

**Palmer Township, Northampton County**

**Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes**

**August 28, 2023, 6:30PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room**

**1. Roll call**

- a. Present: Paul Strasko, Ellen Murgolo, Shannon Wisniewski, Patrick Romano, Scott Kistler, Lee Hilbert, and Paige Strasko.
- b. Members of the public: James Trenberth and Victor Bedoya.
- c. Absent: Michael Brett.
- d. The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM.

**2. Approval of meeting minutes from July 31, and August 8, 2023**

- a. Wisniewski made a motion to approve minutes from July 31 and August 8, 2023. Romano seconded the motion, and it was approved.

**3. Old Business**

**a. Bamboo**

- i. Wisniewski recalled that at the last meeting Ms. Strasko was asked to follow up with Waste Management as to why bamboo is not accepted at landfills. Ms. Strasko updated that due to ammonia gas and odors that grass gives off, it is prohibited from landfills unless there is a special permit. Ms. Strasko also stated that the Fire Commissioner was on board to do a single day burn of bamboo at the fire training grounds.
- ii. Wisniewski asked about drying procedures needed for burning. Ms. Strasko, committee members, Kistler, and members of the public discussed residential instructions for drying, process for collection, equipment needed for transport, length of collection period, removal processes, Code enforcement procedures, how pervasive bamboo is in the Township, updating the disposal guide, how many times a year bamboo collection would be offered, and planning for newsletter advertisement.
- iii. Kistler, Ms. Strasko, and committee members also discussed what portions of the bamboo plant would be accepted for disposal, how residents can repurpose bamboo shoots, and if it would be reasonable for Code enforcement to look for more bamboo.
- iv. Committee members discussed adding language related to the bamboo ordinance in their bamboo guide and paragraph for the Township newsletter to educate residents on what the Township's current policy is.
- v. Murgolo made a motion to add the bamboo disposal guide in the November newsletter, and Mr. Strasko seconded the motion.

**b. Update Township tree planting standard construction documents.**

- i. Wisniewski summarized that this updated document was meant to be an appendix in the new draft tree ordinance that the committee had recently finished, posted on the Shade Tree Commission (STC) page of the Township website, and as an update to the Township's current Subdivision

and Land Development ordinance (SALDO) to explain “good landscaping practices.” Wisniewski explained that she and Murgolo used various resources from the Arbor Day Foundation to make the document.

- ii. Murgolo suggested modifications to the diameter of the planting hole in the document, and STC members discussed size of typical street tree planting area in the Township with Kistler, and how to change document wording for clarity and site conditions across Palmer Township.
- iii. Committee members and Kistler discussed the viability of digging an oval shaped hole, equipment that should be used for digging, uncovering the root collar, burlap removal, native versus amended soil, the documents intention, and how to change wording in the document to reflect all aspects of the planting process the committee wanted to capture.
- iv. Wisniewski stated that the committee was suggesting the document as a proposal and it would still need to be reviewed by other Township officials, they were simply finalizing their recommendations. Wisniewski asked if the entire committee was comfortable with the changes, and all agreed. Wisniewski stated she would make edits and send them to Ms. Strasko by the end of the week.

**c. Sidewalk remediation recommendations**

- i. Mr. Strasko stated that Wisniewski cleaned up the sidewalk document and committee members discussed why the STC was involved with sidewalk violations, sidewalk ownership and homeowners’ responsibility for sidewalks.
- ii. Ms. Strasko stated that after the last meeting she spoke with the Code Officer Dan Lichtenwalner about other violations he sends notices for, and none of them have to do with trees. Ms. Strasko stated the sidewalk document would be sent for sidewalk violations specifically dealing with tree roots.
- iii. Committee members discussed changes made to the document, language changes and all agreed it was acceptable to pass.
- iv. Ms. Strasko and Kistler discussed presenting the document to the Board of Supervisors, and the process needed for final approval. Mr. Strasko made a motion to recommend the sidewalk remediation document to the Board of Supervisors and Romano seconded. The motion was passed by unanimous voice vote. Wisniewski asked where the document would go, and Ms. Strasko stated that the Code Officer would send it out with sidewalk violations for tree roots.

**4. New Business**

**a. Street tree replanting**

- i. Wisniewski stated that the last action for street tree planting by the committee was forming a list of tree species where planting locations had powerlines and size constraints and locations that did not. Wisniewski also

stated that the list was shared with Kistler as a recommendation and that was where the committee input ended.

- ii. Ms. Strasko agreed and stated that she had been working with Tom Adams to put a tree bid together to hire a contractor for tree planting. Ms. Strasko also stated that she, Adams, and Kistler decided to replant in phases and the first phase would include the Villages of Mill Race, Wolf's Run and Fox Run developments starting with about 40 trees.
- iii. Wisniewski and Ms. Strasko discussed the bidding process, Murgolo asked about bid qualifications, and Mr. Strasko asked about bonds. Wisniewski asked about time estimates for planting work, and Kistler explained that timing was another reason the Township staff wanted to start with a smaller number of trees to plant, and timing for fall planting to ensure trees will survive. Wisniewski asked if there would be a separate bid for planting in the spring and Kistler and Ms. Strasko confirmed.
- iv. Trenberth asked if the trees discussed were to replace trees that were previously removed by homeowners and Ms. Strasko stated these trees were to replace what the Township has removed in the last year or so that was dead or diseased. Wisniewski discussed identifying dead or diseased trees and proper replanting, removing stumps and the proposed ordinance that the committee had been working on.
- v. Trenberth asked about homeowner responsibility when trees are on the property line and heaving sidewalks, and Kistler discussed replacing trees that were previously removed and following development landscaping plans for replacement.
- vi. Wisniewski asked that Ms. Strasko and Kistler keep the committee updated on the planting process. Kistler also discussed how the Township Forester and Parks Department will mark tree locations for contractors and the color-coding system to indicate species to be planted at each location and stated that the Township Forester was very pleased with all the species the committee chose for planting.
- vii. Ms. Strasko asked what the committee wanted to do with the agenda item, and committee members agreed to move it to the report section of the agenda because no action was required from the committee.
- viii. Wisniewski asked about residents that did not want a street tree replanted in front of their property and discussed with Ms. Strasko how to incentivize residents to have a tree in the right-of-way, STC members being part of the conversation, and planning on moving trees to parks for those adamant residents that don't want trees.

**b. Trees of Significance**

- i. Mr. Strasko and Wisniewski discussed the trees of significance document that Mr. Strasko found, speaking with the historical society of Palmer to determine if and where there are trees of significance, how trees of significance could be problematic in the draft tree ordinance, discussing

the matter further with the Township solicitor, utilizing a professional arborist for tree identification, and the network needed for this type of tree identification that would be helpful for the committee.

- ii. Murgolo suggested tabling the item until the committee had more information. Wisniewski stated that she had follow-up to do for this item.
- iii. Trenberth suggested starting with historic buildings in the Township that have been identified with plaques.
- iv. Kistler asked about a tree inventory in the Township through Tree City USA and if there were grants available to pay for an inventory. Ms. Strasko stated that she thought there might be grants and that Adams had provided a tree inventory to her from the 1990s that could be used as a starting point. Mr. Strasko shared a resource from the Arbor Day Foundation on how to conduct tree inventory.
- v. Ms. Strasko clarified that Wisniewski was going to make calls to historical society and she would reach out to the Township arborist for more information. Wisniewski also discussed understanding the time and cost involved in completing a tree inventory. Mr. Strasko, Ms. Strasko and Kistler discussed where to search for grants and Township resources for grants.

## **5. Report**

### **a. Board of Supervisors**

- i. Brett was not present to give an update, and Ms. Strasko stated that she had not heard any updates from the Board.

### **b. Tree City USA/Grant trees available**

- i. Ms. Strasko stated that the Township was doing their part for the program by starting to replant street trees and they were on track to apply for the program again at the end of November or beginning of December.
- ii. Ms. Strasko and Kistler discussed the budget and event tracking for the Tree City program, how the Township was in a much better position this year than last year, and the need to focus on replanting rather than removal.
- iii. Wisniewski and Kistler discussed the sustainability of stopping Township removals and that staff is now working on having removals and replants simultaneously.

## **6. Public comment**

- a. Trenberth and Bedoya asked about how to fix sidewalks that were on the property line between their houses and neighbors houses. The public also asked if trees between the curb and the sidewalk are Township owned trees and explained their current circumstances with neighbors, street trees, and sidewalks. Committee members discussed how homeowners are required to maintain the street trees and suggested that the members of the public reach out to the Code Officer with their issue for further assistance fixing their lifted sidewalks and ensuring resident safety.

- b. Members of the public, committee members, and Kistler discussed ADA requirements for sidewalks, various methods that could be used for fixing lifts in sidewalks and size of grass strips between curbs and sidewalks.

**7. For the Good of the Order**

- a. Romano asked about a dead tree on the corner of Whitehall and Freemansburg Ave that he brought up a few months ago. Committee members and Kistler discussed issues with Freemansburg Ave being a state road, Township jurisdiction, and if the tree was in the right-of-way. Kistler stated the Township will confirm that the tree is outside of the right-of-way.
- b. Romano also discussed white pine trees that were planted at a new development in the Township, and committee members discussed that they can be more involved in planting processes once the draft tree ordinance is passed, the new street tree list in the draft tree ordinance, that the committee cannot retroactively change what has already been approved by the Board of Supervisors, and the importance of plan reviews.
- c. Ms. Strasko stated she received new plans for the committee to comment on for a conditional use plan that she will send to the group, but the comments are due at the end of next week. Murgolo asked if there were any trees on the plan, and Ms. Strasko stated she had not had a chance to review them for tree planting yet. Wisniewski discussed timing and process for plan reviews, and the need for timing to consider STC member input and when the committee meets so that members can discuss plans rather than share comments via email. Ms. Strasko explained that deadlines are set by the Planning Department for the Planning Commission meetings and Wisniewski discussed a simultaneous sharing of plans with the STC to be able to include comments during the planning process rather than after Planning Commission review.
- d. Ms. Strasko stated that the Hillcrest Homeowners Association (HOA) was looking to replant street and park trees. Committee members asked to use the same species list provided to the Township for replanting, and discussed if there were any unusual factors about the development that should be considered. Kistler pointed out that utilities are underground and explained that the HOA was replanting where there used to be trees. Committee members were confident that the species already chosen would work well for the Hillcrest development.
- e. Tremberth expressed his appreciation for the committee members' work, and the planning that goes into all aspects of the Township.

**8. Next Meeting: September 25, 2023**

**9. Adjournment**

- a. Wisniewski made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Romano seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by voice vote and the meeting was adjourned at 8:17PM.