

**Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission**  
**Somerset County, New Jersey**  
**Minutes of June 22, 2023**

Present: Mary Lauko, Conner Ferretti, Sara Malone, Arnold Schmidt, Ellen Thompson, James Vassanella

Excused: Stephen Gillooly, Robert Hudak

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – S. Malone motioned to approve the April Minutes as presented; A. Schmidt seconded. Minutes approved as presented.
3. Treasurer's Report – S. Malone presented the financial report. There were no changes to the Tree Planting (12) fund, leaving the account balance at \$392,851.58. No action required. There was one submission to SHADE TREE OTHER MISC ITEMS of \$170.00 for NJ Shade Tree Foundation Membership, leaving a balance of \$830.00.
4. Commission Administration – The previous meeting's length of 3 hours shall be included on Members' 2023 Volunteer Hours Summary Sheets.
5. The New Jersey Urban & Community Forestry Program (NJUCF) is not posting CEUs for 2023 yet.
6. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – None present.

**Old Business/Updates**

1. Committees and Commissions
  - a. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – No updates.
  - b. Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) (M. Lauko) –
    - i. It was encouraged that Township residents call the police if they observe dumping on any Open Space (OS) property. Some parking lots already have electricity and some don't. Right now, two different parking lots in two different OS areas are getting [security] cameras. Cost is being considered for the others.
    - ii. R. Vornlocker put forth the suggestion of planning for future Memorial Forest plantings of 20-30 trees at a time, rather than individually, beginning this fall. FTSTC funds would be used to purchase the trees, then reimbursements would be made to the Tree Planting Fund as orders come in. M. Lauko will give R. Vornlocker a list of six recommended trees plus six alternatives. Money for planting and maintenance by DPW will come out of the OS Trust Fund.
  - c. Franklin Township Council Updates (J. Vassanella) – S. Gillooly gave a presentation to the Township Council at a recent Work Session/Regular Meeting and will look to do it periodically as relevant items come up. The presentation was concise and highlighted the Township's tree canopy.
  - d. Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko/S. Malone) – A 154-page action plan has been completed and the Steering Committee will send the report to Township committees – e.g., EC

and FTSTC – for review. The \$20,000.00 Sustainable Jersey Grant for woodland trail improvements in Naaman Williams Park will emphasize crime prevention. The goal for completion is by the end of 2024.

- e. Department of Public Works (DPW) (C. Ferretti) – Tree work is paused for the moment. DPW did cleanup for Memorial Day and is now preparing for July 4<sup>th</sup>. They are currently doing mulching and the water tank is on a truck. DPW is ready to plant the October Glory Red Maple (*Acer rubrum* 'October Glory') at Memorial Forest. They have cleared and marked out the planting location. C. Ferretti will double-check the status and make sure the tree has been ordered. He also has submitted a “mark out” request to PSE&G.

## 2. Planning

- a. Franklin Township Urban and Community Forestry Management Plan (U&CFMP) – At the recent OS meeting M. Lauko brought to their attention that the Plan needs to be completed by next year. Township Manager, R. Vornlocker, asked the Township Engineer, Mark Healey, to come up with a cost estimate to develop a tree maintenance plan.
- b. Landscape Guidelines for Development Applications/Recommended Evergreen Trees List. – Evergreens list discussed; M. Lauko will revise. It can be included in The Franklin Times if it is finished by the next deadline and can go out as a NIXLE blast.

## 3. Tree Maintenance and Projects

- a. Planting Trees, Watering, and Maintenance by DPW / Hazardous Tree Maps / Inventory – A. Schmidt reported that in the OS Agenda Monthly Activity Report T. Kenyon discussed the [tree] maintenance needs with DPW. A. Schmidt had asked if it included a watering plan. R. Vornlocker said it was “taken care of” and he spoke about having CME Associates do a tree survey to determine which trees need water. A. Schmidt responded that FTSTC is looking for a plan for trees [up to the first] two years [after planting], something that could be done, for example, by hiring summer help. In contrast, R. Vornlocker said that CME Associates indicated the need for a 3-5-year plan. This would be a huge, high-cost plan which CME would bring before the Township Council.

S. Malone indicated that Sustainable Jersey points could be gotten for doing a comprehensive survey as per R. Vornlocker’s proposal and that obtaining these points was dependent upon having a completed U&CFMP. Discussion followed about the immediate need for an interim, “triage” watering plan until the more comprehensive plan is developed. C. Ferretti confirmed that such a program would require only summer helpers. J. Vassanella stated he would reference this at the next DPW meeting with R. Vornlocker and C. Hauck and clarify the Commission’s concerns. M. Lauko reiterated that FTSTC doesn’t want the Township to plant any more trees until a care plan is established.

M. Lauko proposed to draft an email to R. Vornlocker to convey appreciation for the intention to devise a comprehensive plan and that FTSTC sees the need for a more immediate plan for the existing young trees. E. Thompson made a motion for M. Lauko to write said letter to R. Vornlocker. S. Malone expressed concern that the

letter should include reference to the locations of the most recently-planted trees (i.e., John W. Flemer Preserve, Castleton and Inman Parks, and JFK Boulevard). A. Schmidt seconded with the caveat that it was necessary for the Commission to decide what should be included in the letter. Discussion followed.

CME Associates will come up with a cost estimate for the comprehensive plan, which will likely go through the budget review process as part of the next budget cycle (J. Vassanella).

It will include a cost estimate on the tree inventory project. R. Vornlocker also talked about trees planted in Memorial Forest; OS will pay for those plantings (A. Schmidt).

The cost for a comprehensive tree maintenance plan doesn't need to come out of the capital budget; it could be a component of the U&CFMP. The funds for the U&CFMP could come out of the FTSTC budget. FTSTC can get grants for the Maintenance Plan component if it is already included as part of the U&CFMP. Towards the tree inventory, S. Malone can review purchase orders for the last 3-5 years, which will also indicate where the trees were planted (S. Malone).

To be determined include:

- Trees already planted.
- Trees to plant this fall.
- Trees to plant next spring.
- Trees to be planted in the future.

C. Ferretti expressed the need to request a limit on plantings. In response, it was reiterated that would depend on DPW increasing their personnel.

OS spent \$175,000.00 to contract out for meeting turf care needs (M. Lauko). A. Schmidt asked if tree care could be similarly contracted. Discussion ended and motion passed.

- b. Hamilton Street – Crabapples and thornless hawthorn were recommended as substitutes for the unavailable Cumulus Shadblow Serviceberry *Amelanchier laevis* 'Cumulus'.
  - c. Tree Planting and Maintenance on School Properties – M. Lauko personally watered the Arbor Day tree planted at the High School as it had obviously not been maintained. She also documented the number of dead trees in front of Claremont Road School. C. Ferretti suggested that the Superintendent of Grounds is the contact person to address this issue. M. Lauko would like to see a review by the Board of Education (BoE) as well as an action plan for tree maintenance going forward in order for FTSTC to collaborate with BoE on future plantings.
  - d. Franklin Township Tree Maintenance – Issue tabled.
4. Public Information / Education / Events / Community Outreach Projects
- a. Big and Heritage Trees in Franklin Township – S. Malone hasn't yet heard about potential Girl Scout involvement. The project can be promoted at Franklin Day.
  - b. Annual Tree Sale 2024 – No updates.

- c. Franklin Day 2023 – No updates. The celebration will go back to the pre-COVID structure. It will be an opportunity to promote the 2024 tree sale.

**New Business**

1. The PowerPoint presentation M. Lauko created based on the New Jersey Shade Tree Federation article, *Helping Newly Planted Trees Survive Drought, with Almost No Watering* was reviewed and edits were suggested. She will revise it and send it out for comment in preparation for publication as well as presentation on Franklin Day.
2. A. Schmidt reported reading the letter at a recent Township Council meeting opposing the use of Shade Tree Fund monies for the purpose of planting trees on Canal Walk Homeowners Association property in order to shield it from the planned B9 Warehouse Project.

**Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public** – None present.

**Dendrology and General Discussion** – None.

**Adjournment** – S. Malone made a motion to adjourn; E. Thompson seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 9:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary