

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of June 27, 2024

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

Excused: Mary Lauko

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – A. Schmidt made a motion to accept the May 2024 minutes as written; R. Wagner seconded. May minutes approved as written.
3. Treasurer's Report – The Township spent \$390.00 on New Jersey Shade Tree Federation membership from the SHADE TREE OTHER account. CME Associates was paid \$5,884.00 from the Tree Planting (12) fund for a General Maintenance Plan for Newly Planted Trees Less Than 5 Years of Age, leaving the account balance at \$777,059.32.
4. Commission Administration - Volunteer Hours Tracking – S. Gillooly encouraged Members to log into the spreadsheet to record their volunteer hours. The May meeting hours totaled 3.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – S. Gillooly has still not heard from the group of volunteers who 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. A. Schmidt 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. R. Wagner made a motion 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. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt) – Recommendations by the Environmental Commission to the Township Council regarding motor vehicle Anti-Idling regulations have been added to the township Land Development Ordinance. The amendments to the ordinance require that all new businesses and Township-owned properties post “No Idling” signs on those properties. Board of Education (BOE) property is not Township-owned, so they are not obligated to comply with these recommendations. A. Schmidt reached out to Dr. John A. Ravally, Superintendent of Schools, who advised that the BOE is following these recommendations. The plan is to have signs installed on all BOE properties when school opens in September.
 - b. Open Space Advisory Committee / (OSAC) Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko) – No updates.
 - c. Department of Public Works (DPW) (C. Ferretti)

- The water tank is on a truck thus allowing DPW to begin watering between two and three times per week, prioritizing trees planted within the last two years. These included Castleton, Consovoy, Harvey J. Inman parks, as well as John W. Flemer Preserve, and the Kingston School Arbor Day tree, Ridings Parkway and JFK Boulevard trees.
 - Every newly-planted tree gets a gator bag and a tree guard.
 - Because of time spent watering, no other tree work is getting done.
 - The bare root trees left over from the tree sale which were planted at Harvey J. Inman Park are looking okay after wilting badly, initially. These include the two locusts and yellowwoods planted by the playground. C. Ferretti explained the “bend test” he performed on these trees to determine their viability, which involves bending the end of a leader to see if it will snap back. This is a less damaging way of testing a tree rather than doing a “scratch test” on the bark to see if the plant matter under the bark is green or brown.
2. Planning / Status of Township Projects – Darren Mazzei, PE and Shari Spero, LTE, both with CME Associates, attended the Commission meeting remotely to talk about the status of a Tree Inventory and Urban and Community Forestry Management Plan (U&CFMP) including a maintenance plan as described in the June 20, 2024 cost proposal letter to Township Manager, Robert Vornlocker. S. Spero was part of the 2019 Hazardous Tree Survey.
- a. Tree Inventory – The concentration will be on all park trees (cost \$17,680.00) - excluding Castleton - and street trees (cost \$64,820.00) in Township Wards 4 and 5. This includes 70-80 acres of park land and 90 miles of street trees. The focus will be on tree maintenance and planting. The Inventory can be used to inform the Sustainable Jersey Community Health Assessment Survey, the purpose of which is to mitigate heat islands and promote better air quality. Trees on County and State roads (e.g., Route 27) will be included in the Inventory.
3. U&CFMP – The State guidelines changed this year such that the U&CFMP specifically relates back to the Tree Inventory. It was clarified that there are more certified Licensed Tree Experts (LTE) and foresters in the state – defined as those who help to manage a wood lot - than the previously assumption of four, who are qualified to write a U&CFMP, including S. Spero. The deadline is extended to 2025. Discussion followed including:
- A. Schmidt requested clarification about what part of the plan approval was being requested before the plan is finalized.
 - R. Wagner asked what a plan would look like – S. Spero explained that there might be five goals stated, akin to a “wish list”; next, objectives would be listed that would go towards meeting those goals, e.g. It would be written with the assumption of a having a certain amount of funding; then a plan would be put forward to apply for grants, etc. (grants will come with the guidelines.) In a residential area there might be an outreach program where fliers are distributed explaining that there is an available location for planting and a list of specific trees is proposed.
 - Whether geo-tagging of the trees will feed into the existing i-Tree Inventory (S. Gillooly) and whether it will use the same i-Tree software (R. Wagner) – S. Spero

explained that it would be possible to compare the proposed Inventory to the Hazardous Tree Survey but that the Hazardous Tree Survey was not an action plan. S. Gillooly stated that the Township Council wants this Inventory to be more data-driven. These plans usually require an annual accomplishments report.

- In response to R. Wagner's question about CME's need of starting place goals from the Commission before beginning, S. Spero explained that the Commission should start working on those goals.
- S. Gillooly asked what the timeline was from start to finish. S. Spero, referring to the proposal letter, quoted 7-months:

Month 1	Authorization and Kick-off meeting
Months 2-3	Park Inventory
Months 4-5	Streets Inventory
Months 6-7	Mapping and Report Preparation

- S. Spero indicated that CME will perform the tree survey in the fall.
- R. Wagner asked what materials would go into the plan. S. Spero referenced Arbor Day materials, information about Franklin High School Environmental Club Green Fair, etc. For example, details about proper tree planting, infographics, et al, could go into an Appendix. R. Hudak offered that the Commission's web site information could be included in the plan. R. Wagner asked if CME could evaluate those materials for clarity.
- D. Mazzei explained that the next step would be a kick-off meeting.
- S. Gillooly made a motion to recommend to the Township Council to move ahead with the U&CFMP and Tree Inventory as in the June 20, 2024 proposal; A. Schmidt seconded, provided that the Commission has the opportunity to review it first. Motion passed.
- DPW must explain to the Commission how the previous U&CFMP is currently being utilized to inform their tree work.

4. Tree Maintenance and Projects

- a. Hamilton Street (SG/RW) – No updates.
- b. Follow-up on tree removals on Franklin Blvd and Hamilton Street (SG/RW) – No updates.
- c. JFK Tree Plan (RH/AS) – R. Hudak did a presentation on his findings with A. Schmidt of trees between Berger Street and Somerset Presbyterian Church.
 - Green spray paint dots indicate that the tree was noted (with issues such as dead leaders) and require action.
 - Red spray paint dots indicate that the tree was noted last year and should be considered for removal.
 - Trees show evidence of weed-whacking damage to lower trunk bark.
 - Maples show evidence of dead branch tips.
 - Can S. Spero examine oak trees presenting with undetermined disease processes to determine if they can be treated. S. Gillooly said that the Commission can ask the

Township to have S. Spero examine the trees that R. Hudak and A. Schmidt identified as requiring attention.

- Examples of improper mulching were presented. R. Wagner proposed reminding DPW of proper mulching techniques. Discussion followed as to what training was given to DPW work crews. C. Ferretti explained the challenges of ensuring the performance of proper maintenance and how personnel took continuing education classes at Rutgers in the past.

5. Public Information / Education / Events / Community Outreach Projects – No updates.

New Business – None.

Second Opening of the Meeting to the Public – E. Thompson made a motion to open the meeting to the public; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was opened to the public. J. Wagner asked why DPW stopped sending crew members to Rutgers for continuing education. C. Ferretti indicated that this was something DPW personnel expressed interest in and explained the difficulty in maintaining adequate staffing in the current economy. R. Wagner made a motion to close the meeting to the public; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed and the meeting was closed to the public.

Dendrology and General Discussion – None.

Adjournment – E. Thompson made a motion to adjourn; S. Gillooly seconded. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 8:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary