

**Palmer Township, Northampton County**

**Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes**

**May 30, 2023, 6PM, 3 Weller Pl, Lower-Level Municipal Meeting Room**

**1. Roll call**

- a. The meeting was called to order at 6:32PM.
- b. Present: Jamie Collins, Paul Strasko, Shannon Wisniewski, Patrick Romano, Ellen Murgolo, Michael Brett, Lee Hilbert, and Paige Strasko.
- c. Staff from Langan engineering Shaun Haas and Ryan Parisi were in attendance, as well as Jeff Thomas from Newlins Logistics Park LLC.

**2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 24, 2023**

- a. Wisniewski made a motion to approve the minutes from April 24, 2023, and Romano seconded. The minutes were passed by unanimous voice vote.

**3. Old Business**

**a. New Member introduction**

- i. Collins welcomed the new member, Ellen Murgolo to the STC and asked that she introduce herself and describe her interests and skill set. All STC members introduced themselves and discussed their backgrounds, interests and why everyone joined the STC.
- ii. Collins explained some background information of the STC to Ellen, what the committee has been working on, and the recent change from three to five members.

**b. First Park 33 Review**

- i. Collins commented that STC should let the presenters discuss first. Haas presented boards with development plans and a digital display of the approved warehouse plans. Collins also stated that she was unclear on what the concerns were for the warehouse.
- ii. Haas explained the project background to STC members, review process with the Board of Supervisors (BoS), and that a planning commission member had asked for the STC to review the landscaping plan and comment on species used for berm screening. Haas also shared the Board's concern was limiting deciduous trees and increasing evergreens to ensure screening for the warehouse year-round.
- iii. Committee members and engineers reviewed the landscaping plans for the warehouse that were approved under the condition the STC review the species list and provide feedback. Collins asked clarifying questions about tree placement and Haas explained that trees were farther back from the road to prevent utility companies from pruning. Collins discussed species substitutes with Parisi, the landscape architect for Langan. STC members focused on plantings along Tatamy Road for screening where a basin with a retaining wall would be installed.

- iv. Haas also explained that there will be a ten-foot multi-use path installed around the property. STC members and Parisi discussed sizing and height of plantings, spacing, and species.
  - v. Collins suggested removing the species *ilex glabra* ‘shamrock’ shrub that will not grow tall and replacing them with larger evergreen shrub species. Collins also suggested planting as close to the top of the slope as possible to act as more effective screening after planting. STC members, Haas, and Parisi discussed nearby residences, layout of the area, and other seed mixes that will be used in the planting area.
  - vi. Collins asked for additional thoughts from Brett on what the BoS has discussed regarding the plans. Brett stated that the BoS wanted to receive feedback from the STC to confirm that the plantings would be an effective screening and share recommendations with Haas and Parisi. Collins asked for any other thoughts from STC members.
  - vii. Collins stated that she would recommend decreasing the number of *ilex glabra*, increasing *Abies concolor* and discussed Douglas fir growth patterns and obtaining a cross species of leatherleaf viburnum. Parisi summarized their discussion and asked what species Collins would suggest for substitutes based on availability and ensuring contractors buy the correct species. Collins stated if Parisi had other suggestions for species they could communicate via email and make a list of substitute species that contractors can use.
  - viii. Collins and Parisi discussed other species and planting placements, and Collins thanked Haas, Parisi, and Thomas for attending and discussing their plans with the STC.
- c. **Tree removal permits/ordinances**
  - d. **Upcoming grant trees**
  - e. **Bamboo**
    - i. Wisniewski asked to discuss bamboo briefly and if Collins or other members had reviewed the bamboo handout she had created. Wisniewski explained the discussion around bamboo for Brett and that Kistler had asked yard waste employees to be trained to identify bamboo before alerting the public or putting information on social media.
    - ii. Collins stated that she thought the document was good, but they should expand more on instructions for taking bamboo roots to the Hartley Center and making appointments. Wisniewski agreed and Hilbert stated that there is a limit on how much residents can bring to Hartley, but not at Berks Street. Members discussed details of the process for accepting bamboo and what the procedure should be to ensure that bamboo roots do not spread. Collins stated she would look at the document more carefully and will send it around and discuss it with Wisniewski via email. Collins asked Ms. Strasko to send the bamboo document out and Ms. Strasko stated she would resend all documents discussed to the entire group.

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

**g. Sidewalk remediation**

- i. Collins asked if any members had attended the sidewalk safety seminar that Lichtenwalner had scheduled. Ms. Strasko stated she attended and had already sent the members the slide show presentation from the seminar. Collins asked members to review the sidewalk presentation for the next meeting.
- ii. Mr. Strasko suggested finalizing sidewalk details for homeowners to slow the chainsaws throughout the Township.

**h. Social Media letter drafts**

**i. Stones Crossing removal request.**

- i. Collins stated that at the last meeting the STC did not make the decision for Mr. Austin official and asked for a motion.
- ii. Wisniewski made a motion to recommend to the Board of Supervisors to allow Mr. Austin to complete the tree care outlined by Bartlett Tree Service. Collins specified if in the future the tree was unhealthy the STC would require the removal. Romano seconded the motion, and it was passed by unanimous voice vote.
- iii. Collins asked about the process for when the STC makes recommendations to the BoS and who presents those recommendations. Brett stated that it is always good for committee members to come to BoS meetings, but understanding that the position is voluntary, and members may not have time, if something needs to be presented to BoS then members can communicate that to him or through Ms. Strasko.
- iv. Collins explained Austin's situation from the previous meeting. Brett and STC members asked Strasko to follow up with Lichtenwalner to determine if the recommendations needed to be presented to the BoS and discussed timing of the enforcement letter.

**j. Arbor Day Celebration**

- i. Collins asked the group how the Arbor Day Celebration was since she was not able to attend. Members discussed how the event went, the tree planting, and Kistler's explanation of proper tree planting. Ms. Strasko showed Collins event photos that were posted on the STC Facebook page.

**4. New Business**

**a. Member participation/new member(s)**

**b. Draft tree ordinance**

- i. Collins asked if Ms. Strasko had any updates on the tree ordinance. Ms. Strasko stated that she and Brett were working through some changes to the language making STC decision-makers. Brett stated because the STC is a volunteer board, the caveat in the ordinance is the STC or their designee can make decisions. Brett asked Ms. Strasko where they were with the ordinance, and if STC members had seen the draft. Collins and Mr. Strasko did not review the draft ordinance and Murgolo had not been

updated with current documents yet. Collins stated that with the new member, STC should try to review and discuss the ordinance and make it a priority at the June meeting.

- ii.** Collins told Murgolo to give herself enough time to review the ordinance and understand because they can be very complicated. Mr. Strasko asked clarifying questions about the ordinance and Brett stated that the ordinance will dictate all public trees within easements, public right-of-way, or anything the Township has control over. Brett also stated that the ordinance would not dictate anything on private property, only trees within public property. Mr. Strasko and Brett discussed where street trees should be planted in reference to sidewalks and specifications for sidewalk construction that will reduce the amount of tree roots lifting sidewalks in the future.
- iii.** Brett also discussed the big picture referencing other ordinances that are being revised in conjunction with this ordinance that need to be complementary such as the zoning ordinance and in the future the subdivision and land development ordinance (SALDO). STC members and Brett also discussed a moratorium on tree removal, but Brett stated that the ordinance would need to be advertised before a moratorium could be enacted.
- iv.** Collins stated this was more reason for the STC to focus on the draft ordinance at the June meeting. Murgolo asked why the committee wanted to stop tree removals and Collins explained homeowners are allowed to remove street trees at their discretion with no requirements to replant.
- v.** Brett shared a personal anecdote about tree removal in Old Orchard, and Collins explained to Murgolo the dead and diseased removal efforts by the Township and STC over the last year as well that included replanting phases in the future.
- vi.** Romano shared a personal anecdote about tree removal on his property and the experience he had with contractors, as well as stump removal.
- vii.** Brett also asked STC for feedback on approved tree surgeons and arborists for the ordinance that can perform tree work in Palmer Township. Brett stated that the Code department could regulate and that he was envisioning a licensing process or requiring proof of licensing for arborists and tree work in Palmer. Brett stated that the City of Easton has a list of roughly twelve certified tree surgeon's that are allowed to work on street trees. Wisniewski clarified that those who meet the requirements could apply to be added to the list and it was not restrictive, and Brett agreed. Collins stated that she and Ms. Strasko had discussed an application form for tree services, review of credentials, and if STC knows of any reason to not accept the contractor, then they would be denied.
- viii.** Brett clarified that the list would only apply to street tree work and that homeowners are allowed to hire their own contractor for private property

tree work. Ms. Strasko also stated it would be best to have a tree surgeon list as an attachment or addendum to the ordinance so that it would be easier to review and revise just the approved list, and a similar method should be used for the tree species list.

- ix. Mr. Strasko asked about updating the tree planting specifications. Brett stated tree planting specification changes would be better addressed when the Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance (SALDO) was updated and once the SALDO is redone in the upcoming years, the tree ordinance may need to be adjusted to be consistent. Mr. Strasko, Brett, and Ms. Strasko discussed homeowner responsibility for sidewalk maintenance in the SALDO, as well as other details specific to tree planting that would need to be addressed and updated. Mr. Strasko stated that the STC should give homeowners options for sidewalk fixes that will not cost thousands of dollars and Brett agreed and suggested researching grants. Murgolo asked about a list of contractors for sidewalk repair and Brett explained that the Code department completes inspections before the concrete for new sidewalks are poured.
- x. Romano shared a picture of a tree on private property that was overly pruned and STC members discussed with Brett the process for private trees with the Code department.
- xi. Wisniewski asked that before the group moved on, she had time to share her comments. Wisniewski asked clarifying questions about the draft organization and shared that New Jersey came up with a new ordinance with tables and graphics that are easy for residents to follow, and asked what the scale from draft to final version would be. Brett stated that ideally this ordinance would set the base for the SALDO changes in the future and incorporated into the zoning ordinance too. Brett stated that the only item that may need to be updated are the land development articles. STC members discussed organization of the ordinance to make it easier for homeowners to understand. Brett stated that for the new zoning ordinance they created cheat sheets that have bulleted lists that make the ordinance easier to follow, why the ordinance only referred to shade or street trees, timeline for ordinance adoption, and where STC comments would fit into the process. Ms. Strasko asked Brett if she should send the updated draft out to the group and Brett agreed. Brett stated that the solicitor will review the ordinance before it goes to the BoS.
- xii. Romano asked to add a stump removal provision to the ordinance. Brett discussed that it would have to be in the public right-of-way. Romano also asked for a definition of tree removal that includes stump grinding. STC members, Brett, and Ms. Strasko discussed adding more specific provisions to the ordinance and discussed what would be legally required information from the SALDO.

## 5. Reports

- a. **Board of Supervisors**
  - b. **Tree City USA**
- 6. **Public comment**
  - a. There was no public comment.
- 7. **For the Good of the Order**
  - a. Ms. Strasko asked the group when the Township would stop paying for tree removal. Ms. Strasko explained the original list for removal was exhausted, there were additions to the removal list during the process and now there was an additional list of resident calls for trees that were scheduled for removal. Ms. Strasko also stated she was asking because at the previous meeting a comment was made that the Township would not pay for removals throughout the future. Collins was unsure of a stopping point and asked Brett for insight. Brett stated that the Township budget would dictate a stopping point and that he was unsure how much was budgeted for tree removal. Brett also suggested speaking with Williams, Township manager to ensure that the Township continues to meet Tree City USA requirements.
  - b. Romano asked about a tree on Whitehall Ave and Ms. Strasko stated it was determined that the tree was on private property and not within the public right of way. Members discussed procedure for private trees that members felt were a danger to the public health and safety and working with the Code department to enforce tree removal.
  - c. Brett asked about removing a tree stump in Steven's Street Park, and Ms. Strasko stated she would add it to the list for removals coming up.
- 8. **Next meeting: June 26, 2023**
  - a. Collins recommended that for the next meeting, members should review the draft ordinance for discussion, review the sidewalk presentation and make any notes, and stated the group may need another meeting to get through their ordinance questions because an hour would not be enough time. Members discussed options for ordinance review, scheduling, and timing.
  - b. Collins stated she may need to change the date for the next meeting, but she would communicate with Ms. Strasko and get back to the group.
- 9. **Adjournment**
  - a. Murgolo made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Strasko seconded and the meeting adjourned with a unanimous vote at 7:56PM.