr. Derby discussed the plans to improve the meadow to establish more native plant species and deal with invasive weeds, and the planting of American chestnut trees. (American chestnut trees are not native in piedmont NC but used to be quite plentiful. The seeds were probably planted by Native Americans. All the chestnut trees in this area were killed by chestnut blight fungus). Mr. Derby briefly discussed the wooded areas of the park. The attendees were very interested in the current amenities of the park and asked questions about the limited hours of operation. There is insufficient staffing to open the park for longer hours. Also the access road from NC86 that is only one lane. Other topics related to the Farm park included the trails, Blackwood cemetery, improvements in the pond (more bass, less crappie), plans, if any, for restoration of the house with its 1827 cornerstone and outbuildings, development of outlooks, amphitheater, and other topics. Mr. Derby mentioned that plans are being formed for further development. [The Association should ask Mr. Derby back again in a year for an update.]

Hollow Rock Nature Park was the second part of the address. This park is of special interest to the members of the Association because of the Hollow Rock Store now stands in the park. The store was owned by the Whitfield family who donated the land and help build the New Hope Improvement Association building. The Nature Park opened just a year ago and has been used several times by the NHIA for walks and talks. To bring the park to fruition, the 75-acre preserve required the work of four jurisdictions: Chapel Hill and Orange County, Durham and Durham County. Private and non-profit donations were instrumental for land acquisitions. In addition, park infrastructure construction was augmented by a Recreational Trails Program grant. The Park has natural surface trails with bridges over area of intermittent streams and streams. Mr.

Derby discussed how hard it has been to remove unplanned trails that have been created by hikers and bicyclists over the years that go to the stream and across areas that are environmentally sensitive. There are two barns on the property. It is planned for one of them to become an outdoor or environmental education site. Perhaps in the future, a raised boardwalk trail through the beautiful but sensitive marsh area can be built. The next project though is a planned ADA accessible loop trail. Though the loop has been planned, grant money will be necessary for trail construction. The attendees expressed strong support and interest in seeing this sort of trail completed at the Nature Park.

The talk ended with a round of applause at 7:55 p.m.

There were lots of informal questions for Mr. Derby during dessert of sliced fresh local strawberries from Waller Farm, homemade cake, cookies and soft drinks.

A couple of attendees asked for available online information about Orange County parks in general and the two specific parks. The website addresses are below.

Orange County (NC) Department of Environment, Agriculture, Parks and Recreation (DEAPR):

<http://www.orangecountync.gov/departments/deapr/index.php>

Map of Orange County owned parks:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?hl=en&msa=0&z=12&ie=UTF8&mid=1Pds33rucr_vgp_znzP0cKZ0qmV-Q&ll=36.12417900645154%2C-79.085759

Blackwood Farm Park:

http://www.orangecountync.gov/departments/deapr/blackwood_farm_park.php

Hollow Rock Nature Park:

http://www.orangecountync.gov/departments/deapr/hollow_rock_access_area_at_new_hope_creek.php.