



City of Newburyport Tree Commission

Meeting Minutes

Monday, 21 Sept 2020

Zoom meeting

The meeting convened at 6:08 pm.

Tree Commission members present: Constance Preston (Chair), Crispin Miller (Vice Chair/Treasurer), Sheila Taintor (Secretary), Paul Bevilacqua, Andrew Soracco, Scott Hanley, Janet Morris (alternate), Paul Harrington (alternate), Jamie Tuccolo (Tree Warden, ex-officio)

Tree Commission members absent: Sue Brown, Lance Rickard (Tree Warden Designee, Assistant Tree Warden, ex-officio)

Public in attendance: Christine Wallace, 474 Merrimac St (Ward 4 Councilor); Paul Knowlton, 37 Milk Street

Trees on Merrimac Street were discussed first, since Ward 4 Councilor Wallace had reached out to the TC to discuss adding trees to Merrimac Street to help beautify the area, a gateway to the City, and was attending the meeting. Councilor Wallace hopes to identify sites for tree pits while the current paving and sidewalk work is going on. Connie Preston explained our budget restraints – no City funding for the Tree Commission for FY 21 – but agreed to walk Merrimac with the Councilor on Thursday 9/24 to look at sites and explain the criteria the TC uses for selecting sites. Tree Warden Jamie Tuccolo said there would be no problem planning pits available for future trees when the new sidewalks were laid. The whole area being worked on now has already been dig-safed, so that information can be used to identify future sites, although the sites would need to be dig-safed again within 30 days of using them. Christine Wallace suggested contacting residents to see if residents were interested in paying for a tree and Connie mentioned the possibility of dropping off a flyer for residents.

Reports

Secretary

The Commission tentatively approved the Minutes of the 12 February 2020 Meeting, our last meeting prior to this meeting, which were complete except for the addresses of 12 trees which were taken down in January. It was agreed that the Minutes would be complete once the missing addresses were inserted.

Treasurer

The August Treasurer's Report was unanimously accepted. Sufficient funding exists in our various accounts to cover the reduced Fall planting and 2 years' worth of watering for all new community trees. Funds will be reserved in the Revolving Account for emergency needs.

Tree Warden

The Tree Warden did not have a report this month but committed to submit the number of trees removed between February and August and their addresses, consistent with past practice, by Oct first. This list has not yet been received.

Planting

Connie Preston discussed the problems that had occurred with the Spring planting of the PCI Synthesis trees. The Tree Commission had contracted with Plants and Pleasantrees in the past but they were not able to do the work in the Spring due to a transfer of ownership. Coastal Landscaping won the planting bid this year but did not plant several trees to our satisfaction resulting in several needing to be dug up and replanted (no more than 5, according to Connie's recollection). Additional trees were planted too close to the street. Andrew Soracco, project leader for the PCI planting, had placed red flags at the planting sites, but the flags disappeared. The contractor was also given a rudimentary map indicating where to plant the trees, but a miscommunication led to the trees being planted in the wrong spots.

A discussion followed about planting on private property and Cris Miller shared a sad story about elm trees planted in the days of the Tree Committee, under Hugh Kelleher's leadership. An agreement was made with a resident on High Street to plant 2 elms on his property. That owner sold his house and the new owner later cut down one of the 10" dbh elms. Sheila Taintor mentioned that the Commission would need to get an easement in order to prevent that in the future, should we decide to plant on private property.

Coastal Landscaping (formerly Lady Tracey Anne) has just completed watering 196 trees between the weeks of May 18 and Sep 14 for a total of 15 waterings. Waterings had been cancelled the weeks of June 29 and July 6 so those were tacked onto the end of the season.

In light of losing our FY 2021 City budget there is only enough money to plant 18 additional community trees and water the 109 anticipated trees in 2021. Prioritization of the trees was based on donation and FIFO. There are an additional 36 trees on the fall planting list that will have to be delayed until the Tree Commission has more funds. The Tree Commission does have funds to plant 25 more trees with the PCI Synthesis money but those funds must be spent in Environment Justice Areas (EJAs).

Connie has consulted with arborists that work with the TC about planting this fall. They feel that unless the trees can be planted by 10/15, the planting should be held off until spring. Connie felt time was very limited to make a decision, get bids (usually a 3-week process) and do the planting. Paul Harrington mentioned that if an expenditure is under \$10,000, it does not need to be put out to bid, which removes the time pressure.

Connie has reached out to David Clay, the coach of the Newburyport basketball team, to suggest volunteer activities that his athletes can do this fall, such as removing and storing the water bags, cleaning tree pits, mulching tree pits at Kelleher Park, etc. We could also consider similar activities for Spring.

Grants/Donations

Janet Morris left the meeting before delivering an update on Grants and Donations. She is resigning from the TC effective 30 Sept 2020 to focus her volunteer efforts elsewhere but is still willing to participate in pruning and mulching days. Jane Niebling will step in to take over grant applications as a volunteer but is not interested in rejoining the Tree Commission.

Old Business

Annual Report FY 2019 was approved to be submitted to the Mayor, pending receipt of total number of trees removed in FY 2019 from the Tree Warden.

New Business

Tree Commission Membership:

Cris Miller had informed the Commission earlier that he will not be seeking reappointment to the TC at the end of his term in Nov 2020. Cris will be sorely missed but will continue working with the TC as a volunteer. Connie's term ends Nov 2020 so she will be nominated to the CC in October.

Newburyport Tree Guide

Sheila Taintor raised the issue of posting a PDF of the Newburyport Tree Guide on the website for residents to download. The Commission did not think this was appropriate. Copies may be purchased in the Planning & Development office or through the FoNT website.

Losing young trees during hot summer

This past summer was very hard on young trees and we lost quite a few street trees. The Commission discussed how we can prevent this from occurring in the future. We discussed the difficulty of asking residents to be responsible for additional watering, especially after the first 2 years, when the Commission waters all new trees. Paul Bevilacqua inquired whether there was any pattern to the losses, and Cris Miller replied that there didn't seem to be a trend based on either species or location. Paul Bevilacqua suggested looking carefully at our list of recommended street trees and eliminating any that don't handle heat/drought well. Our list has gone through at least 2 iterations, and Cris suggested having our arborists take another look at the list with those conditions in mind.

Number of Meetings, Number of Members, Term Limits, etc.

Connie Preston suggested that we consider changing the Tree Ordinance to remove the requirement to meet ten times a year. Connie is committed to making sure that the Commission meets when necessary but feels that the Tree Commission should not be required to meet when there are not time-sensitive items to be discussed. She also wanted us to consider how many members the Commission needs to function and whether there should be term limits. Paul Bevilacqua provided some historic background on the creation of the Tree Ordinance. In the discussion on the size of the Commission, several Commissioners suggested how important it is to make sure that collectively the members have all the skills necessary to do the work of the Tree Commission, and that 7 seemed to allow for that.

Paul Bevilacqua made a motion to set the meeting length at one hour, unless the Commission determines additional time is necessary. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 PM with Connie Preston, Cris Miller, Sheila Taintor, Paul Bevilacqua, Paul Harrington still present.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sheila Taintor, Secretary

Next meeting: Wednesday, TBD, at 6 PM

Location: Zoom meeting