

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of May 23, 2024

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

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:08 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – Amendments were proposed to the January Minutes. A. Schmidt made a motion to accept the minutes as amended; R. Wagner seconded. January Minutes approved as amended. Amendments were proposed to the April Minutes. M. Lauko made a motion to accept the minutes as amended; R. Wagner seconded. April Minutes approved as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – Shade Tree Account Reports/Shade Tree Sale Results - S. Gillooly presented the financial report. Six trees were sold at the 2024 annual tree sale, adding \$660.00 to the Tree Planting (12) fund, leaving the account balance at \$782,283.32. Eight trees were given away. There were no changes to SHADE TREE OTHER-MISC ITEMS.
4. Commission Administration - Volunteer Hours Tracking – S. Gillooly encouraged Members to log into the spreadsheet to record their volunteer hours. The April meeting hours totaled 2.
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. In attendance was Jennifer Wagner of 6 Sunset Avenue, Griggstown. A group of volunteers had expressed interest in presenting their proposal to plant trees in Naaman Williams Park under the guidance of Township Open Space Consultant, Tara Kenyon, as part of the \$20,000.00 Sustainable Jersey grant. The group was not present at the meeting, however. J. Vassanella said that the offer is currently a moot point since Township engineers have not yet devised a Tree Planting Plan. R. Hudak motioned to close the meeting to the public; A. Schmidt seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions Updates
 - a. Franklin Township Council – J. Vassanella related talks that were had in working committee, as well as Council Chambers, as to Environmental Commission's January 2024 requests to change Municipal Codes that refer to size criteria of trees within various contexts. The next step will be to get an amendment advanced legislatively. Discussion followed citing examples of shortcomings in current Municipal Codes which work against the goal of increasing canopy cover. Of particular focus is why a part of the Code was eliminated that required developers to plant replacement trees in lieu of those removed, rather than simply putting money into the Township Tree Fund.
 - b. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – EC drafted an Anti-Idling Ordinance, introduced at the last Township Council Meeting, attached to the Land Development

Ordinance which also encourages property owners to post “No Idling” sign on their property. A related email was also sent to the Board of Education.

- c. Open Space Advisory Committee / (OSAC) Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko) – M. Lauko distributed two lists of trees, to be considered by Commission members, for planting by volunteers, particularly in the wet area(s) of Naaman Williams Park. Discussion returned to the need for having a formal planting plan – including follow-up care - in place before proceeding with any planting and the need for having trained personnel doing the actual planting.
- d. DPW (C. Ferretti)
 - C. Ferretti will obtain quotes from state arborists qualified to write a Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP).
 - C. Ferretti is taking class(es) toward obtaining qualification for advanced job title.
 - Swamp white oaks, yellowwoods and locust trees remaining from the tree sale were planted in Harvey J. Inman Park. The swamp white oaks were planted off the foul line of the ballfield and the locusts were put in the shade. Shale in the planting holes was broken up as much as possible. The trees were not staked but they are mulched. They do not yet have gator bags.
 - R. Wagner raised concerns about the ten trees planted last November in Consovoy Park. The trees were staked, but not tied to the stakes and one tree never got a gator bag. She questioned why these issues have still not been attended to despite having repeatedly brought up at previous meetings. Discussion followed about ways to bring about the needed actions, including presenting the matter at a Township Council meeting and proposing specific solutions.

2. Status of Township Projects (including Maintenance) / Hamilton Street Updates

- a. S. Gillooly reported that the vendor who was awarded the contract for planting trees on Hamilton Street had not yet been provided with a mark-out for the tree locations. Vincent Dominach, Executive Director Hamilton Street Advisory Board, will now meet with the head of the company and get things moving.
- b. S. Gillooly has not received a response to his email to V. Dominach, two weeks prior, about several previously-planted columnar trees on Hamilton Street that were limbed up in order to clear sight lines for advertising banners. Discussion followed about the necessity for educating residents and business owners about the value and benefit of trees, as well as the laws against vandalizing Township property.

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

- a. Big and Heritage Trees (B. Berz) – No updates. R. Hudak reminded the Commission about the Bicentennial Elm, located in a pocket park off New Brunswick Road.
- b. Annual Tree Sale 2025 (R. Hudak) – Due to the need to place orders for trees well in advance, it was suggested to put next year’s trees up for sale in February. Then, residents could be informed when trees have arrived. If trees are not picked up, they will not be retained for the purchaser(s).

- c. Arbor Day – S. Gillooly read his poem, “’Twas the Night before Arbor Day”, at the Municipal Gazebo and spoke with the Franklin Reporter.
- d. Franklin High School Environmental Club’s Green Fair, May 18, 1:00 am – 3:00 pm. The event was lightly attended. It was determined that the Commission should make tree-related programming materials available at such events for children based on requests from parents. Existing hands-on materials – tree cookies and examples of improper branch cuts - were not effectively utilized.

New Business – R. Hudak reported that Councilpersons, Shepa Uddin and Ed Potosnak, wanted to be informed about any trees that have mechanical damage.

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

Dendrology and General Discussion – None.

Adjournment – M. Lauko made a motion to adjourn; R. Wagner seconded. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 9:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary