

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes

July 11, 2024, 6:30PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Paul Strasko, Shannon Wisniewski, Sandi Bush, Patrick Romano, Lee Hilbert, and Paige Strasko.
- b. The meeting was called to order at 6:33PM.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 6, 2024

- a. Wisniewski made a motion to approve the minutes from June 6, 2024, and Romano seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

3. Old Business

a. Tree Ordinance

i. Permit fee schedule vote

- 1. Wisniewski explained that at the last meeting the group had a consensus to change the permit fee to ten dollars, but Ms. Strasko was looking for an official vote. Bush asked about timing for discussion with the Board of Supervisors (BoS) and any updates from the Township solicitor. Wisniewski and Ms. Strasko stated that they received an update from the solicitor today, and that the updates to the ordinance were added to the agenda for the BoS meeting the upcoming Monday night.
- 2. STC members also discussed other permit fees in the area, if members still agreed on ten dollars, and permit fees in relation to the cost of the work the permit is required for.
- 3. Romano made a motion to recommend changing the tree removal permit fee to twenty-five dollars, and Bush seconded. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote and the STC members will present their recommendation to the BoS at an upcoming meeting.

ii. Romano asked about a previous discussion STC members had regarding sending educational letters to homeowners with dead trees and stumps that were outside of the right-of-way. STC members discussed the original intent of the letters, next steps for approval to send them to residents, how the tone of the letter may be perceived, and the possibility of using a focus group to gauge reactions and drive edits to the letter prior to mailing.

iii. Mr. Strasko discussed changing the wording of the letter to include it as a newsletter article for November. STC members discussed the possibility of including a newsletter article and sending personal letters to residents, as well as space in the newsletter and what articles and topics were already discussed for November.

- iv. Romano asked questions about language included in the educational letter and Wisniewski explained the intent and how STC members may be able to assist residents during the permit process.
 - v. Wisniewski summarized the discussion by stating that the next steps would be to draft an educational letter to bring to the BoS for approval and to form focus groups. Romano agreed to compile a list of 6-8 residents for a focus group to review the educational letter.
- b. Membership/Newsletters/Publicity**
- i. Bush discussed newsletter topics that were previously agreed on by the group and STC members discussed newsletter space with Ms. Strasko.
 - ii. STC members also discussed other topics of dead trees and stumps, vine removal, and utilizing newsletter topics as Facebook posts.
 - iii. Bush stated that she would draft the newsletter articles to bring for approval at the August meeting. STC members asked about the status of the last open seat. Wisniewski and Ms. Strasko shared that a new member will be appointed by the BoS at the upcoming Monday meeting.
- c. Palmer Days Participation**
- i. **Logistics**
 - 1. Wisniewski and Ms. Strasko briefly discussed poster size printing, printing at the Township building, and having an easel to display poster board information. Wisniewski mentioned writing a disclaimer for those that provide contact information for the Big Trees program. STC members also discussed other printed information to bring to Palmer Days including what was available at Arbor Day in April, if other commissions would be sharing the tent or table space, timing for STC members to be present at Palmer Days, what day they could attend, and other events going on during Palmer Days that the STC may have to plan around.
- d. Old Orchard Park Replanting**
- i. Wisniewski and Bush discussed a meeting with Scott Kistler and Jamie Paetzell that they had previously to discuss Old Orchard Park revitalization and support from the Public Works Department for grants and tree related goals and activities. Wisniewski stated that the meeting went well and Kistler and Paetzell were very supportive of the STC's initiatives.
 - ii. Wisniewski also discussed partnerships with other commissions including the Environmental Steering Committee (ESC) to work with on a revitalization project of the park, as well as the Stormwater Authority to determine if there are any planned stormwater projects for the park or the surrounding area. After discussion with Karen Adams, ESC Chairman,

Township staff and STC members, Wisniewski explained that there are a lot of moving parts various Township groups are working on.

- iii. Wisniewski and Bush also discussed the grant through PPL and Edge of the Woods Nursery they are working towards applying for, working backwards from grant deadlines, a grant focused on pollinator habitat, and possibly combining a planting event for the grant with Earth Day or Arbor Day in 2025. Wisniewski also discussed that the DCNR forester they met with stated he could support a future Arbor Day, and if the program works it could be replicated in other parks for future community events.
- iv. STC members and Township staff also discussed if these goals align with the ESC and STC, other items to consider such as stormwater projects, cost estimates, helpful plantings, timing and budgeting, how much assistance may be needed from consultants, networking with other contacts for materials, targeting the fall for this type of planting next year, and gathering specific questions for the arborist when she is able to attend the August meeting.
- v. STC members also discussed pine tree removal in Old Orchard Park, and asked what the cost of maintenance is for the trees that are still standing. Hilbert discussed storm damage to trees nearby in Labarre Park. Wisniewski ended the discussion by summarizing they need specifics from the cost estimate for the project, that the landscaping plan will most likely have to go out to bid, and Wisniewski will keep PPL in the loop for timing of a planting and possible bare root trees for their grant.

e. Fall Planting Event

- i. Wisniewski summarized that she spoke with Brenda Lazarus at the community center and discussed possible dates for a fall planting event at the community center, she found a doughnut truck to come to the event, will work on negotiating prices with them and discussed where and how to obtain trees. Ms. Strasko stated that there was a person looking to donate a tree for a retired employee to plant at the community center.
- ii. STC members discussed picking a date and finding three more trees to plant in the fall and discussed Snowscapes donating a tree, or other materials as discussed at the June meeting. STC members discussed and agreed that their first choice for a fall planting event at the community center out of available dates is October 19th, and their second choice is September 14th.
- iii. STC members and Hilbert discussed trees that were already removed from the site, sticking to trees that have a smaller height at maturity, and planting space near the building. Wisniewski stated that she would confirm dates with Lazarus.

4. New Business

a. Tree Removal Permit 308 S Watson Street

- i.** STC members reviewed the permit information and submitted photos for 308 S Watson Street, but the applicant was not present. Romano stated that he believed both trees should be removed. Wisniewski stated that while she and Bush met with the DCNR forester, they brought him to look at the trees for both permits on the agenda. Wisniewski summarized that the forester observed old mold on one of the evergreens and that the tree looks healthy now aside from the lower branches that were affected by the mold.
- ii.** STC members also discussed the intent of the permit process, what language is used in the ordinance versus allowing tree removals for aesthetics, that the planting plan for this permit is not sufficient and the STC members believe that the application is incomplete.
- iii.** Ms. Strasko stated that she would ask the permit department to communicate with the resident to update the planting plan.
- iv.** STC members and Ms. Strasko also discussed turnaround time for other permits, if permits should be discussed more frequently, ways to expedite the permit process, adding permit updates to the report section of the website, and that Mr. Strasko would review the permit for 308 S Watson Street once the applicant resubmits a complete planting plan.

b. Tree Removal Permit 136 Applewood Drive

- i.** STC members reviewed the permit application and submitted photos for 136 Applewood Drive and the applicants were present. Wisniewski opened the floor for the permit applicant.
- ii.** Jason Arias and Karina Rodriguez explained that their driveway was cracking after having it redone three years ago, there was damage to their vehicles from falling limbs, that their cable wire to their home was taken out by branches and recently replaced, and some of the branches are close to their home.
- iii.** STC members discussed from the photos it appears that their driveway is settling, that the tree appears to be healthy, but it needs to be properly maintained. The homeowner explained that they already scheduled an appointment, paid a deposit, and signed a contract with a company to have the tree removed completely before they were aware of the ordinance change. STC members asked if the contractor they hired also trims trees and asked that the homeowners have their contractor trim the tree to maintain it. STC members also asked about the contractor's information because it was not provided on the permit application and explained that the homeowner is responsible for the health of the tree.

- iv. Mr. Strasko made a motion to deny the permit application and Bush seconded. The permit application was denied by unanimous voice vote. Arias and Rodriguez asked about who is liable if the tree falls, stated that they are concerned about their son's safety, power outages, weather conditions changing, and other factors. STC members asked Ms. Strasko to send the residents tree service provider information that would be able to help them maintain the tree and to ensure that the person they have trimming their tree is trained in the practice.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Ms. Strasko stated that she had nothing to report for the BoS.

b. Tree City USA/Grant trees available

i. Tree Pennsylvania Webinar

- 1. Bush volunteered to attend an upcoming grant webinar.

ii. Bike Path Replant behind Anthony Ct

- 1. Wisniewski briefly discussed the bare root tree grant program, that they are looking for 15 trees to plant; seven in Fox Run Park, and eight along the bike path behind Anthony Court. STC members also discussed stump removal, that the DCNR forester notified the coordinator and provided them with an available tree species list to choose from. Wisniewski and Bush explained that the group needed to choose species from the available list and submit a plan for planting locations. STC members discussed choosing large tree species for the open areas, the preliminary application, that the grant agency will be choosing candidates on July 24th, and the final application will be due on August 9th.
- 2. STC members and Ms. Strasko also discussed beech trees in Labarre park that have a new nematode disease that there is not a cure for yet. Wisniewski explained that the forester recommends those diseased trees be removed since there is not a cure, and the disease has the potential to spread.
- 3. Wisniewski and Bush also informed Ms. Strasko that Snowscapes has not removed the stumps behind Anthony Court yet.

6. Public Comment

- a. There was nothing further for public comment.

7. For the Good of the Order

- a. Romano shared with the group that he has two more applicants for the PA Big Trees website. Wisniewski asked Romano to schedule a time for members to meet with the residents to measure their trees to submit.

8. NEXT MEETING: August 1, 2024

9. Adjournment

- a.** Bush made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Strasko seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 9:00PM.