

CCCA Community Meeting Minutes
August 14, 2018, GVTC Auditorium

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. by Elizabeth Bowerman, President.

Elizabeth extended a special welcome to new attendees and asked that all attendees bring a new person to next month's meeting. After introduction of the CCCA Board Members present, she invited community group representatives to share any announcements they might have.

Leslie Dey, of Friends for Preservation of Historic Landa Park, announced that group is donating \$17,000 for a new ADA-compliant sidewalk; the Park also will be contributing to the completion of this walkway. She announced that on October 20th at 9 a.m. at the gazebo, the group will be dedicating two benches to two of the founding members of the organization.

Jensie Madden, representing the League of Women Voters–Comal Area, encouraged attendees to inform themselves about candidates and announced the League' forum at Tye Preston Memorial Library on Oct. 17 from 6–8 p.m. She also directed attendees to the voter guides at vote411.org and VWV.org, in the Herald-Zeitung on Oct. 16, and at area libraries.

Harry Sutherland reminded attendees that there are t-shirts and tote bags for sale and that the CCCA can accept credit cards.

Elizabeth Bowerman announced that the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance would be holding a meeting on Oct. 17 at GVTC regarding recent wastewater application permits at Honey and Indian Creeks. Recently there also have been permit requests for the Blanco River and at Joint Base San Antonio. Elizabeth also announced that requests to be part of the affected group viz a viz the Vulcan Quarry must be filed by Oct 15. Last, she announced that Monarch Watch is expecting the largest southward migration of monarchs in 10 years.

Committees made their reports. Elizabeth Bowerman read the report submitted by Marne' Peterson, Resource Development Committee. The CCCA brought in over \$6,000 at the Celebration for Conservation. The committee will be researching possible grants for 2019 submission. Grants already submitted were for operational costs and education outreach. Grant requests will be based on the desired budget for 2019, which will be based on committee requests.

Jensie Madden reported for the Government Affairs Committee, which would be meeting the following morning at GVTC to work on talking points for meetings with County Commissioners regarding creation of a task force. She thanked Georgia Shaffer, Helen Ballew, and Rachel Lindsey for their work on putting together the materials to be shared with the commissioners.

Joel Dunnington reported for the Outreach Committee. At the Comal County Fair 15 new people signed up to the CCCA mailing list. The CCCA will have a presence at Landa Park's Arbor Day on Oct. 20 at 9 a.m. Volunteers welcome. On Oct. 17 Joel will be attending the Guadalupe River Conservation Priorities Stakeholder meeting, and on Nov. 5 he will attend the State Revolving

Fund for Conservation Workshop. The Hill Country Alliance is holding its Rainwater Revival Festival in Dripping Springs on Oct. 20, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Georgia Shaffer reported for the Communications Committee. Photos from the Celebration for Conservation and new group partners are up on the CCCA website. A new brochure has been created for the CCCA as well as next month's announcement. Georgia explained that the purpose of the committee is to make us more visible. She observed many people shrink from the word "conservation," but they are concerned about our natural resources and want to preserve them. The focus of the committee will be on education and assisting with the landowners' conference. She requested attendees share Facebook posts.

Helen Ballew announced some specific needs of the CCCA—an accountant or bookkeeper; someone to handle correspondence, and someone with environmental education experience to handle public education campaign. She also announced that after the presentation a survey would be conducted.

Helen introduced the guest speaker, Jeff Weigel, who has worked for the Nature Conservancy for 30 years with 10 of those years mostly in Central and South America. His presentation was titled "Tales of Texas Conservation."

Jeff noted that he has been waiting for a long time for a group to form in Comal County. He complimented Georgia Shaffer on her Twitter posts.

Jeff shared that there is a commonality in the "recipe" for successful conservation projects—just the scale differs.

Lesson: All projects take time and a continuity of purpose.

The effort to protect Bracken Bat Cave, summer home to the world's largest congregation of mammals (an estimated 20 million Mexican Free-tailed Bats), started in about 1987. At first Bat Conservation International (BCI) gained 3/5 interest in 5 acres. Eventually BCI was able to buy 697 acres from the landowner, and the Nature Conservancy helped to manage it. Next a group of citizens worked to protect what became Government Canyon State Natural Area. The Nature Conservancy saw an opportunity to protect a larger area (in Cibolo Canyon), with 10,000 acres as a goal (has over 5,000 now)—1,244 acres already were preserved for Golden-cheek Warbler (GCW) mitigation. In 2013, 1,521 acres between Bracken Bat Cave and Cibolo Canyon had been platted for 3,500 homes—right in the typical flight path of the bats (prevailing wind from the southeast). The land was also GCW habitat and on the recharge zone. There was a groundswell of community interest and efforts by the Texas Nature Conservancy (TNC) and BCI. The land appraised for \$25 million, which eventually dropped to \$20 million. The City of San Antonio, corporate and private donors, TNC and BCI, the county, military, SAWS, and Edwards Aquifer Authority all contributed to the purchase. The deal closed Halloween of 2014; the TNC is still raising money to pay the costs of its contribution.

Lessons: Need a lot of partnerships, patience, and nerve.

Rachel Lindsey, formerly of the Nature Conservancy, pointed out that Comal County has of yet been unwilling to purchase lands for conservation even though it has a GCW Regional Habitat Conservation Plan.

The Shield Ranch in Travis County on Barton Creek is a 5,000-acre ranch west of Austin owned by the Ayres family. In 1987 the family started a conversation with the Nature Conservancy. Ten years later family donated the property in a conservation easement that went to the Nature Conservancy and the City of Austin (ranch is in Austin's extraterritorial jurisdiction). Part of the ranch is set up as a nature camp for inner-city children.

Lesson: Even with willing landowner, this transaction took a lot of time.

Jeff urged the audience to find landowners who want to conserve and protect their lands and to help make these easements happen—appraised value can be deducted over 15 years.

The Gulf Coast Bird Conservancy in Brazoria County is in the process of creating the Brazos Woods Preserve. Brazoria County is home to Dow Chemical's largest site in Freeport; at the same time the county hosts an incredible amount of biodiversity and is important to migrating birds. The Nature Conservancy is working to acquire remnants of forested land along the Brazos, including a 500-acre tract with wetland. The cost was \$2 million but reduced to \$1.6 million, of which \$1 million was obtained from the federal government. Local residents raised the balance of funds, and the deal will be able to close.

Lesson: Need a good project, a tangible outcome, an urgent deadline. And leveraging funds is extremely important.

Mentioned that Bob Ayres wrote a three-part series on how three generations of their family decided together to create the conservation easement on the Shield Ranch. It is on the Cynthia and George Mitchel Foundation website. Also noted that tomorrow there is a conservation land trusts workshop in Kingsville with the Texas Agricultural Land Trust.

Closed presentation with quote from Margaret Meade: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Helen Ballew had the community interest survey distributed. Suggested group may want to take a field trip to Bracken Bat Cave.

The Committees met briefly.

Elizabeth Bowerman reminded attendees that the **November 13 Community Meeting would take place at the McKenna Event Center in New Braunfels**. County Engineer Tom Hornseth will talk about the Regional Habitat Conservation Plan.

Meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.