

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

Present: Stephen Gillooly, Mary Lauko, Bill Berz, Conner Ferretti, Robert Hudak, Ellen Thompson, Rebecca Wagner

Excused: Arnold Schmidt

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – M. Lauko motioned to approve the November 2023 Minutes as written; R. Hudak seconded. Minutes approved as written.
3. Treasurer's Report – S. Gillooly has not received the budget numbers necessary to do the annual report. These budget numbers are needed for the Arbor Day celebration. C. Ferretti will obtain the information from the Tree Foreman.
4. Commission Administration –
 - a. Reorganization of Committee
 - i. M. Lauko made a motion to nominate S. Gillooly for Chair; R. Hudak seconded. Motion passed.
 - ii. E. Thompson made a motion to nominate R. Wagner for Vice Chair; M. Lauko seconded. Motion passed.
 - iii. M. Lauko made a motion to nominate E. Thompson for Secretary; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed.
 - b. Volunteer Hours Tracking – S. Gillooly will send out a new spreadsheet. The Township is interested in volunteer hours as is the Arbor Day Foundation, the deadline for which is February 15.
 - c. CEUs and Metrics for Tree City USA and NJUCF Renewals are needed.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – M. Lauko made a motion to open the meeting to the public; R. Wagner seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. Bill Bowman, Franklin Reporter & Advocate, was in attendance. M. Lauko motioned to close the meeting to the public; R. Wagner seconded. Motion passed.

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions
 - a. Franklin Township Council updates (J. Vassanella) - J. Vassanella brought to the attention of the Commission the need for perhaps 6-10 trees to be planted in Castleton Park in an area that was cleared four years ago as a result of infrastructure upgrades. S. Gillooly supported this as part of an overall accounting of potential planting sites within the Township. Discussion followed regarding the need for increased canopy cover in the NE corner of the Township (4th and 5th Wards) encouraged by EC's review of the Sustainable Jersey Community Health Needs Assessment.

- b. Environmental Commission (EC) – EC is focused on the Township’s tree canopy and to that end, is reviewing Shade Tree Municipal Codes and Ordinances which are not as strong as in they have been in the past. EC wants to makes sure that Shade Tree Municipal Codes and Ordinances are up to date, are more stringent and have enough power and support of authority to compel compliance and punish infractions.
- EC has requested that FTSTC endorse an email that EC sent to the Township Council recommending changing the criterion of a tree in Municipal Code **§ 222-2 Definitions and word usage** and **§ 222-5.1A Tree replacement plan** from 4 inches to 2.5 inches.
 - EC recommends replacing language which was deleted in 2015 ORDINANCE NO. 4100-15 stating that “No more than 25% of tree replacement may be by way of contribution.”
 - EC recommends amending **§ 222-5 Application for tree removal permit where subdivision and/or site plan approval or building permit is required** so that “the sample plot(s) used to determine the average wooded acre for the site” must include a specific number of trees having a DBH equal to or greater than four inches.
- c. Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) (M. Lauko) – No updates. The previous meeting was cancelled due to an ice storm.
- d. Sustainable Jersey (S. Gillooly) – More trees are needed in the more developed areas of the Township.
- e. Department of Public Works (DPW) Updates
- C. Ferretti is still without a computer and has no access to email.
 - There is a major problem with beavers ripping out trees in the area of the pond at the intersection of Van Cleef and Grouser Roads. However, the trees being damaged are likely Bradford Pears, an invasive species. The concern is whether a dam is being built which would cause flooding issues. C. Ferretti has contacted Rutgers University and Hutcheson Memorial Forest whose property is proximate to the location of the pond, for their input.
 - DPW planted a conifer in the “fishbowl” courtyard of the Municipal Building and one for the tree lighting ceremony (the hardscaping for which was paid by the firemen’s’ union) to replace the one that had died, the latter having been donated. DPW plans to maintain the size of the tree in the “fishbowl” by trimming and shaping it.
 - There was discussion about DPW’s varying degrees of post-planting maintenance – placement of Treegators®, support stakes, chain lock, mulch, etc. – for the recent projects on/at JFK Boulevard, Princeton Ridings and Consovoy Park due to competing imperatives. The suggestion was made that if DPW can’t water/maintain trees post-planting, those tasks might be paid for from the Tree Fund. C. Ferretti confirmed that the JFK contractor watered each newly planted tree for 3-5 minutes prior to applying mulch.

2. Planning

- a. Status of Township Projects (Urban and Community Forestry (S. Gillooly) – Consulting & Municipal Engineers (CME) provided cost estimates for the following projects.:
 - Tree Inventory Community Forestry Management Plan for Delar Park, Kingston School Park, Dunham Lebed Park, Middlebush Park, Inman Park, Nassau Park, Naaman Williams Park, Consovoy Park, Bascom Park, Rutgers Heights Park - \$85,186.00
 - not including dense park buffering
 - consisting of shade, ornamental and evergreen trees
 - consisting of GPS location, evaluation of the trees and a maintenance plan
 - Tree Inventory Community Forestry Management Plan for the public Rights of Way (ROW) in Wards 4 & 5 - \$64,820.00
 - consisting of GPS location, evaluation of the trees and a maintenance plan
 - General Maintenance Plan for Newly Planted Trees Less Than 5 Years of Age – fee not to exceed \$5,884.00
 - Memorial Forest - fee not to exceed \$8,528.00. This project cannot move forward until the tenant farmer is no longer using the area for agriculture.
 - Tree Inventory, Community Forestry Management Plan for Township Parks and ROW – Anticipated deadlines for plan renewals to be extended past 2025. Proposal to be provided after new State guidelines are issued.

S. Gillooly will explore the possibility of negotiating lower costs and will speak with Township Manager, Robert Vornlocker about the source of funding. The suggestion was made that some of the funds could come out of the OS budget. M. Lauko made a motion to recommend spending \$5,884.00 on the General Maintenance Plan; R. Hudak seconded. Motion passed.

3. Tree Maintenance and Projects / Update on Hamilton Street – S. Gillooly forwarded the bid to New Jersey Shade Tree Federation. Discussion followed regarding the possibility of FTSTC Members be present during tree planting as “helpful observers”.
4. Public Information / Education / Events / Community Outreach Projects
 - a. Big and Heritage Trees in Franklin Township – Tabled. S. Gillooly will reach out to Sara Malone for her research materials into the project.
 - b. Annual Tree Sale 2024 – DPW will produce a \$2,500.00 Purchase Order for the trees.
 - c. Tree Giveaway – S. Gillooly asked for 250 trees. If trees are actually provided, discussion of media notification regarding tree giveaway can be done at that time.

New Business

1. The Commission discussed EC’s request for endorsement of its email to the Township Council to amend Municipal Codes and Ordinances to redefine “trees” as having a DBH equal to or greater than 2.5 inches rather than the current DBH of four inches. B. Berz made a motion to endorse the recommendation; R. Wagner seconded. M. Lauko stressed the need that the DBH of 2.5 inches be consistent throughout all Municipal Codes and Ordinances. Motion passed.

2. Spotted Lanternfly Grant (\$20K) – C. Ferretti will follow up to see if the Township is interested in submitting for the grant.
3. S. Gillooly researched the clearing of trees from a lot near the intersection of Pierce Street and Elizabeth Avenue. The owner of the property intends to farm the property and is permitted to do so by the Right to Farm Act which “protects responsible commercial farms from public and private nuisance actions and unduly restrictive municipal regulations’.
4. R. Hudak learned that the Home Owners’ Association that cut down trees on Demott Lane will replace them.
5. Suydam Farm Greenhouses is sponsoring lifesaving skills, Stop the Bleed® Training Session on March 4, 2024, 7:30-9:00 PM.
6. Robyn Suydam and Councilperson Ted Chase are promoting the concept of and seeking the Commission’s involvement in promoting the creation of Miyawaki Forests within the Township and keeping an eye out for likely Township-owned plots, particularly east of Franklin Blvd.
7. R. Wagner and S. Gillooly recounted the timely response(s) they received to their reporting of trees being cut down on the lot at 516 Easton Ave. However, R. Wagner was told by DPW that a private (residential) property owner is permitted to cut down up to an acre of trees.

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – R. Hudak made a motion to open the meeting to the public; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. R. Wagner motioned to close the meeting to the public; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed.

Commission Members volunteered for the following committees:

- Big and Heritage Trees – Bill Berz
- Tree Sale – R. Hudak and R. Wagner
- Ordinance Team – M. Lauko
- Publicity / Communications / Articles – R. Wagner

Dendrology and General Discussion – No updates.

Adjournment – R. Wagner made a motion to adjourn; S. Gillooly seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 10:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary