



**CITY OF NORWALK
TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
Norwalk City Hall
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TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING January 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 Chairperson
Peter Viteretto

Staff: Vanessa Valadares, Chief of Operations and Public Works
Robert Stowers, Director of Recreation and Parks
Paul Sotnik, Deputy Tree Warden
Sarah Cruz, Arborist/ Horticulturalist
Dilene Byrd, Secretary

Others: Gay MacLeod, Tree Liaison
Kathryn Sellschop, Tree Liaison
Anthony Cossuto

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairperson Whitehead called the meeting to order at 6:00 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

The approval of minutes was tabled due to a lack of a quorum.

4. INTRODUCTION – SARAH CRUZ – ARBORIST/HORTICULTURIST

Ms. Valadares introduced Sarah Cruz and said one of the reasons we brought her into the team is to help develop things related to the Tree Management Plan and tree planning, along with other things related to it, and she will be attending the Tree Advisory Committee meetings going forward. We are now going to begin to centralize all City Departmental tree planting requests through her, and as the Committee may be aware, we not only have a consultant working on the Tree Master Plan through Recreation and Parks, but we have also received some grants. She said that staff appreciates all the work the Committee does, but wants to be sure we are all aligned on the goal and what is best for the city.

Mr. Stowers said Ms. Cruz has a pretty good background particularly with Urban Forestry and she worked in New York and had a lot of assignments for the parks and also on the Rights-of-Ways, and she has been a consultant to city governments, as well as private entities and has a background in horticulture. He said part of the other reason she was brought to the team besides tree canopy was to do some land management plans for the parks so she will have a dual role in terms of her assignment over the next couple of years. He said she will be taking over the Tree Master Plan and will be working with Mr. Hughes and the consultants for the Master Plan on the canopy surveys with the stakeholders and the Committee will be involved in the surveys because they need to come up with an overall planting plan and management plan. He said she is also working on two grants and helping to revise the scope of work on the Urban Forestry current grant so that we can have more balance to our budget, and she will also be working on a new grant application for work force development which he finds to be very innovative, and will be working in concert with the Norwalk Land Trust.

Ms. Cruz said she is excited to join the meeting for the first time and in her experience, it seems like there is a really solid foundation for urban forestry in Norwalk and that she is excited to join the team and grow the program and formalize some parts of it and looks forward to working with the Committee. She said as Mr. Stowers has mentioned she will be

working on the Tree Master Plan and grants specifically the Connecticut Urban Forest Grant equity opportunity which the CT DEEP has put out, and she has an idea on how to grow a green workforce program and is hoping to recruit members of the community particularly those that may be at some disadvantages for other hiring opportunities and train them which would help them to enter a green workforce in the future. She said she is excited to work with the Committee and she will also be working a lot with Mr. Sotnik. Mr. Sotnik said with the grants that have been received the Tree Program is expanding. Mr. Whitehead agreed and said he would like to see it go to the next level. Mr. Viteretto said a green workforce is something we don't actually have and by having people on the ground helps us to actually make a physical effect which makes a difference. Ms. Cruz said that she has experience in creating Tree Management Plans with both private entities and municipalities and she is a very operational strategic person and everything she does she tries to operationalize it. Mr. Viteretto said he is looking forward to elevating the value of horticulture citywide because that's a component of landscape architecture that we don't usually talk enough about, and green infrastructure is something that we talk about, but is extremely difficult to implement unless everyone is working on the same page, so he is looking forward to her pushing the green infrastructure issues.

5. UPDATE - U.S. COMMUNITY URBAN FOREST GRANT - NORWALK IMPROVEMENTS TO INCREASE URBAN FORESTRY PROJECT

Ms. Cruz said that we are in the process of revising the scope for that grant before it gets awarded and the money comes through officially so there are more specific details of implementation and she and Mr. Stowers will be meeting on Friday to get that finalized and share it with the City's Grants Coordinator. She said as long as the funds are available they may be able to be applied to the Spring 2024 plantings and noted that all plantings that are funded through this grant must be within the Justice 40 track which means that the forest service has specific areas that are mapped to show disadvantaged communities so all the plantings will need to go into those areas, and the consultant that is working on the Tree Master Plan and inventory is identifying planting sites as they go through the inventory, and through the grant funds, we will be able to expand the inventory to cover maybe 75% of Norwalk's street and park trees so luckily, we'll have some help from them identifying those potential planting sites.

Ms. Cruz said the tree canopy software is up and running and she believes they have inventoried approximately 4,500 trees so far just in South Norwalk and at Calf Pasture Beach. She said the program is user friendly, but there's a lot of intricate details that we can extrapolate from it such as a breakdown by species and set filters to see planting sites, and she and Mr. Sotnik have been in talks with the GIS Analyst for the City to discuss integrating the current and previous GIS inventory information into the software and create a sufficient work flow to be sure the program can be used in the future and at the end of the project, they hope to have a public facing map that shows people where trees are distributed in the City. Mr. Stowers said one of the goals within the Tree Master Plan is to restore our forest back to a standard of coverage and are now working on what percentage of coverage that is adequate for Norwalk's population and will give the opportunity to use Capital Budget tree planting funds in other parts of the City. Mr. Viteretto said one of the aspects that have been difficult in South Norwalk is addressing property ownership. Mr. Sotnik said that Ms. King had presented the GIS 123 Survey software

program for geolocating the trees to the Committee previously, and there are currently just over 1,000 point locations in it for newly planted trees that have been located and this new Tree Plotter software will be able to import all of that information into it. Mr. Whitehead said one of the challenges has been supplemental watering. The current tree planting covers the first two years of watering, but beyond that has been a bit of a challenge to provide supplemental watering and that it would be greatly appreciated if Ms. Cruz could work on that as part of the maintenance program. Ms. Cruz said as part of the US Forest Grant that has been awarded and we are working on revising, there was a budget for a water truck and two crew members, and that would be one of their tasks.

Ms. Valadares left the meeting at 6:18 P.M.

6. UPDATE - CAPITAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM

a. Development of Planting Locations List for Spring 2024

Mr. Sotnik provided an update and said there is a list of locations that they have recommended planting for in the South Norwalk area as part of the grant so between those locations and the tree requests there are approximately 250-300 trees that can be planted in the Spring.

b. Available Budget for spring 2024

Mr. Sotnik said for Spring 2024 between the funding sources remaining from the Dr. Martin Luther King Drive Corridor Initiative grant through Economic and Community Development there is still an available balance of \$144,596.75 out of what was \$250,000, and there is \$245.25 remaining from the DPW APRA account out of what was \$200,000, and there is \$184,776.75 remaining in the in Economic and Community Development ARPA account that they let us use for tree plantings out of what was originally \$500,000, as well as a little bit remaining in the DPW Capital Budget for tree plantings, so the total available balance is \$330,830.02, but some of that work has to be done in South Norwalk, so will try and use the remainder of the ARPA monies elsewhere around the City. Mr. Whitehead asked if the available balance is for both Spring and Fall 2024 plantings. Mr. Sotnik said "yes," but the APRA funding has to be spent by December 2024.

Replacements:

a. Various Locations: Working with Almstead and Minutemen

Mr. Sotnik said he has spoken with both Almstead Tree and Minutemen Land Services about the replacement trees and they should be taken care of by the Spring.

7. UPDATE - TREE CITY USA AND GROWTH AWARD RECERTIFICATION APPLICATIONS

Mr. Sotnik said due to the various grant funding we have been able to plant even more trees this year than previous years. He said the population increased by approximately 440 people and per the Tree City USA guidelines, a minimum of \$2 per capita has to be spent.

For 2023, among all of the various Tree organizations in Norwalk, we spent \$12.53 per capita with all of the expenses totaling \$1,148,025.40. He said that there was a \$2.79 increase per capita over 2022, where \$9.74 per capita was spent. He said the requirements will be met very easily for the Tree City USA recertification which has already been approved by the State Forester and we are just waiting for the Arbor Day Foundation to approve it. This will be the 20th consecutive year.

Mr. Sotnik said the numbers for the Growth Award were also very good for 2023. 10 points are required for recertification, and were able to accumulate a total of 20 points for 2023. This will be the 18th consecutive year.

Mr. Whitehead asked if a Tree City USA sign can be added to the island at the Exit 16 ramp. Mr. Sotnik said “yes” but will need to get a permit from CTDOT. Mr. Viteretto suggested installing signs on both the north and south ramps. Mr. Sotnik said he will work on getting the permit and have the signs ordered.

8. PLANNING FOR 2024 ARBOR DAY

Silvermine Elementary School

Mr. Sotnik said that Arbor Day will be held on April 26, 2024, and he has spoken with the Principal of Silvermine Elementary School and she has agreed to host the Arbor Day celebration at the school. The first planning meeting will be held on February 12, 2024, at 11:00 A.M. at the school. Mr. Viteretto said recently there has been a good number of plantings done and could probably use a nice big native tree.

Mr. Stowers left the meeting at 6:35 P.M.

9. TREE LIAISON(S) UPDATES

Ms. Macleod said she sent out an invitation to the list of names that the Committee had to see if anyone is interested in becoming a tree liaison and she sent out twenty-two (22) e-mails and three (3) had responded and one (1) was not interested in joining, but said that she would provide possible planting locations, and the two (2) others welcomed the invitation and will come onboard and their names are Kathryn Sellschop and Steve Klocke and when they are not able to attend the meetings, she will keep them up to date on what the Committee is doing and will send them the minutes and address any questions they may have and help them along with all of the forms.

Ms. Sellschop suggested installing plaques with the information about the of trees for the trees that are planted at the schools as part of the Arbor Day celebrations to bolster and continue tree education. Mr. Sotnik said typically for Arbor Day there is some teaching done at the school and have had a partnership with Double Tree Hotels and they always had a teaching component for their employees to conduct, including a poster contest, but they are no longer in business, but would like to continue the teaching component and is open to ideas. Ms. Macleod suggested that the Committee members judge the poster contest. Ms. Sellschop suggested giving out a tree to the winners of the contest to plant on

their property or working with them to choose a location in their neighborhood to plant the tree.

10. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES

There was no report given.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Viteretto said he will drive along Richards Avenue for the tree planting near the cemetery. Mr. Sotnik suggested that Ms. Cruz and Mr. Whitehead also attend so that a recommendation could be made for a Spring planting.

12. ADJOURNMENT

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

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Dilene Byrd