

Franklin Township Shade Tree Commission
Somerset County, New Jersey
Minutes of August 22, 2024

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

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM.
2. Secretary's Report – R. Hudak made a motion to accept the July 2024 minutes; R. Wagner seconded. Discussion followed and the Commission recommended amendments. Motion passed and July 2024 minutes accepted as amended.
3. Treasurer's Report – SJC Lawncare was paid \$112,244.30 for tree planting on Hamilton Street and there was a reimbursement of \$2,700.00 for proposed development at 355 Elizabeth Avenue, which together resulted in a closing balance of \$666,526.52.
4. Commission Administration, Volunteer Hours Tracking – S. Gillooly encouraged Members to log into the spreadsheet to record their volunteer hours.
5. First Opening of the Meeting to the Public – None present.

Old Business/Updates

1. Committees and Commissions Updates
 - a. Environmental Commission (EC) (A. Schmidt)
 - i. The EC reviewed a plan for a development of 14 houses on a cull de sac off Cedar Grove Lane and recommended removing at least the last two houses on the street in order to preserve trees from the wooded lots. The project still has to go in front of the Planning Board.
 - ii. In response to a question from B. Berz, A. Schmidt explained how EC approves which street trees can be planted. R. Wagner asked if there is any requirement as to variety. A. Schmidt stated that EC can't require that a developer not plant a monoculture. S. Gillooly concurred that there is nothing in the Trees and Vegetation Ordinance that indicates that there has to be a variety. A. Schmidt suggested that the Shade Tree Commission put together a letter to the EC regarding variety.
 - b. Open Space Advisory Committee / (OSAC) Sustainable Jersey (M. Lauko) – Meeting was cancelled. No updates.
 - c. Department of Public Works (DPW) (C. Ferretti)
 - i. DPW is busy pruning branches.
 - ii. The intention is to wait until spring to "warrantee" the failing trees on JFK Boulevard. R. Hudak said that any problems need to be documented now and provided to the contractor and that a watering schedule should be established. He further indicated that the tops of two or three trees didn't leaf out at the top.
 - iii. DPW Manager, Carl Hauck, wanted to know if the Commission intends to do a planting this fall. Otherwise, the plan is to do pruning and top off the mulch of

recently planted trees. M. Lauko suggested that, going forward, it might be advisable to plant trees one year and perform maintenance the alternate year(s).

2. Planning / Status of Township Projects (Urban & Community Forestry Management Plan [U&CFMP], maintenance, Memorial Forest, Tree Inventory, Hazardous Tree Survey

a. R. Wagner referenced the 2016/2022 Township Proclamations goals to increase the tree canopy from 39% to 42%. She wanted to know how many trees it would actually take to reach that goal, especially since the Township has lost tree coverage instead of having increased it. She observed that it is not a smart goal because it is not measurable and not being monitored. S. Gillooly said that it might be possible to get updated information as part of the upcoming Tree Inventory and that once that figure is determined, to put together a call to action for the Township Council. J. Vassanella proposed asking Township Manager, Robert Vornlocker, if Township engineering firm, CME Associates, could do it using i-Tree. What number of trees would be reasonable for DPW to plant and maintain (R. Wagner)? Ask CME what would be a reasonable goal and how it would be possible to get there (R. Hudak). Trees can't be measured one-for-one because trees are of different sizes and shapes (A. Schmidt). The upcoming Forestry Management Plan can help to determine if what the Township is doing is helping achieve the tree canopy goal and whether it is achievable, in light of the fact that DPW has trouble maintaining what has been planted to date (S. Gillooly). M. Lauko cautioned against laying out a goal in the Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP) that is unreasonable. Can Commission money be used to plant trees on private property (A. Schmidt) in a public/private partnership (R. Hudak)? The Trees and Vegetation ordinance might be changed to say that not all the money paid by developers for cutting down trees should go into the Tree Fund, instead compel developers, like Amazon, to plant trees on open fields on their property (S. Gillooly). How much room does the Township actually have to plant on (C. Ferretti)? One location is Memorial Forest; putting in/extending a water line has been discussed (A. Schmidt). There are certain constraints. Even if we planted 1000 trees, e.g., DPW couldn't maintain them. Eventually the Tree Fund will run out. Open Space/Rights of Way (ROW) is finite. Is it really realistic? Could we even get to 42% (S. Gillooly)? There are still parks where clusters of trees could be planted (J. Vassanella). How many trees does DPW consider to be reasonable (R. Wagner)? What limits is DPW up against? Either the Township has to recognize that canopy is being lost or grants, etc., need to be considered in order to do mass plantings (S. Gillooly). The Township realistically needs to have a joint effort for a canopy "build-out" program (J. Vassanella). We need to think bigger; be more creative (S. Gillooly). The Township can, e.g., commit to plant five acres. The plan would have to be legitimate and the funds could be committed (J. Vassanella). We need to remind people that planting a tree is like getting a pet. Link how we are going to get to 42% to the CFMP (S. Gillooly). It would be good to have the actual, real-life number. Then we could go to Amazon (R. Wagner). The part that needs traction is establishing a bare minimum, setting a standard. It will cost X-amount to get "this much" in the ground (J. Vassanella). Just to be clear, we don't have the number (R. Wagner). The CFMP will include quantitative evidence. Eighteen

thousand ash trees are/were along ROWs (M. Lauko). It's reasonable to know our target (R. Hudak). The State would see this along the goal of stormwater runoff. What can be done is multifaceted: ordinance changes, public/private partnerships, planting strategies, public outreach (S. Gillooly). An article in the Franklin Times could promote the Commission doing an "Adopt a Forest" program with Amazon, commemorated with a plaque (A. Schmidt). We need to present to the Township Council; measuring to get data, link this to the CFMP, "Save-a-Tree" program and what is being proposed by the State (S. Gillooly).

b. None of the information on blue tags that were affixed on trees by CME as part of the Hazardous Tree Survey has been tracked. It will be a lot of work to input that information into i-Tree. It will be included in the Tree Inventory portion of the CFMP.

3. Tree Maintenance and Projects

a. 21 Highland Avenue tree removal and Hamilton Street unauthorized tree cutting – S. Gillooly has received no response from the Township to his requests for updates. This raised the issue of what Township entity or department is to be notified when unauthorized tree work is observed.

b. 199 Pierce Street near the intersection with Elizabeth Avenue – The property is still for sale, even though it has only been one year since the trees were cut down and the land put into farming status by planting rye grass according to Director of Economic Development, Vincent Dominach. Township Manager, Robert Vornlocker, referred the case to Township Attorney, Louis N. Rainone. Mr. Rainone is concerned about the "loophole" this case represents. A. Schmidt, who first brought this to the attention of the Commission at the November 2023 meeting, requested that the Chairman forward his email regarding this issue to R. Vornlocker, Mayor Phil Kramer and L. Rainone. J. Vassanella explained that L. Rainone's email is public information and anyone should be able to send him an email, especially since this topic was already made known to him and to link it to previous correspondence. It is reasonable to inquire as to when an understanding of this issue will be forthcoming. This is legitimately something to follow up on. S. Gillooly again questioned the likelihood of getting an answer, whether a property owner would be ordered to stop cutting down trees and what the official way is to report a violation. J. Vassanella recommended laying out the issue in a chronological order and that it is reasonable to request that the matter be brought to the attention of the Township Council. M. Lauko posited S. Gillooly will raise this matter to the next level.

c. S. Gillooly confirmed that text from the bid specifications for the Hamilton Street tree planting states that the contractor is responsible for watering and fertilizing the trees. He has not gotten an answer regarding the status of installation of Belgian Block around the base of the trees.

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

a. Public Outreach and Information (S. Gillooly/R. Wagner)

i. The following Monday after having done his above referenced research on Hamilton Street trees it was reported on the Friends of Franklin Township social media that the trees were, in fact, being watered. J. Vassanella agreed that the

Commission can send out press releases – on social media, etc. - as long as the Commission doesn't speak for the Township

ii. R. Wagner reached out to Krista Hegedus and Bob McQueen at the Township website helpdesk. They instructed her to provide them with whatever information the Commission wants on the website and how often the Commission wants to post. She questioned how to approve any messaging text, as a group. S. Gillooly said it would be fine to email Commission Members draft text as long as Members do not respond "Reply All", in light of Sunshine Law concerns.

b. Big and Heritage Trees in Franklin Township (B. Berz) - B. Berz has made frequent visits to Colonial Park. The county horticulturalist informed him that their department is reorganizing and is interested in re-doing the inventory of trees in the Park. He is trying to identify a tree in East Millstone cemetery from the existing list. The list states that it is an American hazelnut but the Picture This app. identified it as a European beech. There are six trees from the old list that are located on the Bunker Hill environmental center property and he asked for help contacting the person who lives in the private home located there.

New Business – None.

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

Dendrology and General Discussion – None.

Adjournment – E. Thompson made a motion to adjourn; R. Hudak seconded. Motion passed and meeting was adjourned at 9.27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Thompson, Secretary