

**Palmer Township, Northampton County**  
**Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes**

**January 30, 2023, 6:30PM in the Municipal Building Lower Level**

**1. Roll call**

- a. The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM.
- b. Present: Jamie Collins, Paul Strasko, Paige Strasko, Lee Hilbert, Kent Baird, Scott Kistler and Daniel Nicolo.
- c. Absent: Patrick Romano and Michael Brett.
- d. Members of the public: Jeff Lannon, J.W. Brown, Kellie Provost-Brown, Vanessa and Tyler Snyder, Joe DePhillipo, Todd Hafer, Ossie Paraiso, Mike Larocco Justin DePhillipo, Randy Freedman, and John Henning.

**2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from November 21, 2022**

- a. Paul Strasko made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from November. Collins seconded the motion, and the two members approved the minutes unanimously.

**3. Reorganization- call for nominations**

- a. **Chairman**
  - i. Paul Strasko made a motion to nominate Collins for Chairman and Collins accepted.
- b. **Vice Chairman**
  - i. Collins made a motion for Paul Strasko to be Vice Chairman and he accepted.

**4. Old Business**

- a. **Tree removal permits/ordinances.**
- b. **Upcoming grant trees**
- c. **Bamboo**
  - i. **Residential drying process**
  - ii. **Employee training**
- d. **Update Township tree planting standard construction documents.**
- e. **Storm damaged trees- will the township be replacing trees damaged/knocked down after a storm?**
- f. **Protocol for residential messages/questions**
- g. **Memorial tree plantings**
- h. **Social media letter drafts**
- i. **Subcommittee establishment**
  - i. **Romano: areas to work on**
- j. **Increase STC member total.**
- k. **Sidewalk remediation**
  - i. There were many residents in attendance and the committee felt it would have been more beneficial to hear what they had to say first. Old Business items before sidewalk remediation were previously discussed at other

meetings. First John Henning from Woodridge Falls development described the neighborhood's issues with oaks planted as street trees that were lifting sidewalks throughout the whole neighborhood. He described that every house in the neighborhood has sidewalks that are being lifted by the trees. Henning also described how himself and most of his neighbors' got letters from code enforcement stating they needed to fix the sidewalk before a certain date, and that he believed that the letters from code enforcement started after someone tripped and fell due to the state of the sidewalk. Henning discussed how the planting strip between the street and the sidewalk was not wide enough for the trees, that the trunks are touching both the sidewalks and the curb, and that the trees should never have been planted there. John Henning also brought up current ordinances and discussed how the neighborhood street plantings did not meet the current ordinances, and that through his research he found that oaks are listed as the number one species not to plant near pavement. Henning discussed how he thought it would be a race between the township and homeowners to either take out the trees or start fixing water lines etc.

- ii.** Jeff Lannon, also in Woodridge Falls and a long-time resident described that about five (5) years ago he received a letter from code enforcement to make the sidewalk safe again so he rented a stump grinder, lifted the sidewalk and shaved down the tree roots with the machinery. Lannon also described how his neighbor recently received a letter about their sidewalk, and described how the tree near his house is forcing the curb to separate from the street. Collins asked if the tree Lannon worked on lived or not and he said it did.
- iii.** Henning stated that it will end up being a disagreement between the residents and the Township. Henning expressed his appreciation for the Shade Tree Commission listening to their grievances since the Commission is a volunteer position. Henning also asked who approved of the trees that were planted in Woodridge Falls.
- iv.** Collins started her response to the residents by explaining that she is a licensed landscape architect and arborist, and Paul Strasko explained that he has experience in construction, but it was only his second meeting with the Shade Tree Commission (STC). Collins then described that she has been working with the Township for a few years, and that with the new supervisors there has been a resurgence of environmental concerns. Collins described that she has seen the same sidewalk issue and heard about another resident in the Woodridge Falls area that posted on Facebook about receiving a letter to fix the sidewalk. Collins brought the matter to the commission and reviewed the ordinances and explained that the STC is actively working on solutions for homeowners since the Commission is not in agreement with the current ordinances. Collins also explained that most of the problems are not with new development, the

problems are within existing developments with growing trees like the ones the residents had come to express their concerns about. Collins stated that she was very appreciative of the residents coming to the meeting and that they were concerned about the trees. Collins also stated that the Commission understood the problems that the homeowners are facing and they are working on solutions.

- v. Henning stated that no one seemed to have a problem with the trees, it was the species of tree and the way that they were planted that is the problem. Henning also mentioned that he felt most residents were there to express their concerns and reach some sort of agreement and that the residents did not want to get fined. Collins shared that the code enforcer, Dan Lichtenwalner, was not currently enforcing the sidewalk code to give the Commission time to work out a solution. Collins also discussed with residents that she lives in the same neighborhood and has similar problems.
- vi. Collins and Henning discussed how the sidewalks were dangerous, there were a lot of children in the area and how the ordinances aren't usually updated unless there is a call or a need for it. Collins expressed she thought the resident's actions would be a call for the ordinance change but that it would take time. Henning confirmed that it would be a "fluid" situation for the time being and Collins agreed. Henning stated that the residents wanted to work with the Commission to determine what would work best for other homeowners across the Township.
- vii. Strasko, Collins and residents discussed different methods to fix the sidewalk at length and the residents felt that the trees had to be removed. Joe DePhillipo described how the driveways are being lifted and the trees are busting through the curbs. Todd Hafer stated that he believes the trees will need to come down and should be replaced with a different species. Hafer also asked about what the time frame would be for a resolution, how would the residents be notified that the sidewalk discussions were being had, and the residents wanted to know that the Township was working on a solution with them. Resident Mike Larocco described how the trees that were planted there were a mistake, and they needed to be fixed. Larocco was fine with replacing trees one for one, but he also wanted to know who was responsible for the error of the trees being planted and reiterated on who was responsible for the sidewalk, not just planning wise but financially. Collins stated that the Commission is an advisory committee and that they can't answer financial liability questions, but Larocco was welcome to bring his questions to the Board of Supervisors meeting to discuss with them.
- viii. Collins explained that the developer was following the ordinances at the time the development was built, but what the STC was working on now was making recommendations to the Board for solutions for homeowners

experiencing these problems and making recommendations on updating and changing the ordinances to rectify these sidewalk and street tree issues. Henning asked clarifying questions, and Strasko stated that they are trying to work on a standard for all homeowners in the Township regarding methods to fix the sidewalks.

- ix.** Another resident Kellie Provost-Brown described what was happening with maple trees on her and her husband's property. She stated that they did not receive a letter from the Township but it's already starting to show signs of lifting the sidewalk and causing problems and she would rather take out the tree than have to remove it and fix the sidewalk later. Provost-Brown also stated that they were there to support their neighbors with oak trees but did not want other species of trees to be overlooked. Hafer also brought up the point that with cracked sidewalks and growing trees, the problem will be a perpetual recurrence.
- x.** Collins stated that since Palmer Township is such a large and diverse community, there was not one simple solution for all of the issues in developments around the Township. Collins also stated that while the STC has discussed possible solutions, they are nowhere near a resolution.
- xi.** Larocco asked if the sidewalks lifting is a problem in other developments that are about 25 years old and if this a common problem with any trees planted next to the sidewalk. Collins confirmed this happens in every city. Collins and residents discussed other aspects of trees growing near sidewalks and other measures that cities have taken to fix this problem. Residents discussed other solutions with Mr. Strasko and Collins on where to plant trees, and other factors to consider such as underground utilities, and safety. Mr. Larocco stated that any tree would grow out of the space that is provided in the planting strip and asked how feasible it would be to replant trees in the same area. Commission members and residents discussed the possibility of planting trees on residents' front lawn, on private property.
- xii.** Tyler Snyder asked if homeowners could cut down the street trees themselves or if there are any rules against homeowners removing trees. Collins stated homeowners are allowed to remove trees at their own expense at this time. Other residents discussed how they had heard they were not allowed to cut down the trees near the street. Jeff Lannon described that when he received his letter that all the contractors he contacted to do the work refused to do it, but it might be different if an entire neighborhood was calling asking for sidewalk work to be done. Collins, Mr. Strasko, Kistler and residents also discussed tree roots interfering with electrical boxes, damaging tree roots, and roots trying to get to water.
- xiii.** Justin DePhillipo asked to clarify that there was currently no enforcement of raised sidewalks until the STC can come up with a plan. Collins stated

that the hold on enforcement was temporary and that the code enforcement officer, Dan Lichtenwalner, told her that there was a temporary hold. Justin DePhillipo asked if the hold was codified within the Township. Collins stated she was told by the code officer of the hold and DePhillipo could reach out to Lichtenwalner to confirm. Kistler pointed out that Danny Nicolo was there to represent the code office. Nicolo started by describing that he would not include any fines on initial letters that were sent out to residents, and he hasn't sent any letters for a few weeks to work on solutions with the STC. DePhillipo asked again if homeowners are or are not allowed to remove the street trees. Kistler stated that there is currently no rule against homeowners removing street trees in front of their home. Joe DePhillipo described that he was told by a Township official that residents were not allowed to cut down street trees and Kistler clarified that there were no ordinances against homeowners removing street trees at this time and that the STC was working on requiring permits for street tree removal within the Township right-of-way.

- xiv.** Larocco asked if the expectation was to plant another tree if you removed one and Kistler stated there is no expectation of any kind at this time.
- xv.** Kistler also brought up the possibility of removing sidewalks and leaving the street trees in Woodridge Falls. Kistler and residents discussed the possibility and safety of having no sidewalks. Kistler pointed out Kent Baird as the planner for the Township and Baird explained the purposes of sidewalks and described his past experiences with other communities that did not want sidewalks and what those streets looked like. Baird also discussed the direct dollar value of large old trees for homes and the need to inventory the sidewalks and hear from other residents in the neighborhood to determine what the consensus would be. Baird and residents spoke about tree plantings, species, sidewalks, and safety at length. Baird also stated that the residents should not look to fault, they should look to action and start taking inventory of what is present in the neighborhood.
- xvi.** Baird pointed out that Ms. Strasko is the Tree Coordinator and is helping the Township become more up to date with stormwater management and is working on Tree City designation for the Township, and that Kistler does a great deal for the Township as well. Kistler also told the residents that the STC struggles for participation and since they have an interest in the trees, they should consider joining the STC to make a difference in the community. Collins, residents and Kistler discussed Supervisor support, recommendations for the Board moving forward, and the need for more members to join the STC. Henning and Lannon gave Strasko their phone numbers to get in contact about membership for the STC.

## **I. Tree City USA**

- i. Collins stated that she would like to give Baird the floor to discuss Tree City since he usually isn't there and Baird started his presentation of the Tree City program.
- ii. Baird discussed the Township personnel involved with the Tree City program, what his personal background is with conservation, Arbor Day Foundation history, Tree City program standards, developing stronger ordinances for tree protection, and reiterated the benefits of trees on streets and the value they add to human and other animal lives. Baird also discussed what other towns and cities have done for the Tree City program, his experience with tree planting in the past, and the need to promote that Palmer Township cares about its' trees and asked the residents to contribute what they could. Baird instructed residents to reach out to Strasko or himself with any ideas.
- iii. Larocco asked how far along in the process the Township was for applying to Tree City and Baird described how the Township gathered various departments together, got the budget numbers for trees and submitted an application in December, they were just waiting to hear back on how the application went. Baird also explained to Larocco what the benefits of being a Tree City are and that the application is an annual process. Baird also discussed the cost of maintenance with residents for the Tree City program and a possible schedule for tree plantings in the Township.

**m. Palmer website updates and protocol**

**5. New Business**

**6. Reports**

**a. Board of Supervisors**

- i. Mike Brett was not present to report on the Board of Supervisors.

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

- a. Collins stated that they were running out of time for the meeting, and she would review the agenda with Ms. Strasko before next month. Collins thanks Baird for presenting and thanked the residents for coming and invited them back for the meeting in February.

**8. Next meeting: February 27, 2023**

**9. Adjournment**

- a. Collins adjourned the meeting at 7:34PM.