

COVID Conversations

Living in unprecedented times, we desired to chronicle how our members' service changed during a global pandemic. We joined Brittanie G. of Evanston, Maya D. of Waukegan, and Robin G. of Hawthorn Woods for a COVID Conversation.

COVID Conversations: Robin G.

How has working at home changed how you view sustainability?

From the moment everything started shutting down, I became interested in how this would affect the emissions and carbon output on both a national and global scale. Not everything that I was hearing represented the positives of decreased emissions; some predict that factories will open and use much more fuel and resources than before to make up for lost time. Despite this, now people have a taste for working from home and there might be a genuine shift toward a new way of working. This is causing a dramatic change toward what we view as necessary for the workplace and is helping to change the view of what is normal in life.

The entire world coming together to address a global problem gives me some hope that the world can do the same in the future. In living memory there are no situations that have required a global response as powerful as the reaction to the virus. Hopefully, the issues that have been revealed through the virus can be addressed and the tools of our collective response can be a means of uniting against another common enemy - unsustainable living.

How has your work shifted since you began working from home?

Mostly, my interaction with coworkers has been reduced. Currently, I am filling out goals and strategies for Hawthorn Woods's sustainability plan. Before, I was able to walk down the hall and get feedback and now that has shifted to email correspondence. That has increased the time it takes to hear back and decreased the volume of feedback I receive.



COVID Conversations: Robin G.



For the sustainability plan, when did you start working on it and how have you been developing it?

The development of the sustainability plan for Hawthorn Woods relies heavily on the Greenest Region Compact and the designation process for the village to be designated as an Audubon International Green Community. These processes both cover extensive resources and understanding of how sustainability processes work in the Chicago region. As the plan gets further into development, it will go through processes of review with a citizen sustainability committee and will be adjusted with the results of a sustainability survey that had been given out to community members this past spring.



Do you have any other projects you would like to mention?

I have been working on moving forward with our Audubon International Designation and implementing a survey to help with this work. Also, I have been working to start Hawthorn Woods's Sustainability Committee. Unfortunately, this has been greatly affected by the pandemic as we are no longer able to meet in person. I was tasked with ensuring the success and effectiveness of this committee.



Can you expand on the Audubon International Program?

Most believe it is solely regarding birds, but it is much more than that. The comprehensive program has 16 different focus areas. One facet of the designation process is the successful passing of a sustainability plan, which is what I have been working on. For Hawthorn Woods's Sustainability Plan, I am working to blend the focus areas of Audubon International with the categories and strategies of the GRC.



How were you able to start the Committee?

In Hawthorn Woods, a lot of subcommittees have come from the trustee board. One of those used to be the Environmental Committee made up of a few volunteers. We believed that a new name and expansion of the committee would generate a new enthusiasm and productivity of the committee. Now, the code has been rewritten, which has added a new layer of responsibilities for the new Sustainability Committee.



COVID Conversations: Robin G.



In normal times, what kind of projects would the Sustainability Committee be working on?

The Sustainability Committee is currently expanding many of its responsibilities and generating new projects and ideas. It will be in charge of the overview of many environmental initiatives that will go before the full Board of Trustees. Community education, third party certifications, and resident recognition will all be broadened responsibilities of our volunteer members.

Do you have any other goals you want to accomplish within the program's term?



Overall, I am focused on getting things off the ground and keeping them going. I am working towards ways to increase the Village's capacity for sustainability work even considering the uncertainties of the future. By developing plans and structures that will maintain efforts I have worked on during my program, the GRC program will have been in and of itself, sustainable for its host site.

What do you miss most from your service pre-pandemic?

Besides the people in the office, because I think that's an easy one, I miss the building itself and being in the community that I'm serving. Not only am I not in the community where I'm serving, I'm not even in the county where I'm serving. Moreover, I was hoping to interact more with citizens this spring by doing stewardship days involving invasive species removal and being able to get out in nature with residents, but those have been pushed back for now.

Have there been any sources of motivation that have been helping you along?

I have genuinely felt that no matter how poor the circumstances have been, I have been supported and united with both my Hawthorn Woods team and GRCorps. My supervisor at Hawthorn Woods has also instituted a weekly check-in, which I appreciate. Little things like that make a big difference and even though we're all busy or stressed, there still is that team unity and conscious effort.



We caught up with the GRCorps members in late June when the state was beginning to reopen to see how things had changed.

What does going back to work look like for you or what will it look like?

Going back to work for me will have staggered schedules for employees and very little face-to-face interaction, if any, on a normal day. From continued Zoom meetings to no crossing in the halls, the Village Hall at Hawthorn Woods is dedicated to keeping its employees from spreading amongst one another. These lessons were learned from a recent flu virus that had gone through earlier this year! I am very confident I will be safe from exposure with the plans and practices that will be in place during the summer months with the village.

Did you notice the symbols in the margins of the newsletter?

Each symbol represents a category in the Greenest Region Compact and is placed around actions that depict a GRCorps member working on that category.



Climate



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Land



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