



**CITY OF NORWALK
TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
Norwalk City Hall
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TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING May 28, 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: Erica Kipp, Chairperson
Richard Whitehead, Vice Chairperson
Peter Viteretto

Staff: Vanessa Valadares, Chief, Operations and Public Works
Chris Torre, DPW Superintendent of Operations/Tree Warden
Paul Sotnik, Senior Civil Engineer/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

Chairperson Kipp called the meeting to order at 6:08 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 APRIL 23, 2024

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

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

4. APPOINTMENT OF SARAH CRUZ, AS AN EX OFFICIO NONVOTING MEMBER OF THE TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Mr. Torre said there are a few changes that he thinks would do the Committee and City well, one of which will be to appoint Sarah Cruz as the new liaison to the Tree Advisory Committee. He said that Mr. Sotnik will still be on the Committee, but will be doing more engineering work than tree work in the future. He said that Ms. Cruz is well-versed and is very knowledgeable about trees and thinks she would fit in well with the Committee.

Chairperson Kipp congratulated Ms. Cruz and said she thinks it's a great idea and that the Committee has been working with Ms. Cruz over the last several months and it has been a positive experience.

Ms. Valadares said she appreciates everyone understanding the change and Ms. Cruz has been attending the Tree Advisory Committee meetings since December, and the City is very happy to engage an arborist. She said it is very important how much the City has been planting trees with the available funding, and has also have been able to secure more grants, and this is just the beginning of the process they are starting and, in the future, will have a Forestry Division within the City.

Ms. Valadares thanked Mr. Sotnik for all his hard work and dedication for all the years on the Committee and has done a fantastic job and that is why the City is where it is and that he will still be involved with the Committee, but Ms. Cruz will be the point person to the Committee and will be more involved with preparing the agenda. She thanked the members of the Committee for all their work and said the more people that can be recruited will help the City.

5. UPDATE – CAPITAL/GRANT FUNDED TREE PLANTING PROGRAM.

a. Continued Development of Planting Locations List for Spring 2024

Ms. Cruz provided an update and said as of now there are 204 trees to be planted for the Spring and maybe staking a few additional locations. She said they met at the cemetery on Richard's Avenue with Ms. McLeod, and she is still working on that relationship for a potential planting and there are a few additional tree requests along with some requests from the Committee.

Mr. Sotnik said that just about all the Capital Budget funds for tree planting have been spent and after these orders are placed there will be approximately \$47,000 remaining in the ECD ARPA funding account, and there is also approximately \$126,000 remaining in the Dr. Martin Luther King Corridor Initiative Grant. He stated that there is a meeting scheduled for tomorrow to discuss possible tree pit locations. Ms. Cruz said with the grant funding from the Dr. Martin Luther King Grant, they are proposing the creation of new tree pits because there are certain areas in South Norwalk that are barren of any canopy and they are running out of locations to plant in areas that need the trees the most and are hoping folks will be receptive to the idea of tree pits. Mr. Sotnik said on July 1, 2024, there will also be \$100,000 available from the DPW Capital Tree Planting budget to be used for tree planting starting in the Fall of 2024. Chairperson Kipp asked when the funds need to be spent by. Mr. Sotnik said that Ms. Vonashek said there is no deadline to spend the \$126,000.

Mr. Viteretto asked what the additional cost will be for the tree pit in addition to the tree. Mr. Sotnik said the cost is approximately \$2,300 for both the tree pit and the tree. Mr. Viteretto said there is a priority when thinking about what the value of the tree pit is versus the quantity of trees planted because a great deal of money can be spent on infrastructure, but that is not necessarily what is seen and suggested so the City would be better to build the streets that can support trees in advance of tree planting, and every time a Capital project is done it should accommodate a tree pit that is built in the cost of the project and use the tree budget to plant the tree. Ms. Cruz said that is what is being done for the most part, but also not waiting for a Capital Improvement Project and being able to install tree pits where there is enough existing space. She said it is also a good idea to diversify how we plant and wouldn't be using all the remaining funding just for new tree pit creation, but will try to create at least 20-30 locations that did not exist before, which would be great for the neighborhood. Mr. Viteretto said he is just being cautious of the Capital Projects that don't use tree budgets that should be put under Capital dollars because the Committee has seen trees used to supplement Capital Development projects that might have been included as part of the overall Capital Budget and not the Tree Planting budget. Mr. Sotnik said moving forward they would like to see it become part of each of the Capital Project budgets totally, so the Tree Planting budget would be used solely to do other additional locations. He said the goal this year is to plant 600 trees so will need to plant approximately 400 trees in the Fall 2024 planting cycle, so if anyone on the Committee can find additional locations to please let them know.

Mr. Whitehead said if tree pits are installed in the sidewalks the caliper size will need to be increased because the branching structure on the 2 ½" caliper trees are too low. Ms. Cruz said it will need to be species specific.

6. UPDATE – ALMSTEAD TREE WATERING/MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

Chairperson Kipp asked if the watering is being done in accordance with the contracts. Mr. Sotnik said that Almstead Tree has not done any watering yet because of the weather that we have been having, but did fulfill their contractual obligation by letting him know.

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

Mr. Sotnik said it is the same thing with Minutemen Landscaping. He stated that they have also gone around and removed all of the polymer filled watering bags due to issues with the bags breaking.

Ms. Valadares left the meeting at 6:20 P.M.

8. UPDATE - 2024 NORWALK EARTH DAY FESTIVAL ON THE NORWALK GREEN – APRIL 27, 2024

- a. Tree Advisory Committee Table
- b. CT State Environmental Science Club
- c. Recreation and Parks Table and Demonstrations

Chairperson Kipp provided an overview of the Earth Day Festival and said it was a fantastic show of support and was the largest of the three events that have been held to date and it continues to grow each year. She asked if there was a total number of participants that had attended. Mr. Sotnik said there were approximately 1,000 participants. Chairperson Kipp said that other than the food trucks not being prepared for the number of participants and running out of food early, it was a fantastic success. Ms. McCleod said approximately 50 people had stopped by the Tree Advisory Committee table and had one person who showed interest in becoming a tree liaison, but unfortunately has not responded back, but she did get seven tree requests to add to the tree planting list. Ms. Cruz said she also received a few requests for trees at the Recreation and Parks table. Mr. Scheer said the Tree Alliance also had a table and that it was a fantastic event.

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

Mr. Whitehead said there was good attendance at the Arbor Day Cleanup Event and they made some new locations for tree plantings by the new section of the NRV. He indicated

that they will go back next year to continue the much-needed work further down the Trail. Mr. Sotnik said all the tree companies that attended volunteered their time free of charge to the City, and the DPW Tree Team also did some of the work and agreed that it was a great event. Chairperson Kipp said it is important that the tree companies that donated their time and services get some kind of recognition. Ms. Cruz said that there was a post on social media with videos and photos of the event.

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

Mr. Sotnik said that Principal Paredes was excited to host the event and was very happy to see that it was done in both English and Spanish and the Proclamation that was presented by Mayor Rilling was also done in both languages. He said that 500 seedlings were given to the students and staff, and they planted two trees. One was a Flowering Dogwood tree and the other was Sugar Maple tree. He said Ms. Cruz also did classes with the students and overall, it was a great event.

11. TREE LIAISONS UPDATE

Ms. McLeod said she is hoping to have the approval for the planting of five trees at the Jewish cemetery on Richards Avenue. Mr. Sotnik said that Ms. McLeod has been submitting additional planting locations over the last few weeks.

12. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES

Mr. Scherr reported and said the Tree Alliance continues to plant trees and has received a lot of names and contact information at the outreach events for tree plantings and will be planting a lot of trees this Spring. He said they will be doing the Third Taxing District tree planting in the Fall of 2024.

Mr. Scherr said on June 15, 2024 from 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. they will be holding a Bonsai class at Fodor Farm and it will be led by one of the NTA Board members along with a Bonsai Master and it will be the third time the event has been held and that it is a fun event.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Viteretto said Burns Construction has been parking underneath the Shagbark Hickory Tree on Silvermine Avenue and asked how they get a permit, but do not have to do tree protection. Mr. Sotnik said the permits are issued by DPW and they will be working with Ms. Cruz on developing a tree protection detail that will be part of the standard details so when a permit is issued and there are trees in the area, they will be required to protect them accordingly. Mr. Sotnik said in the meantime if anyone sees something like this to

contact DPW and the inspector assigned to the Project can say something to the contractor because they are always not on site and may not see that going on. Mr. Torre said it is also education because he is positive there was a police officer on site every day and is a City effort. Mr. Viteretto said the issue of tree awareness and tree protection is still not really apparent to the construction trades or the police. Mr. Sotnik said, like Mr. Torre mentioned, it is about education and them being made to do it so that it eventually becomes part of their daily work habit, but unless they are forced to do it, they will try and cut corners.

14. ADJOURNMENT

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:42 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Dilene Byrd