

FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK

The Forest Hill Park Post



June 2019

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www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

Little Miracles All Around

Laura Dysart

Seven years ago, the Virginia Blue Bird Society constructed a 10-box blue bird trail in Forest Hill Park. Volunteers came out to learn more, and the park has had a well-monitored trail ever since.

The boxes on our trail are reserved for native cavity nesters. If a non-native bird or invasive species, such as a sparrow, builds a nest in these boxes, trained volunteers are able to recognize the nest and remove it. Volunteers monitor the blue bird trail during the nesting season (April-August) on a weekly basis following the Virginia Blue Bird Society monitoring guidelines. Volunteer monitors assess each box every week to make sure the boxes and predator guards are in good condition. All boxes on the trail have predator guards to prevent snakes, raccoons and other predators from taking eggs. Volunteers soap boxes and remove wasp nests as well as apply Vaseline to the posts to prevent ants from entering.

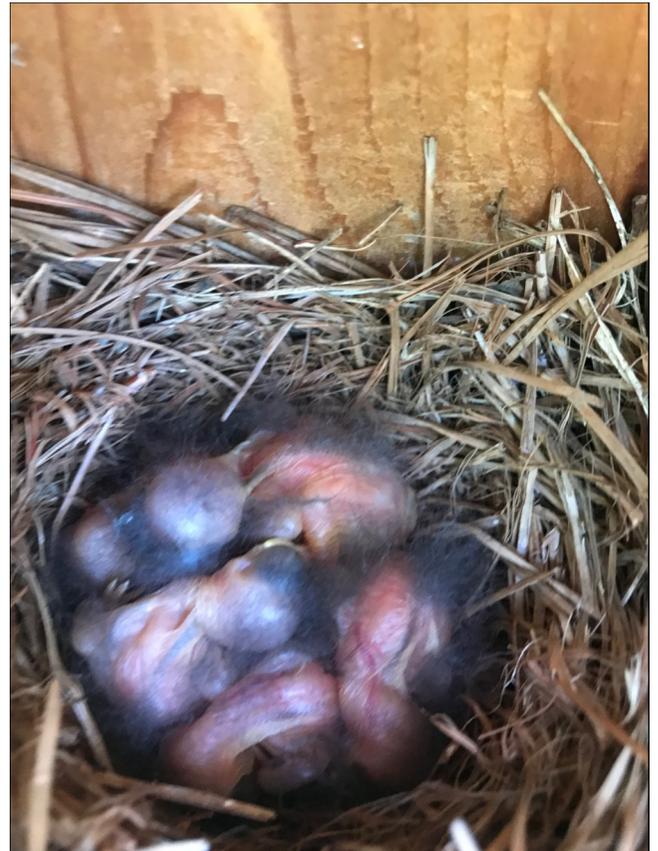


The first bluebird eggs this year.

Volunteers record all activity for the Virginia Blue Bird society including nests, eggs, hatchlings and fledglings for native species. The data from the Forest Hill Park trail is submitted to the Virginia Blue Bird Society annually.

Forest Hill Park has had great success with both blue birds and chickadee species during the last 7 years. During the 2018 season we had 14 blue birds and 3 chickadees fledge into the park from our boxes. This was a decline from previous years, which was on par with a decline across the state. Blue birds will often come back and have one or two more clutches of eggs in one season.

It is very important not to tamper with or open boxes in the park. There is a point when opening a box is dangerous to hatchlings. So far this spring, our trail has had one blue bird nest with 5 blue bird hatchlings, and we hope to report many more.



Bluebird eggs, if fertile, usually hatch between 12 and 14 days, but some do not hatch until 21-24 days. Here, five eggs produced five nestlings.



Twelve or thirteen days after hatching, these young Forest Hill chicks will be ready to leave the nest.

These young chicks require feeding by both the mama and papa bird. They will provide grubs, crickets, beetles, ants, spiders, grasshoppers, caterpillars and other insects. When weather becomes cooler and enough insects aren't available, bluebirds eat tree and vine fruits such as grapes and berries from sumac, holly, dogwood, pokeweed and hackberry. Bluebirds live in Forest Hill Park all year.

Anyone interested in volunteering to assist with and keep a record of these little miracles can contact trail coordinator Laura Dysart at lauradysart@verizon.net.



The above image shows a female eastern bluebird working on building her nest (courtesy Dan Garber.) Left, a parent Eastern bluebird feeds two chicks (courtesy Jerry Acton.)

On Saturday, May 4, Matt Zipperer and I led a walking history tour of the Forest Hill neighborhood. Participants were greeted by several members of Friends of Forest Hill Park at the Stone House, where they heard about how the area was settled and developed and were able to see many prints of the old amusement park.

The walking portion of the tour lasted several hours, and it included many aspects of what life was like when the neighborhood was newly developed. Who lived here? What were their professions? What are the unique architectural features of some of the houses? How did life in the area change through the mid- and late 20th century?



This lovely old structure, circa 1905, has always been referred to as “the Forest Hill Inn Annex.” Originally, it was attached to the Inn, which stands just west of it today. When Dunston Avenue was extended over Reedy Creek to the east, the Inn’s location impeded road construction, so it was separated into two buildings and moved to the present locations.

A special treat on the May tour was an impromptu tour of the interior of what used to be the annex of the old inn on Dunston Ave. It is now a single family home at 4015 Dunston Ave. Peter Mollica has lived there for a number of years and he has done a considerable amount of work on the house. Thanks to Peter for his hospitality.

The next walking history tour is Saturday, June 8 at 9:30 a.m. Join us to walk back in history. Donation is \$15 per person. Free to members of Friends of Forest Hill Park.

Forest Hill Park—the Next Twenty Years

On December 18, 2018, Friends of Forest Hill Park (FFHP) representatives attended a meeting at the request of Jim Smither, a professor of Urban Planning at VCU. He proposed to assign one of his graduate classes the project of presenting a twenty-year plan for Forest Hill Park to FFHP and to Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities (PRCF.) And he told us his students would be graded



Community meeting at Forest Hill Presbyterian Church.

on their effort.

The following months included the students' site visits to the park, a community meeting at Forest Hill Presbyterian Church to learn how stakeholders enjoyed the park and several meetings with FFHP at the James River Park headquarters.

The class of ten students invested many hours and extensive thought in their vision and



Image: Forest Hill Park parking lot current layout (Google Maps)



The top aerial view is the parking lot where picnic shelters and South of the James Market are located. The lower view is the students' proposal, which includes grid parking, additional trees and flora, a nature center (lower right) and designated market tent sites in the grassy median.

presented their final report to FFHP and PRCF in May. The report reflected area demographics and the park's strengths and weaknesses. Comparisons to parks of similar size were shared as well as possible funding opportunities.

Goals for the next twenty years incorporated methods to increase the safety of Forest Hill Avenue and park entrances and signage to help park users navigate. Ways to enhance the appearance of the plaza and natural spring north of the Stone House were presented along with proposals to make the overlook west of the lake more appealing. Possible educational opportunities in the

park were included throughout the final presentation.

There is no official plan to implement any of the suggested changes, but the students' proposals offered many eye-openers and thought provoking recommendations for the future of the park. FFHP and PRCF were favorably impressed.

SUMMERTIME

