

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of March 23, 2023

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

Excused: Arnold Schmidt

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – S. Malone motioned to approve the February Minutes as amended. M. Lauko seconded. Minutes approved as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – S. Malone presented the financial report, indicating that one reimbursement for \$6,900.00 came into the Tree Planting (Fund 12) last month for an ending balance of \$381,191.58. There was no change to the Shade Tree Other Expenses (Fund 01). No action required.
4. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – S. Malone motioned to open the meeting to the public; M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. In attendance was Bill Bowman, reporter with the Franklin Reporter & Advocate who had no comments. S. Malone motioned to close the meeting to the public; E. Thompson seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.
5. S. Gillooly explained that the agenda he has been employing is called an "open agenda" which contains the section "New Business and General Discussion", which means that new items can be added during the meeting, unless such items will require action by the Commission. The Agenda will go up on the Township website the Thursday prior to the meeting with no changes accepted thereafter. Anything that a Member wishes to talk about can be brought up during the meeting without having to have requested it added to the Agenda previously.

Old Business

1. Updates from Committees and Commissions
 - a. Environmental Commission (EC) – No updates.
 - b. Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) –M. Lauko reported that the OSAC has been receptive about tree protection and tree canopy decrease concerns. There is a lot of property coming up for development, including one that will clear 30 acres of trees.
 - c. Sustainable Jersey – No updates.
 - d. FTSTC Report to Council – J. Vassanella reported that the new budget has been introduced and after two budget meetings the issue of part-time "Tree Expert" or Arborist has been raised. He sees it as an incredible positive and has had ongoing conversations with Township Manager, R. Vornlocker. Some Council Members have asked why the position is not full-time. He indicated that it is also positive that the Council is taking "baby steps" in this regard. A full-time position would require a pension and health benefits, therefore, part-time would be the right way to go. He hopes that the issue remains in the budget, gets worked on in April for a vote and acted upon ASAP. Then FTSTC can recommend that the position be made full-time at

the end of the year. He stressed that the decision to create the new position of Arborist is that of the Township Manager; it is a serious consideration and at the very least a Certified Tree Expert (CTE) is part of CME if an Arborist isn't hired.

2. Franklin Township Urban and Community Forestry Management Plan (U&CFMP) and Franklin Township Tree Maintenance Plan – S. Gillooly solicited help from T. Kenyon as regards applying for the upcoming U&CFMP grants. Two grants have been posted. The first is a Green Communities Grant (\$3000 plus 100% match) to hire a consultant to assist in writing the next Urban & Community Forestry Management Plan as the current plan (grandfathered from 2019) expires in 2024. The second grant is a Stewardship grant (various amounts) that could be used to implement specific components of an approved management plan. Prior grant submissions by the FTSTC preceded the State's use of the System for Administering Grants Electronically (SAGE) and were submitted in paper form. S. Malone relayed this information as well as PDF copies of prior grant submissions to T. Kenyon for her further review, and asked T. Kenyon if someone at the Township could use their SAGE login to pull down copies of the two grant guidelines for our further review as the materials could only be accessed through SAGE. S. Malone expressed caution about the wording on the U&CFM website that seemed to indicate the Green Communities Grant could only be used for the initial management plan. A review of the actual grant documents should clarify that concern. S. Malone stressed the importance of a current state-approved management plan; the plan is a requirement for the annual certification of the FTSTC.
3. i-Tree Canopy Cover Inventory Updates – No updates.
4. Commission Administration/Volunteer Hours Tracking - The previous meeting's length of 2 hours shall be included on Members' 2023 Volunteer Hours Summary Sheets. Volunteer hours are used for in-kind contribution for grant applications.
5. Tree Maintenance and Project Updates
 - a. Hamilton Street – S. Gillooly inquired of V. Dominach why trees haven't been planted to date and reminded him that Tree Fund monies are available for that purpose. V. Dominach indicated that the plan is still being worked on. J. Vassanella stated that the Hamilton Street budget was submitted and is waiting for the whole Council to pass it.
 - b. JFK Boulevard – R. Hudak emailed C. Ferretti requesting Public Works (DPW) Foreman Greg Pinheiro's participation in surveying trees in late April, any time after bud break. C. Ferretti will make mention of this to DPW Manager, C. Hauck.
6. Information/Education/Events/Community Outreach Projects
 - a. Public Arbor Day 2023 – S. Gillooly received confirmation that the Board of Education (BoE) is interested in hosting an Arbor Day event, probably at the old High School (Middle School) or perhaps Elizabeth Avenue School. Many schools are interested in tree plantings. FTSTC is agreeable to making trees available to them as long as schools are willing to take over maintenance of the trees and have the staff to do so. C. Ferretti indicated that this would require applying 5 gal. of water a couple times per week. The day after Arbor Day is Franklin High School Green Fair 2023 and would be the appropriate occasion for ceremonial tree planting. S. Gillooly made a motion to hold a ceremonial Arbor Day event at the High School on April 29, between 1:00-3:30 in coordination with the BoE and arrange for the planting with DPW. R. Hudak seconded.

Motion passed. M. Lauko will work with S. Gillooly on planning discussions with the BoE. J. Vassanella will read the Arbor Day Proclamation at Township Council Work Session/Regular Meeting on April 25, 2023. Further discussions to be had include specific plans for Arbor Day, getting extra trees in the ground including the possibility of doing mass plantings in the fall.

- b. Big and heritage trees in Franklin Township – S. Malone reported that the Township’s inventory was last done in 2008 and that there were 24 trees on the list, though she is aware of at least one of those trees that has been removed. The State of New Jersey’s Big and Heritage Trees inventory includes only one tree in the Township– at 2303 Amwell Rd. It is an American basswood *Tilia americana*, 234” in circumference and 105’ tall. FTSTC can kick off its own program to identify big and heritage trees in the Township at the Arbor Day celebration, following the State’s process and utilizing their nomination form and right of access form available on the New Jersey Forest Service web page, [Nominating a Big Tree](#). The process could enhance awareness of the importance of trees in the township as well as provide data to update the State’s inventory for Franklin.
- c. Website Updates – It is now possible to report a downed or dead tree by clicking the Citizen Portal button, signing in and following: **Complaint; Details; Filter by Department>Public Works; Issues and Comments Type*>Dead Trees or Tree Down, then entering details under Your Comments.**
- d. Franklin Times and NIXLE e-blasts – Ideas discussed for the Franklin Times included an article about the Recommended Trees List, how to tell if your tree is dead, and the Big and Heritage Tree list. These items can also go out as an e-blast.
- e. Annual Tree Sale 2024 – Work with Jeff Baumley in May. A tree vendor contacted DPW regarding bare root trees but the trees were all one species. S. Malone indicated that FTSTC’s application for free tree seedlings was turned down because the Commission didn’t have a date, location and time for our Arbor Day Event. R. Hudak suggested thinking ahead for ordering bare root trees for next year and possibly including BoE’s needs in order to meet the minimum order required.

7. Other Initiatives/Projects –

- a. Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications – No updates.
 - i. Do not plant trees list – No updates.
 - ii. Recommended trees list – The list of deciduous trees for Memorial Forest is shorter and includes trees that wouldn’t be considered for street trees due to their size. S. Malone will send out the list to EC, OSAC, Engineering, DPW and BoE. The next list will contain conifers.
- b. CME Hazardous Tree Assessments Maps and Inventory – No updates.

New Business

1. Development Application at 360-380 DeMott Lane clearing up to 8 acres of trees – The issue of whether FTSTC should formally comment on this issue was discussed. S. Malone reminded the Commission that unlike OSAC, EC or the Zoning Board it is not automatically included in the review process and must rely on OSAC or EC to bring tree related concerns to our

attention as was done for the house of worship on South Middlebush Road. As discussed then, it would not be appropriate to cherry pick projects for comment. Further discussion included how parcels of land are brought to the attention of OSAC for potential purchase and whether 360-380 DeMott Lane, in particular, can be highlighted. J. Vassanella explained that there are all kinds of ways that lands appear “on the radar” of OSAC, that there are strict guidelines and that every situation is unique. M. Lauko will research this further and reach out to T. Kenyon before the next meeting. Regarding requests for tree removal, S. Malone questioned how the Commission could get more consistent information about these potential losses of canopy. M. Lauko contributed that OSAC doesn’t just consider trees when evaluating properties, but other factors such as farmland, trails adjoining properties and miscellaneous other criteria.

2. DPW request to add part-time tree inspector – At the March 13 Township Council Budget Request Meeting, C. Hauck requested the addition of a part-time “tree inspector whose job would be to inspect tree work orders, schedule tree removals and pruning and train the tree crew, among other things”, according to the March 14 Franklin Reporter & Advocate.
3. R. Hudak questioned whether the Township was prepared to care for vulnerable, i.e., newly planted trees and whether a planting moratorium might be considered in light of potential drought conditions this year. C. Ferretti indicated that the Township could limit the number of trees to be planted especially during the summer months. He questioned whether Shade Tree Fund or OSAC monies could go towards hiring additional summer help because it has been difficult for the last couple of years at the salaries DPW has been able to offer for laborers. Summer helpers clean the trails system and if there is potential for a drought, then they would man the water trucks, that method being preferable to gator bags which don’t hold up. S. Gillooly will communicate with C. Hauck and R. Vornlocker regarding the concern about impending drought, whether there is a contingency plan in place and what the Commission can do to help. M. Lauko recommended adding the consideration of hiring a third-party contractor as is done in Highland Park and that Shade Tree Fund monies could go toward purchasing more water tanks. C. Ferretti explained that 500-gallon tanks tie up the mason dump trucks that carry them and that they are not appropriate for CDL-rated trucks which are used for carrying lawn mowers.
4. R. Hudak announced that this will be his last year as a member of the Commission.

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – S. Malone made a motion to open the meeting to the public; M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. Bill Bowman respectfully declined input. S. Malone made a motion to close the meeting to the public; M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Dendrology – None.

Adjournment – S. Malone made a motion to adjourn; M. Lauko seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 9:13 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary