

Tree Commission Meeting Minutes
January 5, 2023
7:30-9:00PM

Meeting Facilitator: Lester
Meeting Notes: Brad

Minutes:

1. Introductions
 - a. Judy Alba – New Tree Commissioner. Nurse and anthropologist by trade, presently at Washington Hospital Center. Has done consulting work in public health. Just likes trees and gardening and wants to be a part of the Tree Commission to help ensure the quality of life that is provided by the urban tree canopy.
 - b. Jackie Sabath – Tree Commissioner
 - c. Barry Stahl – Tree Commissioner
 - d. Brad Ball – Tree Commissioner
 - e. MaryLee Haughwout – Tree Commissioner
 - f. Lester Scheuermann – Tree Commissioner
 - g. Gladys Sanchez – Dept. Manager for Dept. of Public Works
 - h. Bill Bystricky – City Grant Writer (exploring getting a grant for getting trees).
 - i. Luke Chesek -- City Councilperson, liaison to Tree Commission
 - j. Gabe Popkin – former Tree Commissioner
2. Approval of minutes from previous meeting (Lester) - 5 minutes
 - a. Everyone has reviewed minutes. Lester's spelling of last name to be changed, and Barry motions to accept, MaryLee seconds. No objections. Minutes are accepted with spelling correction of Lester's name.
3. For discussion and finalization: Feedback to County on Arundel Green street trees (MaryLee) - 10 minutes
 - a. [Draft letter](#)

- b. Phone meeting to review landscape plan conducted in December with members of staff and the Tree Commission. Plan includes addition of trees and stormwater wetland area.
 - c. Reviewed species proposed by plan. No problem with proposed trees, but TC's sense is that more diversity be included, along with smaller/understory trees between larger trees. The takeaway is that we'd like to introduce more trees and mor diversity.
 - d. The plan also proposed traditional sod between trees, but since that requires regular maintenance, TC's recommendation is to use native grasses instead, so that reduced mowing and no weed-whacking be required.
 - e. Bill asked about why some grasses require mowing and others don't. Barry indicated that sod grass is non-native, has a shallow root system, and is intended to be mowed, whereas many native grasses have deeper root systems, require little or no mowing, and provide many benefits to the habitat.
 - f. No objections to the species proposed in the plan, but the TC recommends additional diversity, increasing from the proposed 5 to a total of 14 species. Recommended species provided by Barry.
 - g. The only potential concern is that the red twig dogwood may be at the end of its range due to climate change, so we want to verify which actual species they are proposing. TC recommends the native species be used vs. the ornamental species.
 - h. Two trees are slated to be removed, as they are not in good condition due to soil impaction from construction. TC recommends that the consulting arborist specify where tree protection should be placed to protect the remaining trees during construction/installation.
 - i. Lester questioned if the County is required to post notice for the removal of the unhealthy trees. MaryLee will check with the County.
 - j. TC wants to clarify that it is not responsible for "approving" the removal of any trees, but that it is merely an advisory commission – the final decision/approval rests with the County.
 - k. We may add language that if there is any trouble sourcing our recommended species, to reach out to us so that we can suggest alternatives.
4. For discussion: FY24 City Budget letter - deadline Jan. 27 (MaryLee) - 10 minutes
- a. [Last year's letter](#)

- b. Next fiscal year starts in July, and we are invited to submit requests/comments by 1/27.
 - c. Reviewed the past components of the document and opened the floor to any suggestions.
 - d. Judy suggested adding community outreach, information and communication, so that the work of the TC is known around the community. Since this is a budget request, we need to frame this as an action that is tied to the budget.
 - e. Barry suggested that if there is budget not being used for tree planting, then perhaps that could be reallocated to tree identification and tracking. We would need to get an estimate of what this is going to cost in order to get it into the budget request.
 - f. Gladys will review the budget spent to date to determine how much of our \$80,000 has already been used, so that we can determine if we need less or more going forward.
 - g. Luke suggested that we check all the line items to see what we spent so that we can bolster those that were heavily drawn and reallocate those that weren't used.
5. CBT Urban Trees Grant Program (Luke) - 15 minutes
- a. Luke was introduced to the director of Casey Trees who suggested this opportunity through the Chesapeake Bay Trust, which would be willing to work with Bill Bystricky to fill out the grant.
 - b. The grant can provide up to \$45,000 and is good for multiple different projects.
 - c. We would need to find out if we need to go out to bid for providers since grant money wouldn't be money out of the City's budget.
 - d. Deadline is in March, so we need to move on next steps, or else punt if there isn't enough capacity.
 - e. Jackie asked about that caveat that it's targeted to low income or formerly redlined areas.
 - f. Luke indicated that its more inclusive than that. Based on qualifications, every single census track in Mount Rainier qualifies based on unemployment rate or median income.
 - g. Bill raised several questions that we need to consider before we move forward, such as:
 - i. Letter of support from Green Teem, Tree Commission, City Council, etc.
 - ii. Indicating that we already have identified areas where trees are needed.

- iii. Coming up with a tree maintenance plan (Casey Trees?).
 - h. MaryLee spoke with Mr. Kamali on 1/4/23 that according to city code, we're allowed to have a sole source to work with (e.g., Casey Trees).
 - i. We are at a point where we are short on spaces to plant trees in city owned property, so one idea that MaryLee suggested is that we focus on private property for those residents or institutions that would be willing to take on ownership and maintenance of trees. This could be facilitated through Casey Trees to optimize the species selection and siting.
 - j. Barry indicated that a real opportunity would be working with the apartment complexes, as they have a lot of land. The challenge will be the communication efforts and working with the management.
 - k. The challenge would be getting agreements from apartment managers before deadline in March, so realistically, we would be more apt get results by tabling this for a year so that we can get our ducks in a row.
6. Crape myrtle infestation - options and communications (MaryLee/All) - 10 minutes
- a. There is an aphid-like bug infesting crape myrtles and allowing pathogens/molds to take hold. We estimate 60-70% of the City's Crape Myrtles are infected.
 - b. Bartlett Trees recommended a pesticide that is effective.
 - c. We have concerns about the impact of the pesticide and its long term effects in the environment and on humans.
 - d. ACTION: The first objective here would be to communicate/get messaging out that people should not be planting Crape myrtles anymore because of this problem.
 - e. We could also think about replacing them with other trees.
 - f. We would also need to get a cost estimate for treating them.
 - g. ACTION: There's a lot we don't know about how to proceed, so we would be interested in knowing what other communities are doing as this is not a unique problem to us.
 - i. What is DC doing? What is College Park doing? Etc.
 - ii. Lester will reach out to Steve to find out about what DC is doing.
 - iii. Jackie will reach out to the Hyattsville arborist.
7. Tree Inventory update and software meeting (MaryLee/Lester) - 10 minutes
- a. Lester is satisfied with the accuracy of the system based on repeated testing.

- b. We are looking to set up a separate meeting outside of the regular TC meeting to look at the specifics and goals of the using the data base. We would invite the key personnel from the City perspective to start using this software (Lester, Rocio, Matt, etc.). We'll set up a Doodle poll to find out a 60-90 minute window to have an in person meeting (virtual is possible, but in person is ideal).
 - c. Gladys will discuss with Roccio to come up with a time.
- 8. Updates on City-related projects (Rocio/Gladys) - 15 minutes
 - a. RFP for Climate Resilient Trees
 - i. Bill questioned if contractors could provide bids without locations.
 - ii. MaryLee indicated that the bidders would need to work with the city and residents to identify the trees and locations to be planted. For public spaces, they would work with the Tree Commission to determine locations.
 - b. Future sidewalks and rain garden plans – No update shared
 - c. Chesapeake Conservation Climate Corps
 - i. The city missed the deadline for submission.
 - d. Winter maintenance
 - i. ACTION: Gladys to send a list of trees removed during winter maintenance to Lester so that he can update the tree inventory.
 - e. Levee planting tree replacements
 - i. County is planning to replace the dead trees and sent a list
- 9. Pruning schedule/vine removal workshop (Barry) - 10 minutes
 - a. Barry has set up 8 different zones between 10:30 and noon on Saturdays. These are just workdays (not educational workshops).
 - b. If we get enough work done, we will do a workshop open to the public in March.
 - c. Moving vine workshop to the backburner unless additional interest comes up.
- 10. Discussion: Ideas for Celebrating 20 years as tree city - 10 minutes
 - a. 2022 was our 20th year as a Tree City USA, so we should celebrate in 2023. At a very minimum we should be doing some communications.
 - b. Other cities have done flags on their poles/light posts.
 - c. We could also add it to the “Mount Rainier” welcome signs at the entrances to the city.
 - d. Speaker? Give away trees? Lots of potential.
 - e. Arbor day is in April, so perhaps organizing something around that is ideal.

- f. The question is, do we have the energy/resources to pull something off?
 - g. ACTION: Let's dig in and brainstorm, then dig into this at our next meeting.
 - h. ACTION: Gladys will discuss with Rocio what Public Works can do.
11. Future meeting - invite city consulting arborist for annual check-in?
- a. We should invite Matt to at least one meeting per year to check in and let us know how things are going, update us on things, etc.
 - b. ACTION: We would like to invite him to our next meeting.
12. Next meeting date:
- a. March 2, 2023 at 7:30 PM.
13. ACTION: Marylee will submit a message article for 1/13 deadline.
- a. Lester will write a blurb for the Crape Myrtle issue.

UPDATES

- Pepco work completed - Cody doing inspections of work. Private tree at 3102 Bunker Hill not removed. Sent list of replacement tree locations.
- Safety vest request into Public Works

OPEN ACTION ITEMS

- Gladys will look into whether the city has any maps of underground utilities.
- Folks who signed up to write articles will work on them in the coming month(s)
- Future action to showcase this project (AUTI) and the information available to the Council in the winter.
- MaryLee will follow up with Carole Barth with PG County on tree canopy analysis (ongoing, non-responsive). **Sent 4 emails**
- MaryLee will look into heritage/exceptional tree language in neighboring jurisdictions.
- Brad & Zachary: Come up with a proposal to reach out to tree companies to ensure they are educated on our tree ordinance requirements. We should also investigate other models of putting responsibility on the tree care provider for violating the ordinance. Zachary can share examples of other municipalities that specifically place liability on tree companies. But starting with outreach might be the best first step.