

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of April 25, 2024

Present: Stephen Gillooly, Rebecca Wagner, Bill Berz, Robert Hudak, Mary Lauko, Arnold Schmidt, Ellen Thompson

Excused: Conner Ferretti

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:10 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – Amendments were proposed. M. Lauko made a motion to accept the minutes as amended; A. Schmidt seconded. Minutes approved as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – There were no new deposits. Expenditures include trees for annual tree sale as well as tree guards totaling \$4,400.00.
4. Commission Administration
 - a. Volunteer Hours Tracking – S. Gillooly encouraged Members to log into the spreadsheet to record their volunteer hours. The March meeting hours totaled 2.5.
 - b. 2024 Financial Disclosure Statements – S. Gillooly reminded members to complete the online Financial Disclosure Statements for 2024, the failure to do so coming with a substantial financial penalty.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – M. Lauko made a motion to open the meeting to the public; E. Thompson seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. In attendance were Jennifer Wagner of 6 Sunset Avenue, Griggstown, who expressed interest in the well-being of the environment; also in attendance was Jenny Kafas, 10 Barclay Court, with a science background, who brought her concerns about banning the sale of invasive plants, particularly Callery Pear. This led to the explanation of how banned plants are not currently in the Municipal Codes or Ordinances. S. Gillooly gave a brief overview of the function, goals and accomplishments FTSTC in its advisory capacity to the Township Manager:
 - lending guidance on suitable trees and shrubs to plant in the Township Rights of Way (ROWs)
 - public outreach and education (including maintaining a DO NOT PLANT list)
 - maintaining a Large and Historic Trees inventory
 - responsibility for writing and maintaining an Urban and Community Forestry Management Plan (U&CFMP)
 - aiding in the identification and mitigation of trees that could be liabilities to the Township
 - maintaining a Tree Fund (without controlling how those funds are spent)
 - being the only commission appointed by (and reporting to) the Township Manager, whereas other committees and commissions report to the Township Council
 - (advised on) the planting of over 70 trees last year and 150 trees to be planted within the Hamilton Street Business District; despite these accomplishments, and the Township Council's 2016 Proclamation to adopt a tree canopy goal of 3% increase, the tree canopy coverage fell last year from 39% to 36%

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

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions Updates

- a. Franklin Township Council – S. Gillooly read the Arbor Day Proclamation.
- b. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – A. Schmidt reiterated EC’s proposals to amend Shade Tree Municipal Codes and Ordinances referenced at previous meetings (see January 25, 2024 Minutes). He also explained the discussion that was had to change the way that sample plots - which determine the number, species and sizes of existing trees for an application for a tree removal permit - are performed. Currently, the developer or a Township official may select the plot to be measured which can include trees of any diameter, not necessarily the largest, as well as any number of trees, not necessarily a plot with the most trees. S. Gillooly provided background for these proposed changes and explained further that FTSTC wishes to encourage the preservation of planting of more trees by developers as well the planting of more trees vs. money paid into the Tree Fund. Also raised was the question of which entity verifies that the exact trees agreed to be planted by developers are actually those planted.
S. Gillooly shared that last year the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) revised the Tier A Municipal Stormwater General Permit and reclassified all municipalities into the tier A category. This revision requires all municipalities to adopt and enforce a community wide ordinance covering tree removal/replacement.
- c. Open Space Advisory Committee / (OSAC) Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko) – M. Lauko reported that OS is prepared to proceed with planting groves of trees, particularly in the wet area(s). OS would like recommendations of eight suitable tree species.
- d. All required Arbor Day documentation was submitted; Tree City USA was renewed for the 22nd year.
- e. DPW (C. Ferretti) – R. Wagner will contact the Township GIS Specialist to inquire about the possibility of working with C. Ferretti, et al, to input data into i-Tree.

2. Planning/Status of FT Projects

- a. S. Gillooly is in communication with R. Vornlocker about the Tree Maintenance Plan - as well as the Memorial Forest planting study – and asked to be apprised of draft progress, reiterating that no further trees should be planted until the Tree Maintenance Plan is finalized.
- b. U&CFMP is due by the end of the year. The deadline will not be extended.

3. Tree Maintenance Projects

- a. Update on Hamilton Street – R. Wagner stressed the advantage of mobilizing, via social media, volunteers to help with the watering of trees. Discussion about a multi-pronged approach followed, which included involving entities such as the Chamber of

Commerce, Hamilton Street Business District business owners, Vincent Dominach, Township Council (particularly James Vassanella and Carl Wright), and the Boy Scouts. Trees must be appreciated not just as beautiful things which enhance local businesses but also as financial investments.

- a. Follow-up on tree removals on Highland, Elizabeth and Hollywood Avenues
 - i. The homeowner at 21 Highland Avenue who cut down five trees within the Township Right of Way (ROW) was issued a stop-work order. It was not clear whether a fine would be issued. S. Gillooly inquired of V. Dominach and Director of Planning, Mark Healey, to whom it should be reported when it is discovered that trees have been removed.
 - ii. No permits were taken out for the removal of trees at 3-5 Hollywood Avenue. The Township issued a stop-work order and the tree buffer between their property and Easton Avenue will have to be replaced.
 - iii. S. Gillooly wants to increase the awareness of the inspections department as well as the diligence of their enforcement.
 - iv. R. Hudak reported that the trees removed by a homeowner's association on DeMott Lane were sick and they plan to replace them; likewise, the trees on Martino Drive near DeMott Lane.
 - v. S. Gillooly indicated that a future Franklin Times article will instruct residents to call DPW to determine whether a tree is located within the Township ROW and who's responsibility it is to replace it if cut down. Violations of any ordinance can carry a monetary fine, and/or up to 15 days in jail, but the likelihood of either being imposed is unlikely.

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

- a. Big and Heritage Trees (B. Berz) - B. Berz:
 - i. Spoke with park rangers and the horticulturalist at Colonial Park. They were unable to provide useful information.
 - ii. Emailed the person at Rutgers University who is responsible for Hutchinson Forest. It is estimated that there are more than 200 trees that are over 200 years old and some that are over 300 years old. They think they have 2-3 Champion Trees and that the whole forest should be receive special designation. Someone from their office will accompany him on a guided tour.
 - iii. Has registered for The New Jersey Forest Service's Big Tree Education Event at the Forest Resource Education Center in Jackson on Saturday, May 4.
 - iv. Will attend the Native Tree Give-Away for Arbor Day at the Colonial Park Arboretum on Saturday, April 27, which will feature a horticulturalist.
- b. Annual Tree Sale 2024 (R. Hudak) – Nine people have asked for trees so far. C. Ferretti will plant whatever trees don't sell. The Township IT Department created an online order form as well as a link to the form on the FTSTC web page, including the picture

brochure. Jeff Baumley will include information sheets to accompany the trees. He indicated that the roots are already active and that the trees cannot wait even a few days to be planted or they will die. The trees will be distributed on Saturday, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm.

- c. Arbor Day – The Commission’s Arbor Day event is the tree sale. On Friday, 3:00 pm at the Municipal Gazebo, S. Gillooly will meet the Franklin Reporter for the reading of the Arbor Day Proclamation.
- d. Franklin High School Environmental Club’s Green Fair is May 18, 1:00 am – 3:00 pm. The Commission will have a table at the Fair.
- e. S. Gillooly sent an article to the Franklin Times that 20 trees were purchased via the Tree Sale this year.

New Business - none

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – M. Lauko made a motion to open the meeting to the public; R. Hudak seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. J. Kafas expressed interest in learning about the i-Tree suite. B. Berz reported that the beavers inhabiting the pond at the intersection of Van Cleef and Grouser Roads - which had previously been removed - are back. M. Lauko motioned to close the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Dendrology and General Discussion – S. Gillooly read his poem, “’Twas the Night Before Arbor Day”, which will appear in the Franklin Reporter.

Adjournment – A. Schmidt made a motion to adjourn; R. Wagner seconded. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary