

TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

June 25, 2024

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Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Dilene Byrd at dbyrd@norwalkct.gov to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

Attendance: Richard Whitehead, Vice Chair
Peter Viteretto

Staff: Paul Sotnik, Deputy Tree Warden
Sarah Cruz, Arborist/ Horticulturalist
Dilene Byrd, Secretary

Others: Gay MacLeod, Tree Liaison

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairman Whitehead called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

2. PUBLIC INPUT- GUESTS AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS MAY SPEAK TO ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA. (COMMENTS SHALL BE LIMITED TO NO MORE THAN THREE (3) MINUTES PER SPEAKER.)

There were no public comments this evening.

3. APPROVE MINUTES OF THE TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF MAY 28, 2024.

The minutes were tabled due to a lack of a quorum.

4. UPDATE – CAPITAL/GRANT FUNDED TREE PLANTING PROGRAM- FINAL SPRING 2024 UPDATE

- a. Spring 2024 Final Locations and count- 221 Trees.
 - i. Spring Hill Avenue - 35 Trees.
 - ii. Silvermine Elementary School – Arbor Day Trees – 3 Trees.
 - iii. Norwalk Green – Earth Day Trees – 2 Trees.
 - iv. 125 East Avenue – Malmquist Field – Beacon Street – 9 Trees.
 - v. Deane Street and Deane Court – 16 Trees.
 - vi. River Drive, Gregory Boulevard and Marion Avenue – 4 Trees.
 - vii. Ingalls Avenue, Ryan Avenue, Knapp Street and Ely Avenue – 12 Trees.
 - viii. Mack Street, Burritt Avenue and Knorr Street – 21 Trees.
 - ix. Cleveland Terrace and Mack Street – 11 Trees.
 - x. 10 Woodbine Street - 1 Tree.
 - xi. 275 Richards Avenue – 1 Tree.
 - xii. Weatherly Lane and Maple Street – 5 Trees.
 - xiii. Merrill Road and 18 Alden Avenue – 3 Trees.
 - xiv. Catherine Street, Fair Street and Loundsbury Avenue – 32 Trees.
 - xv. Knickerbocker Avenue and Olmstead Place – 11 Trees.
 - xvi. Old Rock Lane, 230 Richards Avenue and Scribner Avenue – 15 Trees.
 - xvii. Mott Avenue and Union Park – 20 Trees.
 - xviii. Olive Lane – 3 Trees.
 - xix. 41 Fairfield Avenue – 4 Trees.
 - xx. 101 Washington Street – 1 Tree.
 - xxi. 26 St. Mary's Lane – 3 Trees.
 - xxii. 328 Flax Hill Road – Fodor Farm – 9 Trees.
- b. Fiscal Year 2023 – 2024 Final Count - 448 Trees.
- c. Tree Planting Budget Balances.

Mr. Sotnik said for the spring of 2024, 221 trees were planted thanks to input from the public as well as recommendations from Ms. Cruz and Ms. McLeod. He said the cost to plant 221 trees was \$ 183,262.25 which is an average of approximately \$829 per tree. He said for fiscal year 2023/24 the final count for plantings was 448 trees from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, at a cost of \$349,596.25 which is an average cost of \$780.35 per tree.

Mr. Sotnik provided an overview of the remaining balances for the fall planting season and said out of four different accounts plus the 2024/25 capital budget of \$100,000, there is a remaining balance of \$252,114.02, and of that \$126,401 is for the Martin Luther King corridor initiative and only can be spent in a certain area, so the remaining funds that can be spent anywhere throughout the city is \$125,890.19, and can be used in the fall of 2024 and spring of 2025 tree plantings. He said there is also remaining ARPA funding of approximately \$24,900.

Mr. Whithead said the tree plantings were a tremendous accomplishment for this team and can't thank everyone enough.

Mr. Viteretto asked how many trees can be planted for the \$126,401 for the Martin Luther King Blvd. corridor. Mr. Sotnik said the plan is to install 15-20 tree pits and the remaining funds would be used to plant trees, and depending on the location the cost to plant a tree is approximately \$800 to \$900 per tree. Mr. Viteretto asked if we know where trees were lost in the past and why because we have planted on Martin Luther King Blvd. twice in the last decade, and every tree planting plan at this level is usually reviewed by the Tree Advisory Committee and that protocol is important as the members of the committee have a certain amount of expertise and are here to advise, and asked if the planting locations have been chosen and if the committee has seen them.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF FALL 2024-SPRING 2025 TREE PLANTING LOCATION LIST

a. Surveying Existing Tree Request Sites/Locations- Collaboration with Tree Liaisons

Mr. Sotnik said over the course of the summer they will be looking for planting locations within the Martin Luther King Blvd. corridor area and when they find the tree pit locations and are sure it will fit within the sidewalk area the next step will be to determine there is a least a 4' sidewalk remaining and will then check the underground utilities, and at that point can make a recommendation for trees.

Mr. Viteretto said there is also a priority on where the focus is because we have had strategic approaches to where trees are planted and try to get canopy directly on Martin Luther King Blvd. so these tree locations have a certain degree

of multiple levels of deciding where they are planted and perhaps there is an early discussion before a lot of time is spent looking for utilities. Mr. Sotnik said looking for the utilities is the last thing that will be done and need to be sure the area will “hit the checkbox” of what the Tree Master Plan will require. Ms. Cruz said the Tree Master Plan will have a “zoomed out” approach like neighborhood by census block, and the actual canopy percentage, and in the planting prioritization plan the consultant will identify concentrated zones that should automatically be at the top of the list. She said Martin Luther King Blvd is specific in that it’s a specified zone and has it mapped and has tree points for everything that has been planted and suggested looking at that together and discussing. Mr. Viteretto agreed and said that could be an initial approach.

Ms. Cruz said we have close to 175 tree requests that still have not been surveyed and need to get to the back log before taking additional requests.

Mr. Sotnik said as part of the corridor initiative in the mapped area the grant targeted the section of Woodward Avenue intersection and areas where there are huge amounts of pavement in heat islands which can be looked at for potential tree pits and plant trees and would “check the box” of the Master Plan. Mr. Viteretto agreed and said that historic tulip trees were lost in that area. Mr. Whitehead said he believes the tulip trees that were removed were all on private property.

Mr. Whithead asked if it makes sense to locate the utilities before choosing the tree pit locations. Mr. Sotnik said it will be a coordinated approach.

Mr. Viteretto said it has always been a personal priority if not a recommended priority that the most amount of planting is focused in the most visual and prominent areas that we can so that the city sees where the money is going which is important on getting more funding. Ms. Cruz agreed and said also by planting on entire streets where we can. Ms. Cruz said she has received a number of emails especially over the last couple of weeks following up on tree requests.

Ms. Cruz said the tree request list is on a map so she is able to overlay it with a neighborhood and asked how there could be more engagement and active involvement of tree liaisons, and would like to discuss ways to better recruit folks and keep people on board. Mr. Sotnik said it would be good to try and recruit some more people and suggested that Ms. Kipp, Mr. Whitehead, and Mr. Viteretto send him any planting locations that they may have as the next meeting will not be until August 27th and would like to coordinate the plantings between now and then for the September plantings.

Mr. Whitehead asked Ms. MacLeod if she thinks the liaisons are not being overly committed because of the time restraint by attending the meetings. Ms.

MacLeod said it is a combination and the ones that she has spoken to all have the enthusiasm but want to know how much time is involved and may want to do it, but they simply don't have the time, so she does not think giving people a time commitment is the way to go and thinks by being more flexible is the way to go. Mr. Sotnik asked if there is another approach to try to recruit people and get them involved. Mr. Whitehead suggested creating an email group for those who can't attend the meetings so that they can email the planting locations.

Mr. Sotnik suggested going street by street to the existing planting locations and try recruiting that way. Ms. Cruz suggested for the August meeting working together on creating a social media post about the tree liaison program. Ms. MacLeod suggested working with the schools to have a flyer sent home with the kids and also with the PTA. She also suggested working with religious organizations to promote the program through their congregation.

6. REVISED TREE REQUEST FORMS

Ms. Cruz presented the flyer and asked the committee for any input they had. Mr. Viteretto said in the guidelines where it states the program is not intended to provide landscaping, he thinks landscaping is a derogatory term for landscape architecture/design etc. and suggested using the term tree planting instead.

Mr. Whitehead suggested attaching the form when posting on social media to try and gain more tree liaisons. He also suggested that the form state the Tree Advisory Committee, so they know who they are contacting and is linked to the Tree Advisory Committee via the City of Norwalk. Ms. Cruz said the updated form now mentions the committee and departments who are managing the program. Mr. Whitehead said he would like to see it at the top of the form. Ms. Cruz said the purpose of this form is that it comes from the city, and she has been directed to format it, but it does mention everyone who is involved.

Mr. Viteretto suggested in the last paragraph to add please provide your information to the Tree Advisory Committee. Ms. MacLeod suggested adding the location of where the tree will be planted along with a photo of the location. Mr. Whitehead suggested adding the request requires the property owner's permission. Mr. Viteretto suggested adding a link on the form to the guidebook. Mr. Whitehead suggested adding a third column for average mature height because it varies.

7. TREE LIAISON(S) UPDATE

Ms. MacLeod said she continues to try and recruit tree liaisons as well as helping Ms. Cruz to look at the planting locations that have been requested. Ms. Cruz said that she will organize them by neighborhood.

8. UPDATE – ALMSTEAD TREE WATERING/MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

Mr. Sotnik said that Almstead Tree has sent him their updates and are in compliance with the contract terms and has been watering as they install trees. He said that Ms. MacLeod had mentioned that the trees on Mott Avenue were watered in the beginning of June when they were installed but are not looking good so he will contact Mr. Norman and request that they are revived or replaced.

9. UPDATE – MINUTEMEN LAND SERVICES TREE WATERING/MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

Mr. Sotnik said he has also received the updates from Minutemen Landscaping, and they have watered the trees that were installed and there are a few trees that already need to be replaced.

Mr. Whitehead said getting a water truck has been discussed in the past for the trees that had failed or are beyond their warranty and asked if any progress has been made. Ms. Cruz said through the grant they received from the US Forest Service and are hoping to acquire the funds this year which will create two seasonal full-time positions next year and will be able to rent a watering truck through the summer months to do additional watering for the trees that are no longer under warranty.

Mr. Viteretto said the trees that were planted in the planters on West Main Street do not look good and if they don't get watered regularly, they are going to die and have already been replaced once and there was a discussion in the past to have them moved to River Street. He asked if there is some mechanism to get them watered by the city because the store owners are just not going to do it. Ms. Cruz said that operations just don't have the capacity. Mr. Sotnik said in the next contract they can look at a third year of watering if the same prices will be maintained. Mr. Viteretto said if the city doesn't have a mechanism to keep planters like these watered, let's find a place where they can be. Mr. Viteretto asked who manages the pots on Wall Street and South Norwalk. Mr. Sotnik said the Redevelopment Agency has a program where that was done in the past. Mr. Viteretto said this is the second time that money has been invested in the planters and in his mind, it looks like the street is in deterioration because the planters don't look good and said perhaps, they can be added to the tree potting program where the vendor puts flowerpots in them and keeps them watered while keeping the trees watered at the same time. Ms. Cruz said she will look into options. Mr. Whitehead asked if it is worth revisiting the discussion regarding the planters on Main Street by the

chocolate shop and speaking to the owners because a lot of the owners in the area may have changed since the planters were originally installed.

10. REPORT – NTA ACTIVITIES

There was no discussion.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed this evening.

12. ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. WHITEHEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

****MR. VITERETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd