



**CITY OF NORWALK
TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
Norwalk City Hall
125 East Avenue, PO Box 5125
Room 225
Norwalk, CT 06856-5125
P: 203-854-7891
www.norwalkct.gov

TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING February 27, 2024

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting by telephone, Zoom, and/or the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at: norwalkct.gov/meetings



Members of the public can call in and listen to a meeting. They will not be able to speak or see any of the meeting participants. Each meeting will use a unique Meeting/Webinar ID. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" will need to register in advance and use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to view the meeting, but are not participating, can view a live stream on the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. This stream is delayed by approximately 20 seconds. Please find the information using the link above. The meeting recording and minutes will be posted on the City of Norwalk website within seven (7) days after the meeting.



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:	Erica Kipp, Chairperson Peter Viteretto Sonja Oliver Cindy Cossuto
Staff:	Paul Sotnik, Deputy Tree Warden Sarah Cruz, Arborist/ Horticulturalist Dilene Byrd, Secretary
Others:	Gay MacLeod, Tree Liaison Edith Romanello, Tree Liaison

Christopher Farrell, Eversource
Samuel Berg, Eversource
Jeff Scherr, President, Norwalk Tree Alliance

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Kipp 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 NOVEMBER 28, 2023

**** MS. OLVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**
**** MR. VITERETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

4. APPROVE MINUTES OF THE TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF JANUARY 23, 2024.

On page 5, change "Clocky" to "Klocke"

**** MS. OLVER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**
**** MR. VITERETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

5. 2024 EVERSOURCE DISTRIBUTION TREE TRIMMING PERMIT

Mr. Berg reported and said their focus on roadside distribution is essentially on the lines that run from the transmission station to homes, and the maintenance for those lines is crucial for reliability and safety and they trim the lines on a four-year rotation. He said the schedule for Norwalk is very similar to what was done in 2020, where approximately 80 miles was scheduled, and the primary portion will be out of the Riverside Substation which is located at the bottom of Route 123. He said there are two trimming specifications for those lines and they will be primarily focused on the lines at the very top of the pole. He said the maintenance has been ongoing for quite some time and they will be cutting back to where they were in the past, but they are looking at 2024 in a more data driven approach and are prioritizing their efforts on areas where the work will improve resiliency for the system so that less people will be without power over larger events, and they will be making more of an effort to move resources into areas that are going to have a better

impact on the resiliency or reliability of the system as whole, by reducing the larger number of outages, as well as reducing the time they will be affected. He said they will be focusing on backbones and critical infrastructure that can be impacted by trees that are clearly a hazard and will focus on trees that are clearly hazards and severely decayed, and will not be going after living trees that are structurally sound.

Chairperson Kipp asked if the trees that are being targeted through the data driven approach are City trees or residential trees. Mr. Berg said that it will be both and any of the trees that are in the City Right-of-Way will be brought to Mr. Sotnik or Mr. Torre's attention, but again, they will only focus on trees that are clearly a hazard or severely decayed. Chairperson Kipp said that she appreciates them making that distinction because in the past Eversource has been criticized for heavily trimming and removing trees that are not obviously imperil. Chairperson Kipp asked when the work would begin. Mr. Berg said they have begun the permission process and trimming process. Chairperson Kipp asked if the process for residential trees would be that the homeowner would be contacted. Mr. Berg said "Yes," and they have permission specialists and their team that will be working in Norwalk is Lewis Tree, and Mr. Sotnik has all of their contact information, as well as the permission specialists contact information, and the permission process is a door-to-door approach in which they will make multiple attempts to contact the property owner to get permission or consent. Chairperson Kipp asked if the people who will be approaching the homeowners have been trained. Mr. Berg said they have had training specific to their role.

Mr. Viteretto requested that Mr. Sotnik distribute the map of the areas that are scheduled to be trimmed to the Committee members. Chairperson Kipp asked if any of the Committee members has a question to respond to Mr. Sotnik so that he can respond to Mr. Berg in one e-mail with any questions/comments that anyone has.

Mr. Viteretto asked if Eversource has a vegetation management plan so when they look at the upgrades to utility lines, they look at the value of tree covered streets versus not, and how the tree canopies equate into the value of where they upgrade their facilities. Mr. Berg said when they look at upgrading their systems they are looking at upgrades that will work with the tree canopy and usually include the installation of new conductors with "tree wire" which is a coated wire, as opposed to a bare wire. The new wire will take the impact from limbs far greater than what they previously utilized, but it is a slow process as there is over 16,000 miles of line in Connecticut. They look at areas that have more related outages from impacts of trees based on historical data. He said their approach is two-fold and they look at it from an engineering standpoint, as well as a vegetation standpoint. Mr. Viteretto said from the observer's point of view they don't see the trees getting equal value in the balance, but it is something worth discussing because the tree canopy equals economic value of the real estate in the neighborhood that you are in and that is what he is concerned about. He said he understands that upgrading the utilities is very important, but the value of the tree canopy is also needs to be considered.

6. UPDATE - TREE MASTER PLAN

Chairperson Kipp welcomed Ms. Cruz to Norwalk and the Committee is excited to have the position filled by someone with her background.

Ms. Cruz said she joined the team in December and is working under the Recreation and Parks Department under Mr. Hughes and her position is arborist/horticulturist and most of her work will be with citywide tree management and will be assisting with the tree planting contracts and working closely with DPW, but her primary focus is on the Tree Master Plan that a consultant is currently working on. She said the other part of her job is the horticulture aspect so she will be working on a Land Management Plan for all City agencies to work from, especially with the new pesticide ordinances.

Ms. Cruz provided an update on the Tree Master Plan and said the consultant has completed the citywide canopy analysis which will be a huge piece of what goes into the Tree Master Plan, especially for the locations where efforts should be focused on to plant trees, and not just on Right-of-Way properties, but also getting public buy-in to increase the canopy on private property as well. She said the consultant also completed an inventory of just over 4,000 trees in South Norwalk and are also noting areas that seem suitable for future plantings, with a new grant that was received from the Inflation Reduction Act, they are hoping to have them inventory the entire City to capture 75%-100% of public trees.

Ms. Cruz reported on the next steps and said that the internal stakeholder meeting was held to get their input, so the consultant understands fully what the priorities are within the City to best guide the Tree Master Plan. She said the next step is to meet with external stakeholders to get their input. She said she has more updates forecasting what the next year will look like and Mr. Sotnik will share it with the Committee members. Chairperson Kipp said one of the things the Committee has tried to do is maintain the tree inventory and for the past two summers she has written a grant to get funding to support a student working on that and asked if she would like to speak to some of the students and maybe a possibility of an internship. Ms. Cruz said "absolutely" and if they can have an internal program to do more of an intimate survey of public spaces it would be great and that way the consultant can focus on more of the difficult areas to reach.

Mr. Viteretto suggested that Mr. Berg work with Mr. Sotnik on the trees that have problematic issues and plan to possibly replant the trees further back from the wires so that they don't pose a conflict moving forward, but will keep the tree canopy that they want to keep in place. Mr. Berg said that is a great point and the surveys are currently taking place, so he does not have a complete list yet to submit to Mr. Sotnik or Mr. Torre. Chairperson Kipp also agreed that it is a great idea and requested that Mr. Berg follow up with Mr. Sotnik once the surveys have been completed. Mr. Berg said he will present the list at the next meeting.

Mr. Sotnik said Mr. Berg represents the Distribution line portion of Eversource, but a permit will also be issued to the Transmission line group of Eversource, that has not been done in past years, and they will be presenting an update to the Committee for the Transmission line group of Eversource at the next meeting.

Mr. Scherr said that anywhere a City tree cannot be designated because it is on private property, the Tree Alliance will help with tree plantings at those locations.

7. UPDATE - CAPITAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM

- a. Development of planting locations list for Spring 2024
Mr. Sotnik reported and said there are some points that they are giving recommendations on for planting so we will be taking those, as well as the On-Line Request Form that he and Ms. King had put together back in the fall from which they have 72 e-mail requests. He said if the Committee members have any planting locations to let him know and he will put together the list of spring planting locations which will be approximately 250-300 trees. Chairperson Kipp asked what the deadline is to send in the planting locations. Mr. Sotnik said by March 15, 2024, at the latest. Chairperson Kipp said the online form may need to be revised and shared with Ms. Cruz for input and have it posted on the website.
- b. Available budget for spring 2024
Mr. Sotnik said for Spring 2024 between the funding sources remaining from the MLK Drive Corridor Initiative grant through Economic and Community Development there is still an available balance of \$144,596.75, there is \$245.25 remaining from the DPW APRA monies, there is \$184,776.75 remaining in the in the Economic and Community Development ARPA monies that they let us use for tree plantings, as well as a little bit remaining in the DPW Capital Budget account for tree plantings. The total available balance is \$330,830.02, and the APRA funding has to be spent by December 2024.

Replacements

- a. Various locations - Working with Almstead and Minutemen.
Mr. Sotnik stated that he is working with both Almstead and Minutemen Land Services related to the necessary replacements.

8. PLANNING FOR EARTH DAY 2024 - TAC TABLE - APRIL 27, 2024

Chairperson Kipp said the Earth Day celebration will be held on the Norwalk Green and has been growing each year since it started a few years ago, and there has always been a table for the Tree Advisory Committee. Mr. Sotnik said the time will be expanded from last year and will run from 12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M., and the next planning meeting will be held on Thursday, March 14, 2024, at 12:00 P.M. He said there will be a couple of tree plantings and a pruning demonstration, and the Tree Advisory Committee table will have information and handouts and if anyone is interested in manning the table to let him know. Ms. Cruz said the Recreation and Parks Department will be giving some gardening information and she will have a poster displaying the Master Plan and more specifically the inventory that has taken place and Eco benefits.

9. PLANNING FOR 2024 ARBOR DAY CLEAN-UP EVENT - APRIL 24, 2024

Mr. Sotnik said he spoke with Mr. Whitehead, and he thought it would be a really good idea to continue with the Arbor Day cleanup and they will look at the next section of the Norwalk River Valley Trail to hold it. Mr. Berg has offered to the use of Lewis Tree for the event which will take place on April 24, 2024. He said as they clean the area up it may be a good location for additional tree plantings. Chairperson Kipp said the event has grown over the years and is a great showcase for a lot of the companies that are in Norwalk, but

pointed out that it is not an event for the public to attend, but it is a professional cleanup by tree companies. Mr. Sotnik said there are approximately six companies that volunteer a half of days' time at no cost to the City to do this work to make the public aware of the necessity for tree maintenance work. Mr. Viteretto said depending on the location the trees they may need to be pre-tagged because there are good species there that are native and should stay, as well as multiple native invasives and predetermines what the landscape sculpt is like and when completed should be effective. Mr. Sotnik said at the areas that were cleaned out last year by the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and West Avenue, Ms. Cruz is putting together a planting plan for the Spring and it will be unveiled at the event.

10. UPDATE - PLANNING FOR 2024 ARBOR DAY- SILVERMINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - APRIL 26, 2024

Mr. Sotnik provided an update and said that he met with the Principal on February 12, 2024 and they are very excited to host the event and will continue the tradition of doing the plantings and we will look for volunteers to do the judging for the poster contest. He also stated that the teaching component that was done by Double Tree in the past will now be done by Ms. Cruz. He said the next meeting is scheduled for March 22, 2024, at 11:00 A.M. at the school.

11. TREE LIAISON(S) UPDATES

Chairperson Kipp said that Ms. MacLeod has been working hard on recruiting tree liaisons and she would like to schedule a luncheon/training session with the new tree liaisons in the spring to go over what their role is. Ms. MacLeod agreed and said that is a terrific idea to get the tree liaisons more involved than they have been. She also said that it is disappointing that the two liaisons that had signed up are not at the meeting this evening, but she will reach out to them and give them an update.

Ms. MacLeod said that she will send Mr. Sotnik some planting locations as well as the carryovers from last year which include the Congregational Church and Temple Bethel Memorial Park on 220 Richards Avenue. Mr. Viteretto said the Yew's are not going to look good once they are cut back to create a space to install new trees, but he will have a discussion with Ms. MacLeod offline to further discuss.

12. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES

Mr. Scherr asked if the tree in Woodward Avenue @ Dock Road that was dead had been replaced. Mr. Sotnik said he does not believe so, but is aware that it needs to be done.

Mr. Scherr said the Norwalk Tree Alliance has a list of plantings from interested homeowners that spans across Norwalk.

Mr. Scherr reported on the 2024 events and said there is an exciting concert event happening on May 4, 2024 at 5:00 P.M. with a rain date of May 11, 2024 at 5:00 P.M. and will be held at the Farm Creek Preserve and will be done in tandem with the Norwalk

Conservatory of the Arts as well as the Norwalk Land Trust. Chairperson Kipp requested that when there is a flyer done for the event that he shares it with the Committee.

Mr. Scherr said he has been discussions with Mr. Hughes and about looking at the Tree Farm at Fodor Farm a little differently and are looking at possibly planting more native trees and setting up a QR code system that will link to a self-guided audio tour, and will also be opening the fencing because currently it allows invasive vines to grow and is difficult to keep up with the maintenance and will try to eliminate that issue. He said they have also been having conversations with the schools specifically Jefferson School because they are a Maritime Magnet School and are looking to begin a relationship with them to talk about linking land and sea similar to the walks that have been done along the NRV, and talk about alternative transportation methods to get people around without cars and linking the walking trails to the river which is such a key component to Norwalk's history. He said there was another walk held at Calf Pasture Beach including an educational talk and were going to do one at Oak Hills, which they still will, but that it will be more of a bird watching walk.

Mr. Sotnik requested a final list of the tree planting locations, so the Tree Advisory Committee list and the Tree Alliance list of planting locations are shared so there is no duplication of efforts and overlap.

Mr. Scherr said he is looking forward to working with Ms. Cruz. He said they do have a list of planted trees that they have been concurrently keeping up with as trees are planted and would like to mesh the two and would like to work on that together.

Ms. Cruz requested that Mr. Sotnik share her contact information with the Committee members.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business discussed.

14. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. COSSUTO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

he meeting was adjourned at 6:59 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd