



Public Hearing w for the removal at 48 Old Saugatuck Road

November 19, 2024

Staff: Chris Torre, DPW Superintendent of Operations/Tree Warden
Sarah Cruz, Arborist/ Horticulturalist
Dilene Byrd, Secretary

Others: Michele Sorensen; Mary Romano; Jeffery Libby; Mary Buley; Peter Menking ; Takashi Tsuchiya

Mr. Torre opened the public hearing at 6:02 PM.

Mr. Torre said the reason for the public hearing is to discuss the removal of a tree at 48 Old Saugatuck Road. He said a service request was received to remove a tree and Ms. Cruz along with a DPW Road Supervisor who are both Tree Wardens investigated the tree and the proximity of the tree to the street is troubling, but not so alarming that the tree would be removed simply because of that. The tree was posted for removal because it rotted at the base and had no structural integrity to stop it from falling over.

Ms. Sorensen- 24 Popular Street

Ms. Sorensen disagreed that the tree was rotted. She said the tree had been hit by a car and had a wound, so it was not rotted. She also said that to say the tree has no structural integrity is extreme, as there is less structural integrity than a tree without that damage.

Mr. Torre provided an overview of the public hearing process and said the tree was posted and he has three days after the public hearing to give a decision on whether the tree will be removed or not and anyone has 10 days after that to file a motion with the State Superior Court and challenge the ruling.

Ms. Sorensen asked if the tree can be trimmed rather than removed.

Ms. Cruz provided an overview of the assessment and the DPW Road Supervisor who is in charge of tree maintenance found that given the location of the tree and the damage/decay at the

base of the trees had asked her to do another assessment because she is a certified arborist both in the State of Connecticut and is also an International Society of Arborists ISA certified arborist. When she looked at the tree to the proximity of the road and difficult visibility around the curve explained the damage at the base of the tree. She said the structure at the top of the tree is fair but doesn't have a great taper so most of the structure and canopy of the tree is all at the top and that is what she is worried will fail on the tree. She said when an inspection is done they factor in the ISA and best management practices surrounding risk assessment which includes considering the health of the tree and the structure of the tree and also the targets that may be hit by the tree and then need to weigh the pros and cons which include how high of a risk the targets are to the public and does it warrant removal and it is an in-depth process.

Ms. Cruz said the tree was posted on October 17, 2024, and found significant defects at the base of the tree including the loss of structural integrity. The tree is located between a footpath and the road with frequent targets and the damage to the trunk was likely due to a vehicle. The tree is located close enough to the road to obstruct visibility for drivers which does create an unsafe roadway condition. The canopy is in fair condition but exhibits poor structure. Overall, the condition of the tree and its location warrant removal based on their internal guidelines and forestry best practices.

Ms. Romano said that health and safety is the number one consideration so anybody else other than the experts who know about trees is an emotional opinion, so it is subjective. She said for all the reasons that Ms. Cruz stated she is also concerned about the tree and the decay is bad at the base of the tree. The tree has grown so far out towards the road that the road is out of compliance with what a road should be, and she has those measurements. She said with the current drought she would love to see the tree removed because she has read about trees falling on power lines and starting fires.

Ms. Sorensen noted that this is the seventh largest Hickory Tree by diameter in the state and thinks it warrants a little more consideration, she has estimated the age of the tree is 320 years old and can't plant 30 samplings to replace this tree and there is no replacement of the ecosystem services that this tree is providing. She said this is a tree that does not present sails, and the drought does concern her, but it is more concerning when there are heavy rains.

Jeffery Libby- 60 Old Saugatuck Road

Mr. Libby said this is the most majestic tree in the neighborhood and thinks it should be nominated for a legacy tree, he respects the professionalism of the health of the tree, but it presents as a healthy tree and feels the tree is being punished because of man and is unfair. He said other factors beyond health this tree is the only thing that keeps people from speeding and also protects the pedestrians.

Peter Menking- 89 Old Saugatuck Road

Mr. Menking said if this tree comes down and the stump is ground he can almost guarantee that vehicles will come on the sidewalk and someone will get hit and his concern is that “yes” there is a risk to public safety when talking about the tree coming down however, this is a risk to public safety in the event of what sounds like a substantial sustained storm with high winds in the right conditions, but if the tree is removed the public safety issue is every day unless there is a dramatic improvement to the road. He said he would like to see that public safety is the number one concern of the city. Mr. Torre said he agrees that a conversation with Traffic, Mobility, and Parking should be had before the tree is removed

Diane CeCe-37 Olmstead Place/President, East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

Ms. CeCe stated the tree canopy in East Norwalk is a very important topic and can't afford to lose any more tree canopy and are desperate to get additional tree canopy especially given the potential of future development. She hopes staff is being very prudent in examining this tree in determining that the tree should be removed and that she has not heard anything this evening convincing her of that except for root rot on a portion of the tree and while it may appear healthy it may not be, and she is sympathetic to the city once it is a known fact that this tree is unhealthy. She asked why the tree was looked at and asked if there were any concerns with the sight line and vehicle hits. She asked what alternatives could be considered and what the plans were to replace the tree. Mr. Torre said there is a tree ordinance regarding replacing trees and the call had come from a customer service request. Ms. CeCe asked if there is something in the policy where a third-party assessment can be done. Mr. Torre said “no” and that staff was following state law.

Takashhi Tsuchiya

Mr. Tsuchiya asked how often the trees are monitored. Mr. Torre said the city has 35,000 trees. Mr. Tsuchiya said if the concern is wind resistance why can't the tree be trimmed to make it less dense to reduce the pressure. Ms. Cruz said that the damage and loss of structural integrity at the base of the tree, and it is not repairable.

Mr. Torre said he has three days to give his decision but if that is willing to be waived, he would like to take the extra time and do his due diligence to find out from TMP what the plan is for this location regarding public safety.

Josh Green-74 Old Saugatuck Road

Mr. Green said he heard that a neighbor had gone to the tree with a screwdriver, and it went through the tree which if that is true leads him to believe the base of the tree is not an extraordinary sound and it supports the removal of the tree because it doesn't feel safe. He also said a huge tree fell on a neighbor's house two years ago and was not a huge storm and for him the idea of the tree not being healthy he feels it should be removed. He said he has had trees planted on his property by the city and they seem to have a surplus of funds to add a tree canopy around the city and he recognizes it may not have had the historical value they can at least begin

to build it up. Mr. Torre said by ordinance for each tree that is removed they have to plant trees and as a resident, a request can be made for a tree planting to realign the street trees. Ms. Cruz said that based on the diameter of this tree they would be required 14 trees of a certain diameter as a replacement plan.

Ms. CeCe asked if the cause of the rot was identified. Ms. Cruz said from a visual assessment it looked as though there was damage to the trunk and decay had entered the base of the tree.

Mr. Torre said that the staff would make an informed decision regarding the tree and go from there.

Ms. Romano said she is glad the discussion regarding the tree became a bigger discussion regarding the safety of the road, the sidewalk, and the replacement trees.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd