

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of May 25, 2023

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

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:08 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – S. Malone proposed changes to the April Minutes. S. Malone motioned to approve the April Minutes as amended; A. Schmidt seconded. Minutes approved as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – S. Malone presented the financial report and stated that the SHADE TREE OTHER MISC ITEMS balance had been reset to \$1,000.00 from \$100.00 since the prior report. There were no new dispersals from the Tree Planting (12) fund, leaving the account balance at \$392,851.58. No action required. The JFK Club will pay for an October Glory *Acer rubrum* to be planted in Memorial Forest.
4. Commission Administration – S. Gillooly encouraged members to keep track of volunteer hours. S. Malone received her certificate for the 4 CEUs she earned for attending online i-Tree Canopy training. M. Lauko received one CEU. If Commission Members attend outside training, documentation should be provided to the State, which may issue credit.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – S. Malone motioned to open the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. Deborah Stuart, 2 Farrington Way, questioned whether FTSTC Funds can be used to plant trees on private property. It was explained that such funds can be used only for municipal property – Rights of Way (ROWs), parks, etc. – and that ROWs do not apply within a private community. As her homeowner's association is intending to chemically treat for tent caterpillars, she asked if the Commission had an alternative solution. The Commission does not dispense such recommendations. S. Malone suggested she contact the County Extension Services (Master Gardeners Program) for further guidance and R. Hudak explained tent caterpillars provided food for birds. Theresa Thorsen of 18 Lebed Drive questioned whether it was possible to obtain a variance to reroute monies from the TREE PLANTING FUND to plant a tree on private property. It was explained that a variance would not apply in this scenario. Discussion followed regarding the instances for which a variance would be necessary. T. Thorsen asked if the Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications included reference to plantings in retention basins – as for example, at Somerset Run Condominium Association - and plans for which entities are responsible for maintaining what falls from trees. FTSTC has no authority in these instances. S. Malone explained that the Commission had recently issued a DO NOT PLANT list which would become part of the revised Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications [and which would include weak-wooded trees, those most likely to drop branches]. S. Gillooly further indicated that a Zoning complaint could be filed to address maintenance of trees planted around a development that block sight lines.

S. Malone motioned to close the meeting to the public; M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions

- a. Franklin Township Council Updates (J. Vassanella) – Topics covered included that Shade Tree Planting Funds can only be used to plant trees on Township property – parks, and public spaces, etc. Councilman Vassanella will put a request into the Township Clerk to include S. Gillooly’s presentation on the agenda for the first June Township Council Work Session/Regular Meeting.
- b. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – No updates.
- c. Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) (M. Lauko) – The meeting was cancelled, however T. Kenyon reported that the Township received the \$20,000.00 Sustainable Jersey Grant it had applied for to fix up the trail and make other enhancements to Naaman Williams Park.
- d. Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko/S. Malone) – no updates.
- e. Department of Public Works (DPW) (C. Ferretti) – DPW just started re-mulching around the Municipal Complex with C. Ferretti supervising. DPW has been doing more ash tree removal and clearing of bike paths. M. Lauko observed that the previous year’s mulching was still looking good.

2. Planning

- a. Franklin Township Urban and Community Forestry Management Plan (U&CFMP) – S. Gillooly reached out to Township Manager, R. Vornlocker to find out if Certified Tree Expert (CTE) Dominic Pensabene, CME Associates, might be available to write the revised U&CFMP or provide a referral to someone who can. (FTSTC is not eligible for State funding to pay for a consultant because funding is available only for initial plans.) R. Vornlocker said he would hand it off to DPW. S. Malone offered to provide S. Gillooly with an outline and timeline of the U&CFMP revision process if that would be helpful to communications with the Public Works Manager, C. Hauck and R. Vornlocker.
- b. Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications/Recommended Evergreen Trees List. – M. Lauko distributed a list, including her reasons for edits but has not yet received a response from Commission Members.
- c. Hazardous Tree Maps / Inventory – S. Malone suggested that this would be a component of the U&CFMP. C. Ferretti reported that DPW personnel on light duty update the blue tags inventory, however, these data are not entered into the i-Tree program. He also confirmed that there is a “stump list” of trees which have been removed.
- d. Planting Trees, Watering, and Maintenance by DPW – S. Gillooly questioned how resources look for this summer. M. Lauko stressed the need for special attention to the most recent/last planting[s] as per the [New Jersey Shade Tree Federation article, Helping Newly Planted Trees Survive Drought, with Almost No Watering](#), which she had reformatted into a PowerPoint presentation. C. Ferretti reported that the trees planted at YingHua School as part of Arbor Day 2022 are doing well, having been properly tended by DPW during drought conditions. S. Malone stressed that if an [i-

Tree Suite] inventory was being maintained, those trees requiring special attention could be readily determined.

- e. Hamilton Street – S. Gillooly reported that V. Dominach asked for help from Brentwood Bay, LLC (850 Hamilton Street) regarding the possibility of substituting Redbud *Cercis Canadensis*, for the unavailable Cumulus Shadblow Serviceberry *Amelanchier laevis* ‘Cumulus’. Discussion followed. M. Lauko, E. Thompson, and S. Malone will review appropriate species and provide S. Gillooly with possible replacement trees to forward to V. Dominach.
- a. JFK Blvd. Tree Survey – R. Hudak’s PowerPoint presentation showed:
 - two trees with blue tags remaining
 - dead and dying trees
 - leaning and crooked trees
 - maples with dead leaders
 - monoculture of recent plantings from Berger Street to Hamilton Street
 - mulch volcanoes
 - declining oaks
 - tree canopies under power lines
 - surface roots

S. Gillooly recommended that these observations should form the basis of a report to be sent to C. Hauck and Parks Foreman, Gregory Pinheiro requesting that D. Pensabene, CTE, CME Associates, come up with a maintenance plan to address the issues therein. Discussion followed including recommendations to: do another survey of JFK trees with D. Pensabene; have D. Pensabene analyze what went wrong with these trees; S. Gillooly draft the letter/plan and clarify what the letter would be requesting; and the need for an active maintenance plan. E. Thompson expressed doubt that such efforts would be taken seriously by DPW based on long-standing history and that no meaningful changes would occur unless and until the Township Council assumes leadership and sets the tone.

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

- a. Arbor Day 2023 / Proclamation – The Arbor Day event was a success. Schools will be included in Arbor Day plans next February based on their interest this year.
- b. Big and Heritage Trees in Franklin Township – no updates.
- c. Franklin Times and NIXLE e-blasts – no updates.
- d. Annual Tree Sale 2024 – no updates.
- e. Franklin Day 2023 – no updates.

New Business – B9 Warehouse Plan (AS) - A. Schmidt brought to the attention of the Commission that the developer of two warehouses, known as the B9 Project, across Mettlers Road from Canal Walk 55+ community, is required to put \$89,000.00 into the Township Tree Fund. An attorney representing the Canal Walk Homeowners Association put forth a proposal in an April 21 letter requesting that the money be used for the purpose of planting trees on Canal Walk property in order to shield it from the planned development. This issue was raised during the Public Discussion section of the May 23 Township Council Meeting. In response, Township Manager, R. Vornlocker stated that

as per Municipal Code Chapter 222-5.4 Tree Fund, Tree Fund monies cannot be used for the planting of trees on private property.

A. Schmidt made a motion to send an email to the Mayor and Township Council opposing the use of Shade Tree Fund monies for this purpose; S. Malone seconded. Motion passed. Discussion followed as to precedent and when FTSTC should respond to other such issues. It was recommended that it should be done on a case-by-case basis as issues come to the attention of the Commission. The commission reviewed the email that A. Schmidt drafted and suggested some minor modifications.

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – S. Malone made a motion to open the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. D. Stuart, a Canal Walk resident, said that she appreciated the Commission’s standing on the Municipal Code Chapter 222-5.4 Tree Fund. She further stated that she agreed with the sentiment expressed earlier by E. Thompson that if it was important enough to have a Shade Tree Commission, then it shouldn’t be disrespected and that starts with the Township Council. Bill Bowman, reporter with the Franklin Reporter & Advocate, also in attendance, respectfully declined input. M. Lauko made a motion to close the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Dendrology – None.

Adjournment – S. Malone made a motion to adjourn; S. Gillooly seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary