

City of Northampton, MA
Public Shade Tree Commission (PSTC)

January 2, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Submitted by: Beth Willard

Meeting Called to Order

Lilly Lombard, Chair called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM and announced the audio/visual recording of the meeting.

Members present and absent/introductions:

| Member | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
|---|----------------|---|
| Lilly Lombard, Chair | X | |
| Todd Ford, Vice Chair | Absent | |
| Molly Hale | Absent | |
| Jennifer Werner | X | |
| Marilyn Castriotta | X | |
| Rob Postel | X | |
| Susan Lofthouse | X | 4:52 PM |
| Staff & Visitors | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
| Richard Parasiliti, Tree Warden | X | |
| Beth Willard, DPW Clerk | X | |
| Carolyn Misch, Senior Land Planner | X | |
| Greg Beck, Arborist, Bartlett Tree, visitor | X | |

Public Comment

- Greg Beck, arborist with Bartlett Tree Experts attended to introduce himself and get to know the people on the commission.
 - Bartlett Tree Experts has absorbed C. L. Frank & Company.
 - All personnel of C.L. Frank & Company were kept and are still at the local office.
 - Bartlett Tree has a few new resources that C. L. Frank did not have available.

Approval of previous minutes

- Minutes were read and amended by commission members.

| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|---|------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| To approve December 19, 2018 minutes as amended | Jen Werner | Marilyn Castriotta | Yes 3, No 0, Abstain 1 |

Chair Report

- Lilly reported that one of the trees planted on South & Olive (discussed at the last meeting) has since been removed.
 - The trees were setback plantings of Ginkgoes.
 - The trees were planted under an old agreement that was not recorded on the deed.
 - Rich will speak to the senior planner about the situation.

- Kristina Bezanson, the arboriculture professor at UMass is on the agenda for the next meeting.
 - She has a lifelong career in tree work, particularly in a municipal capacity.
 - Lilly asked for input, as Ms. Bezanson's presentation can be tailored to what the members wish to hear about.
- TreeSpeak is showing progress.
 - Madeleine is working on it, but having trouble getting use of Smith College equipment for the audio recordings.
 - Smith College will make the tree labels, and the Commission will provide installation.
 - Karyn Nelson has the web pages built, and they look good.
 - Next item is to attach the audio.

Tree Warden Report

- A Public Shade Tree in the tree belt at 115 Bridge St was removed illegally by Aspen Realty.
 - They asked for the removal to be forgiven by the Tree Warden.
 - When the request was denied, they emailed the Mayor, asking again. Rich will have a conversation with the Mayor about the situation.
 - The crew cut down a Ginkgo, but did not touch the other trees in the tree belt.
 - The consequence of their actions will be a \$500 penalty.
- Rich mentioned a series of talks advertised in the Citizen Forester Newsletter.
 - Talks are being sponsored by the Plainfield Tree Alliance.
 - A talk by Rich Harper was noted.
 - Rich will attend at least one talk to show support.
- About 8 Silver Maples on the Childs Park side of Woodlawn Ave., and probably a few more on the other side, will be taken down.
 - This is a possible planting opportunity.
 - Lilly will add it to the priority street list.

Guest: Greg Beck, Arborist Bartlett Tree (purchased CL Frank)

- Lilly welcomed Greg.
 - She asked what is his typical client, what are they asking for, and if he has noted any overarching concerns of which the Commission should be aware.
- In working in Connecticut, Greg found the Emerald Ash Borer problem was the primary issue.
 - He has yet to see the problem here, but Lilly noted that it has been spotted at Arcadia.
 - The borer will kill untreated Ash trees.
 - Treated trees can survive – the treatment involves direct trunk injections.
 - When the borer population levels out, the program can be shifted to a different treatment plan.
 - Currently the injection treatment is conducted over 4 years.
- They have received a lot of calls about Gypsy Moth, which is particularly bad in the Amherst/Pelham area.
 - He has noted very few egg masses in Northampton.
 - Gypsy Moth thrive in drought conditions.
 - Gypsy Moth is held in check by a fungus that needs moist conditions at the right time (wet years).
 - With the exception of this year, recent conditions have been dry.

- He is working with the local colleges on programs to work on the problem.
- Currently treatment includes injections, foliage sprays, deep root fertilization, and also a soil treatment for Two Lined Chestnut Borer (on the heels of gypsy moth - a spiking population was noted in the Quabbin area), which thrives on stressed beech and oak trees.
 - Alleviating stress on the tree, such as providing water to it, is helpful.
- Greg met with Joe Elkinton, a UMass Professor who is doing studies in Amherst with Arborjet.
 - Greg noted in Amherst that a lot of trees had been tagged by them, so he is trying not to impact their studies.
 - Joe Elkinton is studying population dynamics of invasive species (including Gypsy Moth).
- Greg noted for comparison, 1981 was a really bad year for Gypsy Moth. This year could be as bad.
- Jen asked if Bartlett Tree had received requests for tree removals for solar installations.
 - In the past 6 years, they had several requests in Connecticut and some in Massachusetts.
 - Jen asked if there was a percentage increase in the number of take downs.
 - Greg said the increase was very minimal.
 - The most common reason for removal is safety.
 - Additions to existing buildings is another common reason.
- Marilyn asked about the removal of infested trees.
 - Greg said normal removals are either chipped for mulch or used as firewood.
 - Infested trees are chipped.

Revisions of Section 350, Zoning Ordinance related to PV, Q & A with Carolyn Misch, Senior Planner

- Carolyn noted that the Significant Tree Ordinance had already been adopted.
- A related issue is that of solar installations.
 - There is a cap on the amount of timber they can remove to create a solar field.
 - The idea is to limit clear cuts in the city.
- She noted that this ordinance was originally adopted in 2011.
 - Large scale installations require a special permit
 - Since then, there has been interest in installing systems covering 10 to 40 acres.
 - The cap didn't allow these everywhere.
 - One purpose of the cap was to protect the flood plains.
 - Solar fields would then be built in other parts of the city, including wooded areas.
 - Several prospective applicants had come forward and were stymied by the cap.
 - The changes would allow, under very specific conditions, the removal of more than 3-4 acres of forest.
 - Planning & Development is redefining that section of the ordinance with very rigorous conditions for a permit.
 - The idea is to require a special permit for large solar fields removing more than 25,000 board feet.
 - 50% of the property would be permanently protected or put under a conservation restriction as a requirement, mirroring the cluster development regulations.

- The Significant Tree Ordinance still applies, with a 12 month “look back” period.
 - An inventory of the trees would be required, and all over 20” would be required to be replaced.
 - An example is the Con Edison permit approved at the old Willard gravel pit off Burts Pit Rd.
 - 147 trees were removed, and they will be required to do replacements.
- Sue asked why board feet was used as the measurement.
 - Carolyn explained that it is a standardized measurement to account for commercial timber.
 - The state threshold is 25,000 B.F.
- Carolyn said most areas to be cleared for solar installations are large stands of trees. Some possibilities are coming up:
 - The nursing home area in Leeds off River Rd.
 - The Revolver Club area off Ryan Rd.
 - The gravel pit off Burts Pit Rd.
- Jen asked if board feet covered only trees for timber harvest that have commercial value.
 - Carolyn replied that that was true.
 - Lilly noted that this did not protect trees of little commercial value that could have an ecological value.
 - Is there was a means to account for them in this ordinance change?
 - Rich noted that the overstory in a tree stand would be valued for board feet. The understory would be other trees without a board foot value, but have other value.
 - Carolyn suggested using an acreage trigger for a special permit if that made more sense.
- Marilyn asked if the ordinance would be going through as is.
 - Carolyn replied that something was needed to plug the loophole around complying with the cap by cutting the trees prior to selling the land for solar development.
- Lilly asked if the city had explored the cost versus benefit of removing trees for solar field.
 - Is there research to suggest that it is worth the trade?
 - Carolyn replied that it had not been explored.
 - In order to get to carbon neutral by 2050, steps need to be taken, but we don’t want to defoliate the entire city to achieve that objective.
 - Some areas will have to be allowed to reach that goal.
 - Each site needs to be weighed in the moment.
 - Lilly noted that there are ways to calculate the carbon held in a stand of trees.
 - Can this be weighed in the evaluation versus the carbon reduced by the creation of a solar field?
 - Conditions #6A through 6E require that the project needs to be carbon neutral for 10 years, and the applicant must provide evidence that it will.
 - Lilly thought all woody plants (bushes, etc.) should be included in the carbon equation.
 - Rob asked if stumps were required to be left.
 - Carolyn replied that it is not always feasible, but could be used as an alternative to adding all woody material to the equation.

- Jen questioned how to deal with a parcel that was logged and regrew without any desirable board foot species.
 - If a developer wanted to put in a 5 acre solar array and cut brushy non-board foot trees – how would that work?
 - Carolyn replied that the applicant must hire a forester, and we rely on their report. It would not trigger this section of the code.
 - Requirements for setbacks from buffer zones, vernal pools, etc. are still there, but that would be a Conservation Commission permit process.
 - The value of the trees for ecological purposes would not be considered.
- Rob felt that the acreage limitation made more sense than a board foot measurement.
 - Jen asked if the acreage limitation would remove the requirement for a forester.
 - Carolyn replied no. The evaluation of the trees was still a requirement.
 - Rob pointed out the board foot method might incentivize people to cut trees and then a few years later sell the property for solar development.
 - Carolyn pointed out the 12 month look back on cutting the timber.
- Lilly suggested at #6C – convert “net timber” to “net trees”.
- Carolyn asked about addressing stump maintenance (#7).
 - Lilly suggested asking about a plan for maintenance on the application.
 - Rob noted that it could help in meeting the carbon neutral 10 year requirement.
 - If #7 proves too onerous, it can be looked at again.
- Lilly felt she would like Todd to look at the changes before voting on them.
 - Carolyn said the changes had to be voted tonight to be included on the city council agenda for January 17.
 - Rich pointed out that the commission needed to vote on some form of change tonight to meet the schedule.

| • Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|---|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| To approve with the amendment that we use the language “5 acres” instead of “25,000 BF of timber”, and “trees” instead of “timber”; and to co-sponsor the amendment of this ordinance | Marilyn Castriotta | Rob Postel | Yes 5, No 0, Abstain 0 |

Neighborhood Planting Project—Rubric for evaluation and discussion of applicants,

Commissioners

- Lilly asked if everyone had opportunity to look over the spreadsheet
 - Rob added on that the Prospect St neighborhood had the potential for 6 setback sites.
 - There potential for them to be significant trees because of their locations.
 - No one had any further additions to the spreadsheet.
 - Since everyone was happy with the layout of choices, then it is something that will carry on for the next evaluation.
- A straw poll showed the majority of commissioners in favor of the Prospect St. application.
 - Rob noted that certain sites in the Munroe St. neighborhood could also get trees separate from the Neighborhood Planting Project.

- Lilly noted that the applicant on the Munroe St. project seemed to be excited about the community building aspect that the planting project presented.
 - Perhaps the commission should contact them and suggest that they resubmit in the future (maybe with some help in reworking it), so as to give encouragement through engagement.
 - Rob suggested planting some selective sites, and also to encourage them to re-submit the application in the future.
 - Rich supports that suggestion, but with the understanding that this action will have to apply to future applicants, as everyone must be treated equally.

| • Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
|--|---------------|--------------|------------------------|
| To make decision on our community application process, and for this cycle, choose the Prospect St. project | Sue Lofthouse | Jen Werner | Yes 4, No 0, Abstain 1 |

- Rich will contact Ken.

Planning Schedule

- Nothing to report.

Subcommittee report

- Planting Plan Subcommittee
 - Nothing to report

Tree Northampton update

- Rob reported that they took a break for the holidays and will resume pruning later this month.
 - There are lots of untrained people, so he will concentrate on training throughout the year.
 - There are a lot of factors that have to be understood by those pruning the trees.
 - He needs more trained people to help train the volunteers.
 - In theory, they are pruning plantings from the last 2 to 4 years (2” - 4” trees), but have a large stock that have been in the ground for perhaps 5 years.
 - This fall, they pruned approximately 40 trees at Florence Fields that are in the 6” range.
 - Conceivably, in 5 years, there could be 1200-1300 trees needing pruning.
 - There are now about 20 people with some training, but not necessarily able to work on their own.
 - Rich is concerned that they are volunteers, and a good knowledge of the aspects of the tree is needed to understand how to prune it.
 - He doesn’t see working on their own as a real possibility for most of the volunteers.
 - Kristina Bezanson may be able to help with some of the students.
 - Greg volunteered to help train, and suggested he might also have someone from Bartlett Tree that could also help.
- Lilly suggested anyone can remove mulch, and suggested removing volcano mulch and pruning roots as a great use of volunteers that don’t have a lot of training.

- Volunteers pruning roots would need oversight. Sue has a crew of about 30 that have experience.
- Greg spoke about problems with training crews not to volcano mulch.
- He also spoke about remedial action that they can take to improve a tree's chances such as airspading, uncovering the root flare, soil amendments, and root pruning.
- Greg suggested that in planting, bare root trees are the way to go.
 - Lots of root ball manipulation in planting also made for a stronger tree.

Any other business not anticipated by Chair

- Rich was contacted by a woman about hosting Emerald Ash Borer training in Northampton.
 - The tree inventory shows only about 4-5% Ash.
 - Jen pointed out that it is moving up the Connecticut Valley.
 - Lilly didn't feel we could host or organize an Emerald Ash Borer session.
 - Rich agreed, as there are so many training sessions out there, hosting another is not necessary.
 - He will respond to the woman, declining the hosting opportunity.
- Rich has a Grad student from UMass coming, but has not pinned down a date with him yet.
- It might be 4 months before we hear about the grant from the state, and it might not be the full amount requested.

To-do List re-cap

- Rob – will keep on pruning.
- Jen – will catch up with the Chicopee structural soil person this week – he was away.
- Rich – will contact Ken Neiman about the award. He will talk to Carolyn and get amendments to the commission, and talk with Todd tomorrow about it. He will go to Amherst Nursery tomorrow with Rob & Alicia to tag trees, and will email Chestnut Hill Nursery in NY (bare root tree source), as well as a bunch of other things.
- Sue needs to email volunteers with pruning information and set up an online poll for that.
- Marilyn - said the subcommittee should meet before the next PSTC meeting.
- Lilly – agreed the subcommittee should meet and fine tune next year's plan, and possibly the plan for the year after.

| | | | |
|------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Motion | Motion By: | Seconded By: | Vote: |
| To adjourn | Jen Werner | Sue Lofthouse | Yes 5, No 0, Abstain 0 |

Meeting adjourned at 6:31 PM.