

TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
AGENDA
AUGUST 26, 2025, AT 6:00 PM.
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING

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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, Chair
 Peter Viteretto
 Sonja Oliver

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

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Viteretto called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Viteretto called the roll, and all those listed in the attendance were present. There was a quorum present.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- A. **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.

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

- A. **Approve the minutes of the July 22, 2025, Tree Advisory Committee meeting.**

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

V. REPORTS

A. Tree Planting Updates

Ms. Cruz reported that over 50 trees were planted this past spring. The reason the number was so low was due to funding restraints. This year, the goal is to plant between 350 and 400 trees, and fortunately, the budget is not an issue. She has been communicating with Almstead Tree, so they are aware there will be a lot of orders in the fall.

Ms. Cruz provided an update on funding and stated that, following the tree planting in the spring of 2025, there is just under \$100,000 in the MLK/ECD account, which she would like to utilize as soon as possible. The 2025/26 DPW tree planting account was approved in the amount of \$200,000, which is a historic and double the amount from the previous fiscal year. There is also \$30,000 available in the GGP account, which she believes is money set aside from the SONO Collection to plant trees within the South Norwalk area. In the Recreation and Parks tree planting account, there is a remaining balance of approximately \$30,000. Therefore, the total available balance is \$360,000, which can be utilized between now and June 30, 2026.

Ms. Cruz said for this fall, her number one goal is to address all of the outstanding tree requests, as there are over 250 of them, and emails have been sent to those where the tree unfortunately cannot be planted in the area that they had requested, but there are a lot of locations that are viable for planting. The second goal for the fall is to create 10 new tree

pits, and she prefers to plant those areas later in the fall when the weather is cooler. The third goal for the fall is to resume the tree inventory this year and to set aside a budget within that project to identify up to 2,500 potential tree planting sites.

Mr. Sotnik said he and Ms. Cruz are working with the engineering division so that money is incorporated into the projects for tree plantings, rather than having to draw from the tree planting budget to maximize the amount of tree canopy.

Mr. Viteretto asked who determined the 2,500 planting locations. Ms. Cruz said the consultant who performed the tree inventory was Plan It Geo. When they conducted the inventory, they added the trees in the right-of-way to their system. The staff provided perimeters and had requested that they identify potential planting sites. Mr. Viteretto said in terms of prioritization of those locations, it was mentioned that people had requested plantings, but what he is not hearing is the original goals and objectives, focusing on major arterials in the city as opposed to individual homes, and he does not want to see the money spent on individual homeowners. He would rather see some of the prioritization go onto the main streets, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Drive. Ms. Cruz clarified that the tree requests are not all adopt-a-tree private tree requests, and, except for 12 viable requests, the rest are on public roads. However, she agrees with Mr. Viteretto that it will require more planning than just staking locations, but it is definitely a priority. Mr. Viteretto suggested scheduling a separate meeting to discuss a strategy that examines some of the criteria for how the money is being spent. Ms. Cruz said that now, there is a full canopy assessment from the Tree Master Plan, and it is possible to overlay the tree requests with that assessment. She noted it is limited in the South Norwalk area because there is so much pavement, so the tree pits are very important.

B. Tree Watering and Replacements 2023-2024

Ms. Cruz said over the last several months, they have been unfortunately seeing significantly lower survivability in the trees that were planted, particularly in the fall of 2024 and the spring of this past year. There are some that are very obvious and are receiving a lot of service requests, and she has been in discussions with both contractors to determine the issue. They have been instructed to remove the dead trees as soon as possible, particularly those located at the schools. There was minimal watering in May through early July, as the months were wet. All trees still under guarantee will be required to be replaced in accordance with the terms of the contract. Mr. Viteretto said the dead trees should be noted.

V. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Viteretto said it was discussed last month regarding the city's plans for moving forward with structural soils and whether the TMP department intends to use those specifications, particularly on Wall Street. He said it would be helpful to review and engage, as there are other support systems that are possible. Ms. Cruz said she had just received the details for the Wall Street project from TMP, and she also has another detail from a recent DPW project that is from

consultants. However, she questioned whether one could be created in-house as a city standard detail.

Ms. Oliver asked if anyone on the committee had any information regarding the request for a Ginkgo tree for the library. Ms. Cruz said she has been in contact with Ms. Harris.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Urban Forestry Goals 2025-2026

Ms. Cruz said that Ms. Kipp had asked about the goals for 2025-26. Ms. Cruz presented the 10-year roadmap from the Tree Master Plan and next steps, and asked the committee for their input on what should be prioritized or strategized to meet these goals.

Ms. Cruz suggested that the winter of 2025 would be a great time to strategize about planting 1,600 trees at an average rate of 400 to 500 per year. Mr. Viteretto noted that planting 1,600 trees is approximately \$1.2 million, given the contract and planting rates. Therefore, when the Tree Alliance plants trees, we need to take advantage of this opportunity. Ms. Cruz also encouraged homeowners to plant on their own as well as for development. Mr. Scheer suggested that the committee focus on the main arteries when possible and send him as many of the tree requests as possible, as those will mostly be planted on homeowners' properties.

Ms. Cruz stated that community outreach and engagement are a priority for this committee, as well as for the creation of her position, which involves strengthening existing relationships and building a more robust outreach and education component into the city's programs.

Ms. Cruz said the Tree Master Plan was adopted in April of this year and will need to be integrated into the POCD (Plan of Conservation and Development). Mr. Viteretto asked if this is an area that the committee could help develop language and have it integrated into city policies. Ms. Cruz said, "Yes," particularly with Planning and Zoning.

B. Update on the Public Tree Inventory

Ms. Cruz stated that the tree inventory is approximately 50% complete, based on the consultant's projection that there are 25,000 trees on public property. She said that benchmarking was used by comparing cities of similar size and geography. Ms. Kipp pointed out that while she understands there needs to be benchmarks, if they are going to look at statistics, they need to get real hardcore data, and she is more than happy to run statistics and get that information because they are probably in a much better position

than they look if comparing to a community much smaller than Norwalk. Mr. Viteretto suggested that Stamford should be the immediate comparison.

Mr. Sotnik announced that the DPW's annual open house will be held on Saturday, September 27th, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the DPW Operations Center, located at 15 South Smith Street. He said he would like to invite the Tree Alliance to participate again, as well as the Tree Advisory Committee. Ms. Cruz said that anyone who would like to participate should contact Mr. Sotnik. Mr. Sotnik said that non-perishable food items will be collected to be given to the Person-to-Person food pantry.

VIII. NORWALK TREE ALLIANCE UPDATES

Mr. Scheer provided an update and said there were no meetings held over the summer, but that they have been keeping track of the trees and have planted 122 trees since last fiscal year, which does not include the fall planting, where they anticipate more trees to be planted. They will continue to look for ways to supplement the requests received by the city.

Mr. Scheer said they have been organizing a scavenger hunt throughout the city, which serves as an educational tool to engage the community. The event, which is ongoing until September 2nd, has been a success.

Mr. Scheer said they had hired a summer intern, and she did very good marketing work for them regarding approved native tree plantings.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

- ** MS. OLIVER MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** MS. KIPP SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd