

Palmer Township

Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes

November 21, 2022, 6:30PM at Palmer Township Municipal Building

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Jamie Collins, Paul Strasko, Scott Kistler, Lee Hilbert, Daniel Lichtenwalner, Joseph Armato, Paige Strasko. Patrick Romano came in shortly after the meeting was called to order.
- b. The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM.

2. Approval of meeting minutes from September 26 and October 24, 2022.

- a. Romano came into the meeting in time to make a motion to approve both sets of meeting minutes. Strasko seconded. The minutes passed unanimously.

3. Old Business

- a. **Sidewalk remediation-** The Commission started the meeting by discussing sidewalk remediation and bamboo with Lichtenwalner. Collins mentioned the residential posts on Facebook about fixing sidewalks and the fact that the ordinances do not give residents many options to fix the problem without harming the trees. Collins states she does not think the ordinances are environmentally friendly the way they are written and opens discussion to find a way to offer residents viable solutions to their sidewalks being lifted. Mr. Strasko discusses his construction experience on College Hill, redoing sidewalks and replanting trees and describes how the sidewalks curve around the tree trunks to give more growing room. Collins, Lichtenwalner, Mr. Strasko and Armato discussed possible solutions such as moving the sidewalk closer to the street and planting trees on the other side, discussing options with developers to make changes, and any changes that would need to be made to existing ordinances.
- b. Armato discussed the procedure for changing ordinances with the Board of Supervisors (BoS). Collins discussed what should be done for the homeowners currently experiencing this issue. Lichtenwalner discussed what he would tell residents that have this issue, he showed some special exceptions in the Township of curved sidewalks, and some of the problems with having sidewalks curved. Mr. Strasko, Collins and Lichtenwalner discussed problems with curved sidewalks not being uniform, not being the proper solution for every location, and the need for review by the Township engineer. Mr. Strasko also described his experience with street trees where roots were stopped from the street curb. Kistler mentioned keeping utilities in mind that are usually buried on the other side of the sidewalk. Kistler, Collins, and Mr. Strasko discussed specifics of utilities and reiterated that the main problem is with existing subdivisions, not future development. Collins reiterated her main issue is that homeowners can hire whoever they want to per the ordinances to fix the sidewalk and wants to give residents more professional guidance to protect the street trees and fix the sidewalks in a logical and aesthetically uniform manner. Collins mentioned working with Mr. Strasko on

construction details for homeowners for the future. Other options were discussed among committee members and Township staff, Armato suggested making a list of possible remedies for homeowners to decrease financial burden and have solutions for different scenarios around the Township. Lichtenwalner described the typical procedure when he finds a hazardous sidewalk, and that he currently tells homeowners options like lift the slab and cut the roots, but if there is a collective solution the STC can come up with, he would pass that along to the residents. Kistler also discussed the possibility of reducing the sidewalk width around street trees being planted. Collins asked if Lichtenwalner would be the one granting special exceptions and he described that Tom Adams would be the person who would grant special exceptions for sidewalks and explained that Adams has granted exceptions in the past. Collins also mentioned the STC may want to continue discussing options for future development, even if it is only a small percentage of the Township that is left to develop. Kistler discussed Penn's Grant development in the Township and the success with trees there, even though they were planted on private property. Ultimately, the STC and others present decided to work with Tom Adams to develop more solutions or exceptions for street trees.

- c. **Bamboo-** Collins and Lichtenwalner discussed the residence where planted bamboo was a problem, and Collins stated the landscapers she reached out to answered back stating if bamboo dries out, it is no longer viable. Once the pieces are dried, they can go in the chipper as normal for composting. Kistler reiterated that the Public Works facilities would need to have an area to store and dry bamboo if residents drop it off. Kistler also asked Collins if residents should be required to dry the bamboo before they bring it in, and Collins thought that was reasonable. Collins also mentioned making a social media post to alert residents and explain the drying requirements for bamboo. Kistler and Collins discussed bamboo removal on a new piece of Township property and the best way to handle a large scale drying and removal. Collins wanted to include photos of bamboo removal with the social media post to warn people of what the plant can turn into.
 - i. Collins and Kistler discussed the best options for removal, time of the year to complete removal, drying times, making sure all parts of the root are removed from the soil, and educating the residents on the issue. Kistler asked if the bamboo was able to freeze and die or does it need to dry completely? Collins stated she would reach back out to nursery growers and ask how freezing would affect bamboo. Collins again reiterated education, Lichtenwalner mentioned the STC putting together a blurb, and the two discussed enforcement of the bamboo ordinance. Collins stated she would have Ms. Strasko put together an article for her. Lichtenwalner stated he had to leave, but he would discuss the sidewalk issue with Adams and report back either through Ms. Strasko, or directly.
- d. **Tree removal permits/ordinances**

- i. Collins explained that she and Ms. Strasko had been working through ordinances, as she thought Armato had asked the STC to do and the two have realized that it is much more work than the volunteer commission is equipped to handle. Armato clarified that he was looking for the STC to make recommendations or suggestions on changes for ordinances. Collins and Armato discussed where the STC would like to go with ordinances, coming to a BoS meeting in November and presenting suggestions to the board. STC members reviewed a write up to BoS members explaining changes that the STC would like to see happen such as a tree preservation ordinance and tree removal permit ordinance. Romano expressed that he thought the removals should be stopped first before moving forward. Collins and Romano discussed what is needed to change ordinances for tree removal permits and understanding the process step by step. Kistler asked if a moratorium could be put in place on tree removals until the ordinances could be finalized and stated that would be something to ask the solicitor about. Commission members and Township employees discussed requirements for the moratorium and ordinance, conditions for mature and old growth trees, making exceptions for dead, dying, or diseased trees that are a hazard, how much the BoS may want to do, and the ultimate benefit to stopping tree removals. Collins stated she wants to have a conversation with the BoS and get more direction on what the whole board wants.
- e. **Where to plant 10 donated trees**
 - i. Nothing new, Kistler stated the trees will be planted on Williamson St., Collins stated the item can be removed since the tree locations have been determined.
- f. **Upcoming grant trees**
 - i. Collins stated this item will remain on to ensure the STC can work on grants to secure the Township trees when they are available.
- g. **Bamboo**
 - i. **Residential drying process**
 - ii. **Employee training**
 - 1. Discussed at the beginning of the meeting (3b)
- h. **Update Township tree planting standard construction documents**
 - i. Collins stated she had copies of the documents on her desk and will continue to review and work on updating them.
- i. **Storm damaged trees- will the Township be replacing trees damaged/knocked down after a storm?**
 - i. Collins and Kistler explained to Armato that residents had called after an anomaly storm that occurred in October in Old Orchard and had killed or knocked down live and healthy street trees. The residents were calling and asking if the Township would be replanting or replacing the street trees.

Kistler stated the old policy was not to replace these trees, but if the Township wants to move in a new direction, it is worth a discussion.

- ii. Collins also asked where the 160 tree removals stop that the Township has been working on piece by piece. Armato stated they have bit off more than they can chew currently and these tree removals will be the focus for now since they were not budgeted for.
- iii. Collins stated she thinks the STC should tell the public that the commission is reviewing the issue and will have more in the future, or as Armato said it is under advisement. Kistler, Collins, and Armato discussed future problems with street tree plantings and replacement plantings, but for now the STC would like to tell the public the issue is being discussed.

j. Protocol for residential messages/questions

- i. Collins asked how everyone felt the protocol for messages/complaints was working so far. Armato discussed the new protocol moving forward will be that Ms. Strasko receives a residential complaint, she will send it to Kistler or Lichtenwalner, and if they need a professional tree opinion, Kistler or Lichtenwalner will reach out to Collins for her expertise. Collins asked about Tom Adams being involved as well and Kistler explained the Township is trying to streamline the process and keep “too many hands out of the soup.” Kistler stated he thought that there was progress having Ms. Strasko as the nucleus.
- ii. Kistler asked Ms. Strasko to explain some other issues that have come up from residents besides dead, diseased or dying trees. Ms. Strasko described a few instances where residents have called about trimming park tree limbs that are hanging over onto their property, and other calls or concerns that residents have called in. STC and Township employees talked about the resident calls in detail and tried to decide on how to resolve those concerns and complaints.

4. New Business

a. Social media letter drafts

- i. Collins stated she wanted to include an introduction letter for the STC members in the February newsletter and still needed Romano’s information and a picture, and now she needs the same from Mr. Strasko. Collins also mentioned getting business cards or a photo ID made for STC members to give to residents when in the public.

b. Memorial tree plantings

- i. Collins stated this can be pushed to the next meeting for more discussion later. It will be revisited as an old business item.

c. Subcommittee establishment

i. Romano: areas to work on

- 1. Collins asked Romano to work on a list of areas that need help where subcommittees can do some work such as drafting social media posts and any other area that Romano thinks work can be

delegated to. Collins asked Romano to bring the list for the January meeting.

d. Increase STC member total

- i. Collins stated she wanted to increase the member total from three to five to have enough people present at every meeting, as well as having more ideas for solutions to the problems they were dealing with.

e. Sidewalk remediation

- i. Discussed at the beginning of the meeting (3a)

f. Tree City USA

- i. Kent Baird was not available to discuss Tree City USA. The item will continue into the new year. Collins is hoping to hear updates from Ms. Strasko and Baird on the item in January. Collins also asked Ms. Strasko to send STC members the criteria to become a Tree City through the National Arbor Day Foundation.

g. Palmer website updates and protocol

- i. Collins also shared she was recently informed that the STC now has a tab on the Palmer Township website that they can utilize. Collins wanted the other members to be aware and brainstorm some things that can be put on the website. Romano mentioned putting bamboo on the website, and Collins agreed and wanted members to continue to think about other announcements that can be added to the Township website.
- ii. Ms. Strasko clarified what the STC and Township staff wanted her to relay to a resident regarding street tree removals.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Armato discussed that he would let the other BoS members know that Collins was coming to a meeting and discussed that there will probably not be liaisons for the commissions or committees in 2023. Armato also described that for the first time in a long time all the committees were full, and it should not be a problem to increase the STC total.

6. For the Good of the Order

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

7. NEXT MEETING: January 30, 2023

8. Adjournment

- a. Collins adjourned the meeting at 7:54PM.