

**Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission (FTSTC)**  
**Somerset County, New Jersey**  
**Minutes of October 27, 2022**

Present: Conner Ferretti, Stephen Gillooly, Robert Hudak, Mary Lauko, Sara Malone, Arnold Schmidt, Ellen Thompson, James Vassanella

Excused: Christopher Williams – C. Williams officially sent his resignation to Township Manager, R. Vornlocker.

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – A. Schmidt motioned to accept the draft August Minutes as written; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed. Minutes were approved as written.
3. Treasurer's Report – No changes from last month. No action required.

**First Opening of Meeting to the Public** – S. Malone motioned to open the meeting to the public. A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was open to the public. In attendance was Chuck Martin, 3 Seelys Run, Somerset, member of both the Trails and Open Space Advisory Committees, a retired biologist looking to develop methods and policies to preserve trees on Township trails. Recognizing overlapping areas of interest with Trails, Open Space, and FTSTC, he was in attendance to learn about the workings of the FTSTC.

**Old Business**

1. Commission Requirements
  - a. The previous meeting's length of 2.5 hours shall be included on Members' 2022 Volunteer Hours Summary Sheets.
  - b. U&CFM Plan – no updates
  - c. Grants – At the Sustainable Jersey Local Health Assessment meeting this past Monday, S. Malone stressed the importance of the tree canopy and how trees enhance the health of the community, especially in absorbing storm water. She also indicated that the Township doesn't have the resources to address the high number of hazardous trees.
  - d. Report to Council – J. Vassanella requested a report that he could present to Council as to what FTSTC does. He encouraged regular reports at convenient intervals. Topics for reporting can include, e.g., the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Township as a Tree City USA, contents of eBlasts, ongoing website changes, the identification of 3,000 trees as hazardous (in danger of falling down). This regular reporting will help to prepare material for the annual report to the state. J. Vassanella can give a brief presentation at the next Council meeting. S. Malone will put together a report to that effect before the next meeting.  
With C. Williams' resignation, and it being necessary to recommend to R. Vornlocker a replacement for liaison to the Open Space Advisory Committee

(OSAC), M. Lauko volunteered to assume that role. S. Malone will send an email to the Township noting our nomination of M. Lauko for that role.

## 2. Tree Plantings / Projects / Maintenance

- a. Tree Planting and Maintenance Plan - As was agreed at the September meeting, FTSTC will recommend to R. Vornlocker that no more trees should be planted in The Township until a tree maintenance plan is written. Criteria for writing such a plan are laid out in Sustainable Jersey “Tree Maintenance Programs”. CSIP grant monies, which become available in Spring, would enable FTSTC to hire a consultant to write the plan. If Dominick Pensabene, LLA, LTE, with CME Associates is available to write the plan, FTSTC will not need the CSIP grant; therefore, FTSTC will request that D. Pensabene attend a meeting to discuss.
- b. Memorial Forest – A. Schmidt, liaison with Open Space Advisory Committee, reported that Mayor Phil Kramer wants to plant a tree in Memorial Forest in memory of his mother. S. Malone recommended following proper planting protocols, including selecting a tree from the Trees to Plant list, which is in development and avoiding those on the FTSTC Do Not Plant List. It was agreed that no monies would come out of the Shade Tree Fund for this purpose.
- c. Hamilton Street Redevelopment planting – No response from V. Dominach. S. Malone will email V. Dominach and copy R. Vornlocker for an update on previously submitted FTSTC comments.
- d. Maintenance of Recent and Ongoing Projects
  - i. Salem Oak - Department of Public Works (DPW) unexpectedly planted the tree Thursday, October 20, in advance of a predicted freeze warning, precluding the opportunity for a public ceremony. Discussion followed about how to increase communication with DPW which J. Vassanella agreed should be a high priority. S. Gillooly will work with R. Hudak on a proposed letter to R. Vornlocker.
  - ii. JFK Boulevard (ongoing) - R. Hudak will report in the Spring of 2023.

## 3. Public Information / Education / Events / Community Outreach Projects

- a. Website updates – S. Malone reported that the Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP) disappeared from the website. She will work with IT to make sure it is replaced, along with the CFMP Work Plan and recommend a link from the FTSTC page to the SDL Portal.
- b. Franklin Times and NIXLE e-blasts – Potential topics include the Salem Oak, winter pruning, how to ID a hazardous tree, and reviving the legacy tree program.
- c. Annual Tree Sale 2023 – Limited supply and increased cost of both trees and shipping contribute to the inability of maintaining the quality of tree sales past. S. Malone made a motion to cancel the 2023 tree sale as a result. A. Schmidt seconded. Discussion followed about finding ways to make it viable. M. Lauko

proposed an amendment to the motion to explore other options and postpone the vote until the November meeting. Motion passed.

4. Initiatives / Projects

a. Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications

i. Recommended Trees List – S. Malone and M. Lauko continue working on the list.

b. Joint Subcommittee of EC, OSAS, FTSTC

i. Franklin Township Tree Removal Ordinance – A. Schmidt reported that the current Township ordinance calls for annual review and updating of the cost of trees that developers pay into the tree fund. The \$30.00/tree charge has not been updated for years and the OASC recommends increasing it to \$250.00 - \$300.00 plus labor. They also recommended revising the ordinance to include maintenance after planting. The OSAC will send their recommendations to the Township Engineer. J. Vassanella will communicate with R. Vornlocker about drawing up an ordinance amendment regarding these proposals. S. Gillooly made a motion to support OSAC's recommendations. S. Malone seconded. Motion passed.

**New Business** - none

**Second Opening of Meeting to the Public** – Chuck Martin reiterated his desire that FTSTC might take interest in shade trees on Township trails. He spoke about the many dead ash trees that had fallen or were hanging dangerously over Township trails. These trees should be “dropped and cut” and left in place because rotted trees are important to the ecosystem. As part of developing a program to educate citizens to learn to love trees on the trails he would like to see IDs on them. In his efforts to map trails in Memorial Forest, he spoke with tenant farmers and hunters in the area. It is not clearly defined in the [farm] lease what areas can and cannot be farmed. Finally, there are 450 acres of forest that is Township owned. A. Schmidt made a motion to close the second opening of the meeting to the public. M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed.

**Dendrology** – M. Lauko noted that, in regard to winter pruning, beech trees bleed in winter.

**Adjournment** – S. Malone motioned to adjourn the meeting. A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary