



**CITY OF NORWALK
TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
Norwalk City Hall
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TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING **April 23, 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
Sonja Oliver
Peter Viteretto

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

Others: Jeff Scherr, President, Norwalk Tree Alliance
Gay MacLeod, Tree Liaison

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairperson Whitehead called the meeting to order at 6:01 P.M.

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 MARCH 26, 2024

**** MS. OLIVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

4. UPDATE - 2023 TREE CITY USA RECERTIFICATION APPLICATION

Mr. Sotnik said that on March 27, 2024, he received notification from the Arbor Day Foundation that the City had been recertified for the 2023 year as a Tree City USA, which makes it the 20th consecutive year that Norwalk has been certified as a Tree City USA.

Mr. Sotnik shared a photo of the plaque that was presented by the Arbor Day Foundation. Mr. Whitehead asked if the signs will be placed at the entry points in the City. Mr. Sotnik said "yes," there are existing signs and that there are new stickers that will be placed at those locations with the 20-year status, and the plaque is at City Hall. He also stated that he is working with CT DOT and Economic and Community Development to have two additional signs placed at the exit ramps of I-95 at exit 16 as had been previously requested.

5. UPDATE - 2023 TREE CITY USA GROWTH AWARD APPLICATION

Mr. Sotnik said he received notification from the Arbor Day Foundation March 22, 2024, that the City of Norwalk has also received the Growth Award for 2023. Mr. Whitehead asked how many years the Growth Award has been received. Mr. Sotnik said that 2023 is the 18th consecutive year. He stated that a municipality has to be certified as a Tree City USA for two (2) consecutive years before being eligible to apply for the Growth Award, therefore the two (2) year difference. Mr. Whitehead asked if the stickers would be placed under the Tree USA signs.

6. TREE CAMPUS USA - CT STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE NORWALK

Mr. Whitehead said that the college also received the recertification as a Tree Campus USA.

Mr. Viteretto asked if there was something more permanent than the vinyl sign on the stone wall. Mr. Whitehead said he will inquire and report back to the Committee.

7. UPDATE - CAPITAL/GRANT FUNDED TREE PLANTING PROGRAM

a. Continued Development of Planting Locations List for Spring 2024

Mr. Sotnik said there have been 105 locations staked and orders have been placed for all the locations. Ms. Cruz said across from Woodward Park at Burrett Avenue and Mack Street, there are just a few London Planetrees, but nothing else, so 20-25 trees will be planted. She said on the corner of West Avenue and Connecticut Avenue, there was a nice design aspect which will hopefully make the area more pronounced as an entrance to the City. Mr. Viteretto suggested also planting additional Magnolia Trees.

Ms. Cruz said that along the NRV, where the cleanup will be held tomorrow, at the request of TMP staff we will be planting a couple of trees with a mix of some shrubs along the roadside so that the trail walkers will feel safer when walking on the trail. She said once the cleanup is done another 10-15 trees can also be planted on the inside of the trail and proper topsoil will be mixed in during the plantings to ensure the trees are not being planted into straight fill material. Mr. Viteretto asked if the invasives will be removed along that stretch during the cleanup effort. Mr. Whitehead said that invasive vines will primarily be targeted and we will remove anything that threatens the bike trail or the roadway from New Cannan Avenue to 38 Riverside Avenue.

Mr. Sotnik asked the Committee members if there are any other planting locations for the Spring that they would like to include. Ms. Oliver said it was previously discussed additional trees would be planted around SONO Gardens. Mr. Sotnik said there are several options for funding in that area so he will schedule a time for him and Ms. Cruz to meet with Ms. Oliver for a site visit. Mr. Whitehead said he had mentioned that there is a few London Planetrees on MLK from a planting that was done seven (7) years ago that are dead and out of warranty and should be replaced. Mr. Sotnik said there will also be a planting at Woodward Park that Mr. Scherr had mentioned and in addition to those there are several other locations that he received requests for tree plantings. Mr. Whitehead asked if there will be a list kept of the trees that don't get planted during the Spring installations so that they can be planted in the Fall. Mr. Sotnik said "yes."

b. Approved FY 2024-2025 Capital Budget Funding

Mr. Sotnik said the capital budget process is over and on April 9, 2024, the Common Council approved \$100,000 for the DPW/TAC tree planting budget, and Recreation and Parks was approved for \$50,000 for fiscal year 2024/2025, which will be available after July 1, 2024. Mr. Viteretto said we should be choosing projects that are visible and the work that has to be done should focus on the primary arteries, entrances, and public areas helps to keep that budget amount in place and we will need to keep doing that. Mr. Whitehead agreed and said when the

larger plantings are done it makes a visual impact. Ms. Cruz said upon her arrival she noticed that in a lot of the parks there are only mature or overly mature trees so keeping this budget and considering succession in these plantings is important.

**8. UPDATE - 2024 NORWALK EARTH DAY EVENT ON THE NORWALK GREEN –
APRIL 27, 2024, 12:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.**

a. Tree Advisory Committee Table

Mr. Sotnik provided an overview of the Earth Day Festival and said it will be held on Saturday, April 27, 2024, from 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. and Ms. McLeod has agreed to staff the Tree Advisory Committee table and the pruning guide will be available as well as other TAC brochures. Ms. McLeod said more importantly, more tree liaisons need to be recruited, so she will have a signup sheet available. Mr. Viteretto said that Norwalk has 10 - 14 neighborhood communities/associations, which is great for a City and liaisons being tied to a community may give them more of a sense of empowerment and suggested bringing a list of the different communities/associations to the festival. Mr. Sotnik said he can provide a map along with a list of the communities/associations.

b. CT State Environmental Science Club

Mr. Sotnik said that Ms. Kipp will also have a table with the students from the CT. State Environmental Science Club.

c. Recreation and Parks Table and Demonstrations

Ms. Cruz said that Recreation and Parks will also have a table displaying the community garden and she will have a tree activity for the kids, as well as a poster for the Tree Master Plan so that people are aware of the progress and what it entails. She said there will also be a pruning demonstration and she would love help from any of the Committee members. Mr. Sotnik said that one (1) of the two (2) Sugar Maple Tree will be fully planted and the other one will be partially planted for the planting demonstration. We will also be giving out 100 Douglas Fir seedling/plugs. Mr. Viteretto said that the Elm trees on the Green that the First District had cut within the last couple of years have still not leafed out yet this season, making it more difficult to see, but they are clearly an example of why trees should not be cut the way they did, and suggested Ms. Cruz point that out during the tree pruning demonstration.

**9. UPDATE - PLANNING FOR 2024 ARBOR DAY CLEAN-UP EVENT –
APRIL 24, 2024, 8:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.**

Mr. Whitehead said the cleanup will take place at the new section of the NRVV opposite Riverside Cemetery on Riverside Avenue and they will be working from the corner of New Canaan Avenue to 38 Riverside Avenue and the cleanup will be for volunteer tree companies only, and not for the general public due to work zone safety and the type of

work being done. He said the cleanup will take place from 8:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. and lunch will be provided, and that this is the third consecutive cleanup event. Mr. Sotnik said that the dignitaries and politicians have been invited and he has been in contact with the CT DOT to make them aware of the cleanup, as it is technically State property, but there is a maintenance agreement between the City, the NRV and CT DOT. He said he also received the declaratory ruling from the Conservation Commission for permission to do the work because technically, it is next to the river in the wetland buffer area so, they needed their approval, which he has received. He said the replanting plan for the corners of West Avenue and Connecticut Avenue that were done as part of last year's cleanup event will be displayed.

Ms. Cruz asked if the chipping will be done onsite for the cleanup. Mr. Whitehead said they will be chipping onsite along the new trailway and in the past have offered the tree companies a location to dispose of the mulch if they wanted to. Mr. Sotnik said the declaratory ruling for the Conservation Commission states because of the wetlands and buffer zones, any wood chips that are generated from the removal activities cannot be deposited within the wetlands or upland review area, and that trees in the wetlands may be cut flush, but the trunk and roots may not be grubbed out. Mr. Whitehead said the chips will be chipped into the back of the truck and removed from site and no stumps are being removed.

Mr. Sotnik thanked Mr. Whitehead for organizing the cleanup and getting the tree companies to participate at no cost to the City.

Mr. Viteretto suggested having banners installed on the fencing with the tree companies' information for public recognition.

10. UPDATE - PLANNING FOR 2024 ARBOR DAY - SILVERMINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - APRIL 26, 2024, 1:00 P.M.

Mr. Sotnik said that the Arbor Day Celebration will be held at Silvermine Elementary School on Friday, April 26, 2024, at 1:00 P.M. and the members of the Tree Advisory Committee are invited to attend. He said the principal is very excited to host the celebration and has requested that the proclamation be presented in both English and Spanish. He said a Sugar Maple tree and a Flowering Dogwood tree will be planted and 500 Douglas Fir seedlings/plugs will be given out at the event. He also stated that the Poster Contest has been completed, the winners have been selected and Recreation and Parks will be giving an award to the contest winners for a program that they conduct. Ms. Cruz said that each of the winners will receive one free program from Recreation and Parks and the teachers requested that she create a lesson focused on the benefits that trees provide and what people can do for trees in return and what can be done to take care of the environment, and that it will be a dual language lesson.

11. TREE LIAISONS UPDATE

Ms. Macleod said there are a few leftover tree plantings from last Fall, and one will be planted at the Congregational Church on Richards Avenue and the other will be planted at

the Temple Beth El Memorial cemetery. She said there is a line of Yew bushes along Richards Avenue and when she met with the Executive Director and she agreed to cutting through 5' to 6' swatches of the Yew bushes/shrubs to plant tulip trees but, the concern that Mr. Viteretto raised is when the Yew bushes/shrubs are cut out there will be browning for the first year or so and will look unpleasant, so she will be sending a detailed letter that the area will look messy until some of the yew bushes/shrubs grow back in, but the Tulip trees will be planted.

Ms. MacLeod said she would like to open a discussion to see if there are any thoughts of not cutting through the bushes because if not, they will need to walk away from the planting because there are no other options because of the layout of the cemetery, so she wants to be sure that everyone is on board with doing this. She said that someone will also need to be hired to cut through the bushes/shrubs, which is also a concern. Mr. Viteretto said planting the trees on the inside would have been better and may be able to plant between the plots. Mr. Whitehead said the bushes/shrubs don't do anything for canopy and the "lesser of the two evils" is to cut through the hedges even if creates some bare spots in the interim as the trees are more important. Ms. Cruz said the snow shelf in the area is 3' and she placed stakes for three flowering dogwood trees and tulip trees if that is what is being requested and planting in the Right-of-Way may be a better compromise. Mr. Scherr said the bushes/shrubs are fairly wide and suggested planting them within the yew hedge, but to leave the front untouched. Mr. Viteretto suggested going down a size to 2" to 2 1/2" caliper, but planting the trees within the bushes/shrubs as they will grow much better inside, as they will never mature in the snow shelf the way they will mature inside the cemetery. Mr. Sotnik suggested laying the plan out and having Ms. Cruz, Mr. Whitehead, and Mr. Viteretto review the plan and Mr. Whitehead suggested a site visit with Almstead Tree to evaluate the pruning in order to install the smaller trees before Ms. MacLeod sends the letter.

12. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES

Mr. Scherr reported and said that a few trees have already been planted and there is a volunteer planting that will be held on Tuesday.

Mr. Scherr said the Tree Alliance will have a table at the Earth Day Festival and will also have a table at the second annual NRVT celebration which will be held on May 4, 2024, from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.

Mr. Scheer said that the Tree Alliance would still like to be involved in planting along the NRVT. Ms. Cruz suggested a site visit after the cleanup so a plan can be mapped out for the planting areas. Mr. Scheer said that the Tree Alliance can also help with the tree plantings at SONO Gardens with a coordinated effort with the City.

Ms. MacLeod said there are a number of residents in West Norwalk that are interested in having trees planted and that she will contact Mr. Scherr to discuss.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Sotnik said that he and Ms. Cruz had a kickoff meeting for Spring plantings with

representatives from both Almstead Tree and Minutemen Landscaping.

Mr. Whitehead asked if it has been decided whether the Tree Advisory Committee can or cannot be mentioned on the tree installation request Form. Ms. Cruz said that staff is in the process of reviewing it and making edits, but as of now it will be called the Tree Request Form and, in the body, all the departments including the Tree Advisory Committee will be included and suggested a contact for the Tree Liaison Program so it can be included on the form as another way to advertise for that program. Ms. Cruz said the edits for the Tree Request Form and the Adopt A Tree Form will be presented at the next meeting. Mr. Whitehead said that a lot of people are not aware that there is a Tree Advisory Committee, and the Committee does all the legwork for the plantings and staking the locations and needs to get their name out there more. Mr. Viteretto agreed and said it has been a long-term issue and they have been trying to brand the Tree Advisory Committee for a long time particularly within inter-departments because as an entity, they don't necessarily have the brand name and they are here to advise and are often not used in that capacity. He said the Tree Advisory Committee has a logo and suggested that it should be included on the form as the Tree Advisory Committee has been trying to brand themselves for a while to be purposeful because they have things to contribute.

14. ADJOURNMENT

**** VICE CHAIR PERSON WHITEHEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Dilene Byrd