

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes

June 6, 2024, 6:30PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Shannon Wisniewski, Patrick Romano, Sandi Bush, Lee Hilbert, and Paige Strasko. Paul Strasko joined the meeting a few minutes after call to order.
- b. The meeting was called to order at 6:32PM.

2. Approval of Minutes from May 2, 2024

- a. Romano made a motion to approve the minutes from May 2, and Mr. Strasko seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

3. Old Business

a. Tree Ordinance

i. Permit fees and operations

- 1. Wisniewski asked if there were any questions regarding her and Romano's meeting with the Code Department to discuss procedure for enforcement, communication, and permit operations. No other members had questions regarding their meeting. STC members also discussed permit fees and using the miscellaneous fee for now. Bush asked what the processing time for permits is and Ms. Strasko explained there is not a lot of time in processing the permit paperwork. STC members discussed the cost burden to residents, not looking to compensate for staff time since they are already paid, applicants that pay for a permit and are denied, and lowering the permit fee. Ms. Strasko explained that residents will be refunded permits that are not approved.
- 2. STC members discussed a ten-dollar cost for tree removal permits, discussed clarifications of setting the rate to ten dollars, what that process would look like, and had a group consensus to change the permit fee to ten dollars.

ii. Tracking Presentation

- 1. Wisniewski presented the tracking spreadsheet she made for both STC members and the Code Department to track and check off stumps and trees that need to be removed in accordance with the new tree ordinance, as well as trees and stumps that are out of the public right-of-way that the STC members want to educate residents about.
- 2. STC members discussed adding a column to the spreadsheet to track when items are added to the list to understand how long the process takes for enforcement or contact, as well as adding a

column to describe which area of the Township the location is and using a grouping of neighborhoods to better direct members when looking for trees.

3. Andy Carr, member of the public, asked about the definition of right-of-way, that the definition needs to be clearer, and explained how he has determined if a tree is in the right-of-way since working in the Township by using the center of the tree trunk as a guide. Carr and STC members discussed the ordinance definition, using the center of the tree's trunk to be the determining factor for if the tree is in the right-of-way or not. Wisniewski stated that she would follow up for more clarification on the right-of-way definition.

iii. Notice to Residents

1. Wisniewski stated that she was working on templates for resident notification and that she is waiting for Code Department support and input for the templates. Ms. Strasko stated that the resident notification letter for the new ordinance is on track to be mailed by June 17, 2024.
2. Carr asked about provisions for emergencies with trees. Wisniewski asked for clarification on his question and Carr explained his work with emergency tree removal from storm damage, if residents would be required to get a permit for storm damaged tree removal. Wisniewski stated that the main concern for the STC is replanting and asked Carr to let someone in the Township know if a resident is not obtaining a permit to replant trees damaged or removed by storms.

b. Membership/Newsletters/Publicity

- i. Bush discussed various newsletter topics for November including a question and answer based on the questions received from the mailing about the tree ordinance, why removing dead trees and stumps is important, an introduction of the STC members, status of tree grants, and planting tips. Romano suggested including a topic for tree topping and prohibited activities as well as vine removal. Mr. Strasko discussed added fall tree maintenance with the saying "when you rake your leaves, check your trees."

c. Palmer Days Participation

i. Champion Trees Materials

1. Bush and Wisniewski discussed a volunteer resident that Bush knows for the Champion Tree program who can be their pilot for measuring and entering information on the Big Trees website.

ii. Equipment- range finder

1. STC members also discussed a measuring app for their phones that could be used and discussed purchasing a range finder for the Champion Trees pilot program.

iii. Logistics

1. STC members discussed a display board using photos from the volunteer Bush found for Palmer Days, the amount of space available in the Township booth for Palmer Days, and other groups that will be using the tent the same night as STC members. Bush stated that she would schedule a meeting with the volunteer for the Champion Tree program for STC members to discuss how to use the phone app for measuring and learning how to enter tree information on the Big Trees website.

4. New Business

a. Tree Removal Permit 1158 Stones Crossing Road

- i. The resident of 1158 Stones Crossing Road, Jonathan Fallos, attended the meeting to discuss the permit and process with the STC members and provide background information. Fallos discussed that the trees he removed were not healthy, how in recent years smaller limbs were falling off the tree, damage sustained to his home, and his worry of safety hazards that prompted the tree removal. Fallos apologized for not being aware of the ordinance change and explained his family's financial situation and that there were no funds for stump removal at this time. Fallos also asked for assistance with placement of trees for replanting, the eventual issue of a tree near the electric wire connected to his home and asked for more time as a relief to the replant and stump removal requirements.
- ii. Wisniewski explained that STC can assist in helping to find a place and type of tree, how Appendix A to the ordinance includes tree species suitable for planting under overhead utilities, that the permit is valid for one year, and asked about the pricing quoted for stump removal.
- iii. Fallos, STC members and Carr discussed typical stump removal procedures including grinding the stump about six inches below grade and covering the area with topsoil and grass seed.
- iv. Wisniewski made a motion to approve the permit under the conditions that Fallos removes the stump by the end of the calendar year, and replants two trees by the end of the permit period which is May 30, 2025. Romano seconded the motion, and the permit was approved with the noted conditions by unanimous voice vote.

b. Park Replanting

- i. Wisniewski and Bush discussed their attendance at the recent Recreation Board meeting and their plan to look at Palmer's parks as a whole and removing extraneous grass areas with tree plantings. STC members discussed prioritizing the park's aesthetic needs and the current ADA plan and assessment of the parks that is underway.
- ii. Hilbert discussed adding trees along the walking path in Old Orchard Park and not replanting trees on the steep hill where they were removed. STC members discussed the feasibility of plantings and justification for planting in all the parks as well as tree removals in other parks, having a site plan layout, the scope of plantings, looking for and determining an estimate for removal and planting work, and using a phased approach. STC members and Hilbert discussed asking Kistler for budgeting information.

c. Bike Path Replant Behind Anthony Ct

- i. STC members, Carr and Ms. Strasko discussed the area of removal on the bike path behind Anthony Court. Ms. Strasko explained the background of resident complaints, previous limb failures in windstorms, the most recent tree failure due to storms that caused residential property damage to a fence and trees falling in residential backyards, and that trees were removed at the recommendation of the Township arborist.
- ii. STC members briefly discussed types of trees to replant in the area, the care the trees will need, and buffer regrowth of all plants in the removal area. STC members stated they would visit the area in a few weeks after tree removal work was completed and would work on a replanting plan after seeing the removal area.

d. Fall Planting Event

- i. Wisniewski stated that she and Mr. Strasko have discussed holding two tree planting events a year, one for Arbor Day and one in the fall. STC members discussed bandwidth of the group to complete two planting events, and timing for a fall planting. Bush suggested tying the event in with an Oktoberfest celebration.
- ii. STC members discussed logistics of a second event, location of the planting, how much money would be needed for a fall planting event, how far in advance to advertise, and the scope of the proposed event. Members also discussed having a park planting tied to a sporting event, and that the Community Center recently had three trees removed.
- iii. STC members and Township staff discussed starting to advertise for an event in September, advertising outside of the Township newsletter, and

Wisniewski stated that she would brainstorm more ideas. Carr offered to sponsor a fall planting with hot cider and other items to offer attendees.

- e. Romano discussed stumps on Greenwood Avenue, how they are a disgrace to the Township and the Tree City USA designation, how he showed Bush where the stumps were located and that he heard the Township would be taking the land over. Romano discussed how the school district or current landowner should be forced to remove the stumps and clean up the area and discussed the no-man's-land in the area and the land on the North side of Route 22. STC members and Township staff discussed landowners of the areas Romano described, who to escalate these issues to, using property maintenance as the enforcing guidelines, and next steps for problem areas. STC members, Carr, and Supervisor Bellis discussed various project progress in the areas Romano described, site work that needs to be completed and the correct avenue to escalate these stump removals.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Supervisor Bellis was present and suggested that the STC meet with the BOS with their full board, that the members should get name plates for meetings, and discussed some of his ideas for Palmer Days including having trees in drums around the pavilion with species information and having an event at the Youth Center for Arbor Day with the Elementary School. Wisniewski explained her experience with the School District and the Elementary School administration, the difficulties of having an event at the Elementary School, and the STC's efforts to plan the Arbor Day event this year.

b. Tree City USA/Grant trees available

- i. Wisniewski briefly discussed a webinar for Tree Pennsylvania grant information coming up that she would not be able to attend, and Bush stated that she would attend the webinar and share with the group. STC members also briefly discussed meeting with Aaron Brockmeyer and that there needed to be a follow up with him for more grant information.

6. Public Comment

- a. Carr asked Ms. Strasko to email him a copy of the tree removal permit that he can share with his customers.

7. For the Good of the Order

- a. There was nothing additional for the good of the order.

8. Next Meeting: July 11, 2024

9. Adjournment

- a. Bush made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Romano seconded. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 8:40PM.