

SMILE General Meeting minutes

Wednesday, April 12, 2023

At SMILE Station, S.E. 13th at Tenino

(Minutes kept by Elizabeth Milner, in the absence of the Secretary)

Main Website

www.SellwoodMoreland.org

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Procedural

www.SMILErecords.org

OFFICERS PRESENT: Elaine O’Keefe, President; Elizabeth Milner, Vice President;
Pat Hainley, Secretary Eric Norberg

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Bob Burkholder, Dave Weber, MacKenzie Torres,
Jim Friscia, Sarah Bungler

SMILE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Judi Davis, Brian and Claudia McCarter,
Doug Bridge, Cathy Ingram, David Schoellhamer, Tom Sterusu, Tina Osterink,
Mikki Cecil, Rachel Weber, Susan Clark, Tevse Scott, Ezra Cohen

VISITORS: Connie Shipley (Royal Rosarians)

The meeting was called to order by SMILE President Elaine O’Keefe at 7:31 p.m., who explained that this meeting was being held a week late this month to clear a major religious holiday -- after which, with a quorum present, she invited a review of the minutes of the March 1 SMILE General Meeting minutes. After the review, Brett Baylor moved the minutes be approved as submitted, Barbara Baylor seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

President O’Keefe pointed out that the theme for the meeting would be gardening and sustainability. The meeting proceeded with the program.

Tiffany Mancillas from the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) was the first speaker. She explained that soil and water conservation districts were formed by the U.S. Government, in response to the 1930’s “dust bowl”, to address issues of soil health and conservation. The EMSWCD is taxpayer-funded, and all classes and programs that it offers are free and open to the public. Tiffany urged all attendees to take advantage of these offerings, since as taxpayers they have already paid for them!

EMSWCD has a robust education program covering a range of topics, including naturescaping, rain gardens, urban weeds, and more. At this time all classes are virtual, and can be found on the EMSWCD website. The District hosts a yearly native plant sale; orders are placed in January and picked up in February. In addition to classes, EMSWCD offers small grants to nonprofits, site visits and a variety of community events, all of which can be found on the website.

Tiffany then explained to SMILE members present why EMSWCD promotes using native plants, explaining that native plants are best-suited to our climate and soil conditions, and are the natural food source for local wildlife, and also require fewer synthetic chemicals and fertilizers. Tiffany showed examples of naturescaping projects around Portland, highlighting the beauty and wildlife benefits of such projects. Since some local nurseries do not carry native plants, the EMSWCD website has a list of native plant nurseries). EMSWCD does do soil tests but they can direct people to the organizations which do.

The next presenter was Carol Hardy from the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service “Master Gardener” program, whose presentation was “Successfully Starting Plants from Seeds”. Carol teaches in the Environmental Science department at PSU, and also works with the Backyard Habitat Certification Program, a partnership between Portland Audubon Society and the Columbia Land Trust. (SMILE partnered with the BYH program to install “Springwater Meadows” by the Springwater Trail in south Sellwood.) The Master Gardener program requires extensive training and certifications.

The first topic Carol covered was “Seed Tape”. This is the process of placing individual seeds within strips of toilet tissue, which makes them easier to start in soil, rather than placing seeds directly into soil. Seed tape can be stored in the refrigerator until ready to plant.

Carol next covered “soil blocks,” which are an alternative to using plastic pots. Soil blocks are made by mixing potting soil (recipes available online) and using a “soil blocker” or tin can to create these blocks, into which seeds can be planted. Soil blocks reduce plastic waste and are more beneficial to plant roots.

Her last topic was alternatives to using peat moss for planting. Peat is a common material used by home gardeners and in agriculture, but it is environmentally detrimental as it requires the destruction of peat bogs, which store carbon and provide wildlife habitat.

Mark Lakeman was the third presenter at the SMILE General Meeting -- talking about “Permaculture and Resilient Communities”. Mark highlighted the philosophy of permaculture, which is utilizing the ecological systems immediately at hand, and translating that into human systems as well.

Mark highlighted several examples of the “Re-Villaging Movement” in British Columbia, and also in Sellwood’s “Share-it Square” (which he himself spearheaded, winning state recognition for this pioneering project) – he emphasized the goal of “bringing people together to learn, share, grow food, and benefit by “the networks of mutual benefits between humans and ecological systems”.

Mark talked about the components of Share-it-Square, a place-making project in Sellwood he’d created in 1996, which includes a tea house, the first “Little Free Library” in Oregon, community-building programs, and the use of permaculture and design to slow traffic, and create gathering spaces in the public right-of-way. He remarked that in Portland, raised garden beds are allowable in parking strips (there are 6,000 residential miles of such space in the city) and that fruit and nut trees are allowed in the public right-of-way as well.

Mark shared many photos of “re-villaging” projects, including many in Share-it-Square: green roofs, tree houses, raised gardens, the “chicken palace”, and others.

The last presentation of the evening was from Brett Baylor, who is part of the Metro Climate Action Team (not affiliated with the Metro Regional Government), funded by the Oregon League of Conservation Voters. Brett’s presentation was entitled: “Making our homes cleaner, greener and safer.”

The focus of this presentation was the need to reduce methane emissions from gas-powered home appliances. Brett gave an overview of the current climate crisis and its effects on Oregon, and pointed out that methane [natural gas] contributes 25% of the world’s greenhouse gasses. Brett added that this presents an area of opportunity to reduce global warming, as methane has an atmospheric half-life of 10 to 12 years. (Carbon remains in the atmosphere for up to 1000 years.) Brett explained that methane emissions in the home are responsible for asthma in children -- and children in homes with gas appliances are 40% more likely to develop asthma. Methane contains toxins like Benzene, which is one of the major air pollutants in Oregon. Modern electric stoves have made significant advances as an alternative to gas stoves, he pointed out.

There being no other business on the agenda, or offered from the floor, President Elaine O’Keefe reminded attendees of the important annual SMILE Board Election at the next General Meeting on May 3rd, and then adjourned the April General Meeting at 9:00 p.m.