

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of October 26, 2023

Present: Stephen Gillooly, Mary Lauko, Conner Ferretti, Robert Hudak, Deborah Rodgers, Arnold Schmidt, Ellen Thompson, James Vassanella, Rebecca Wagner

Excused: Bill Berz

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – A. Schmidt motioned to approve the August Minutes as amended; M. Lauko seconded. Minutes approved as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – V. Dominach informed C. Ferretti that one of the warehouses is donating \$300,000.00 to the Tree Planting (Fund 12) for 1,000 trees. That will cover the cost of the Hamilton Street project. It was clarified that when a tree is replanted it does not reset the 2-year guarantee. We need to look out for that item in the bid package. The Township is aware that the tree replacement funds are not sustainable going forward. However, the fund is healthy for a while. There were a few tree purchases that did not appear on the financials.
4. Commission Administration – S. Gillooly reminded Members to update volunteer hours and CEUs. Also, receipts for Core Training should be submitted to the Township Manager in order to obtain a refund.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – A. Schmidt motioned to open the meeting to the public; D. Rodgers seconded. Motion passed. Bill Bowman, Franklin Reporter & Advocate, was in attendance. A. Schmidt motioned to close the meeting to the public; E. Thompson seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions
 - a. Franklin Township Council updates (J. Vassanella) – S. Gillooly inquired about having a proclamation read at a Township Council meeting to thank Sara Malone for her years of service and leadership to the Commission. Councilman, J. Vassanella, recommended the fourth Tuesday in November.
 - b. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – No updates.
 - c. Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) (A. Schmidt) – A. Schmidt and Bob Puskas examined the condition of the trees along the driveway into Memorial Forest and noted that in response to their request, Department of Public Works (DPW) had cut weeds away from the trees. They observed that there is room for more trees (8-10) to be planted along the driveway, as well as further back along the trail and possibly on the left side. They assessed that the roadway will require improvements due to the potholes. Township engineering firm, CME, will provide cost estimates for a tree planting plan at the [next] OSAC meeting.
 - d. Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko)

- In conjunction with the \$20,000.00 grant for improvements at Naaman Williams Park – the primary park east of Franklin Boulevard - Open Space Consultant, Tara Kenyon spoke about cleaning up and revamping the trails and addressing the ground wetness.
 - The Local Health Assessment & Action Plan report will be presented at the November 13 meeting.
- e. Department of Public Works (DPW) Updates (C. Ferretti) – Over the last month, DPW completed two big projects:
- Catalpa Park - Installation of a water line from South Middlebush Road along Old Vliet Road and cleanup of the section of the Brown Trail from the driveway to the field of the Bunker Hill natural area. C. Ferretti recommended that it should become a mulched trail via the use of the Department’s front-mounted chipper.
 - Princeton Ridings - Tree crews planted a mixture of 40 trees on the middle island. For the most part, the quality of the trees was very good. Deer guards have been applied, gator bags are on and the root zones will be hand mulched. M. Lauko inquired as to whether the planting holes required any soil amendments. C. Ferretti indicated that that two loads of topsoil were added where it had been necessary to remove shale. Any remaining top soil will be used to fill in low areas. A watering truck was not available for this planting. A temporary watering schedule will be used until CME comes up with a definitive plan.
 - Consovoy Park – Ten trees will be planted.

R Hudak asked if the Princeton Ridings and Consovoy Park plantings were documented in such a way as to make it possible to estimate future tree replacements.

Currently, DPW - as part of work orders - and the Township Manager, only, have plans of the tree plantings. C. Ferretti has not received his department-issued iPad. It was acknowledged that communications with DPW Management improved with C. Ferretti as DPW liaison.

2. Planning

- a. Franklin Township Urban and Community Forestry Management (U&CFM) Plan – The Township is working with CME to help with the U&CFM plan as well as planning for Memorial Forest and any other plantings.
- b. Hazardous Tree Maps (i-Tree Maps) / Inventory – Efforts will be made to ensure that the tree inventory includes any newly planted trees and that the overall forestry management plan includes this as well.

3. Tree Maintenance and Projects

- a. Hamilton Street Tree Planting – S. Gillooly received clarification from V. Dominach:
 - that the 2-year warrantee does not reset when a tree is replaced;
 - that the bid is for planting in the spring after frost;
 - and that the bid can be amended after it goes out.
- b. PSE&G Tree Donation [for JFK Boulevard] – C. Ferretti reported that 40 trees had been donated and that everything would be coordinated by DPW. A. Schmidt disagreed

with this approach, citing the lack of consultation with the Commission about the species and spacing of trees. C. Ferretti wasn't sure but was anxious to take advantage of the offer and assured the Commission it would be possible to work with PSE&G on the Commission's concerns. J. Vassanella informed the Commission that there is a designated liaison within the Township who deals directly with PSE&G and asked if the Commission had requested to see the correspondence with PSE&G. He concurred that if it was a sincere donation, it should be done at the convenience of the recipient and that A. Schmidt's concerns should be considered. S. Gillooly said PSE&G could let the Commission know if there was the option to plant in spring or if this was a time-specific offer. He suggested taking advantage of the offer and making the most of it and that some trees are better than none. M. Lauko pointed out that fall is an optimal time for planting. A. Schmidt said that volunteers could go out to mark which trees can be removed, or that they could be planted near trees that will [eventually] come down; additionally, that the first thing is to find out if they can plant in the spring. S. Gillooly made a motion to contact PSE&G and DPW for further information on the specifics of the planting timing, tree location and tree species availability. The motion is to ask if PSE&G cannot put off the timing until spring and that the Commission be consulted on tree selections - maples and zelkovas to be strictly excluded - and planting locations. If the planting needs to be put off to the spring and the Commission will not have input, the Commission will not be in favor. E. Thompson seconded and discussion followed. Motion passed. C. Ferretti indicated he would follow up with DPW Manager, C. Hauck to obtain clarification on the motion criteria.

4. Public Information / Education / Events / Community Outreach Projects
 - a. Franklin Times Article (Winter) – The deadline is in a week or two. An article should focus on the spring tree sale and specify that deposits will be non-refundable.
 - b. Big and Heritage Trees in Franklin Township – No updates.
 - c. Annual Tree Sale 2024 – No updates.

New Business – None.

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – R. Hudak made a motion to open the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded and the meeting was opened to the public. B. Bowman had no input. A. Schmidt made a motion to close the meeting to the public; R. Hudak seconded and the meeting was closed to the public

Dendrology and General Discussion – 'Soil compaction and impact on tree survival' tabled.

Adjournment – A. Schmidt made a motion to adjourn; C. Ferretti seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 9:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary