

Palmer Township

Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes

May 31, 2022, 6:30PM at Palmer Township Municipal Building

1. Roll call

- a. The meeting was called to order at 6:36PM.
- b. Present: Jamie Collins Commission Chair, Bob Williams, Scott Kistler, Lee Hilbert, Brenda DeGerolamo Joseph Armato and Paige Strasko.
- c. Absent: Patrick Romano

2. Safety

- a. Collins was concerned about dead trees on Newlins Mill Road and dead ash trees around the township in the public right of way. She also described widow maker branches depending on height also being a risk. Collins also mentioned that public works employees know what a dead tree looks like, and that the township should consider adding a line item to the budget for dead tree removal.
- b. Williams introduced Collins to Hilbert since he will be the parks employee that will be working closely with the Shade Tree Commission and asked about a procedure for him in terms of documentation of trees, if he should be taking pictures of the trees that are going to be removed. Williams is concerned about residents calling asking about why certain trees are gone. Collins says if they feel the need to take photos, they should but the photo cannot be retouched in any way at all. If there is something specific on the tree, they want to document Collins recommends taking a push pin and an index card to indicate the area on the tree of interest instead of adding an arrow to the picture via any computer editing. Collins also stated they could write up a form for tree assessment that included different checklist points on why a tree needs to be removed such as percentage of foliage, is there bark missing, any fungal fruiting bodies etc. Williams asked Kistler to work on a form for public works to use in tree assessment. Armato also mentioned the importance of documenting tree removal because if the township notices they have had to remove trees in a certain area over a period they will be able to determine a root cause, perhaps there is something in the soil or there is another external factor causing trees in a certain area to die such as disease.
- c. Kistler states the initial safety concern for the township right now are the dead ash trees in various locations in the township. Kistler also states the township is hoping the Shade Tree Commission can help institute a rapid response to removing dead trees as fast as possible. Kistler also mentions that they can put this information on the township website rather than having to contact each resident individually as they have in the past. Armato asked if the bills were sent out yet so that the township could also send out an informational flyer with the bills in the mail so that they are positive a good portion of residents receive the information. DeGerolamo also states they will push the information on the

website and social media, Armato mentioned that not everyone is on social media. Williams states they can put the information everywhere, with the bills, on the website and in the next newsletter. Kistler also asked Collins if she would be willing to write a short paragraph about the Shade Tree Commission to put out with the information for residents to educate them on what the Shade Tree Commission does.

- d. Armato asked about choices of trees that are being donated from a builder. DeGerolamo stated Kistler should have a whole list of trees. Kistler stated he already chose some locations for where the donated trees could be planted, there were trees removed from the edge of the pool recently, so they needed to be replaced there. Kistler said he stopped making plans once he heard the Shade Tree Commission was going to be working on finding locations and species of trees to plant.
- e. Williams asked if the policy the township has thought about starting, three for one, would be too aggressive. Collins asked for clarification, so Kistler explained they wanted to plant three trees for every one that was removed. Williams explained more that some residents ask about the trees, and he was hoping that if they planted more residents would be happy. Collins asked if all three trees are planted in the same area and both Williams and Kistler said no just in the general area. Collins also mentioned that the area in Newlins Mill she has seen the trees there are planted very close together and that fifteen feet apart is not enough space for trees that wants to grow fifty feet wide. Collins stated that if the town can plant more trees somewhere else in the parks as opposed to overplanting in the sidewalk strips that would be better so trees had more room to grow. Collins also said sidewalk trees should be planted at a minimum of twenty-five to thirty feet apart so they can grow, she thought the best thing would be replace one tree where the other one was and plant two more somewhere else in the township where the tree can thrive and let the homeowner know because residents would love that.
- f. Kistler mentioned that he was planning on some of the ten trees donated to be planted in Labarre park because some vandals had ripped out five newly planted trees there. Williams tells Armato the ten trees are going where trees already were and then he asked if Armato agrees that at minimum they should replace a tree with a tree, some municipalities do two trees to replace one, so Williams wanted to ramp up and start catching up on their tree deficit and do three for one. Armato said if it is financially feasible, he is fine with that. Williams did not have the answer to that at the time. Kistler also brought up that this was originally just for parks not street trees. Armato asked if Kistler knew how much they pay for a tree. Kistler said about \$350-\$400 for three-inch caliper trees about eight or nine feet tall, Kistler mentioned they had purchased a great deal of Autumn Fire Maple trees that get a brilliant red color. Collins asked if the township has a place to store trees, but Kistler stated not at this time. Armato and DeGerolamo asked about storing trees at the Berks Street Facility and Kistler stated he would have to

buy trailer loads. Collins stated she may be able to get the township a better price on trees. DeGerolamo asked if Kistler had already budgeted for some trees this year and Kistler clarified the item in the budget was for the parks. Collins mentioned it might be better to wait to tell residents about the three for one plan with trees since the township is unsure of the budget for that, but they need to at least start one for one tree replacement. Collins also mentioned that she thinks there should be a tree removal permit to stop residents from simply removing healthy trees from their property simply because they want to. Collins also stated that many other townships have policies that require residents that remove trees to make either donations to the township for trees or plant so many trees of a certain caliper to make up for the diameter at breast height of trees being removed. Williams stated the township will look at other sample legislation that Collins had mentioned and bring it to the Shade Tree Commission for recommendations to the Board of Supervisors (BoS) on what will be the best route for Palmer Township. Williams also explained a bit more of the new process now with board members being liaisons, Armato can bring the recommendations from the committee directly to the BoS from there.

- g. Collins stated she was happy to see the township being more reactive and hoped that she could help them be proactive in terms of tree care since areas like Old Orchard do not look like they used to. Kistler also stated they needed to discuss how far they wanted to go backwards in terms of replacement trees. Should they keep looking forward or do they want to look back and replace trees that were removed from places like Old Orchard as well. Armato stated he thought it would be better to move forward once Collins has prices for trees then the township will be able to determine how much they can plant this year.
- h. Kistler also stated something they need to take into consideration is the previous township procedure which was to cut trees as close to the ground as possible and no stump grinding. Kistler stated with the new direction they are looking in the township is obligating itself to stump grind and properly remove stumps of dead trees to replant and that would come at a cost of about \$150 per stump. Collins stated that for some of the older stumps that have been there and are already decaying this process might not be necessary since the township will not plant in the same exact place where a tree used to be. Collins stated that they can assess what stumps really need to be removed and what can be left. Collins also mentioned they could look at tree spacing as well and perhaps just increase spacing between trees to account for old stumps. Armato stated they will not be able to fix ten years of damage overnight and it will take some time. Collins is more interested in getting a start. Kistler also stated that they need to keep these areas in mind because if they do not come up with a plan to go back and reassess it will take much longer to replant trees. Armato stated the first area of focus is taking care of dead trees that can become a hazard.
- i. Williams mentioned there have been many trees removed in the recent past and DeGerolamo also mentioned many tree diseases have come through this area

quickly in the last few years that have taken trees quickly and unexpectedly. Collins states she does not think the township itself has done as much damage as homeowners removing trees from their property. Kistler also states they have never removed a healthy tree for no reason.

- j. Kistler also mentioned after the township has evaluated trees for their health there could be a great number of trees that need to be removed and that the parks and public works do not have the man-power necessary for that type of work. Williams agreed and Kistler asked if they should think about putting a bid out for tree removal services. Kistler asked if this was an emergency where it needed to be handled right away or if he had time to go through bids and try to get a low quote for tree removal. Williams stated he thought they owe it to the residents to find a low bidder and keep the budget low. Collins also chimed in that she thought the trees should be evaluated first to understand the depth of the problem. Williams and Armato were discussing who would have time to survey trees. Williams suggested having Hilbert and perhaps another employee go through and make a list by address of trees that need to be removed or further evaluated and share the list with the Shade Tree Commission so that Collins can also look at the trees. Williams stated in the meantime they need to start removing dead trees because dead is dead and there is nothing to wait for. Kistler then brings up that Supervisor Mitchell mentioned to him there were a few dead trees in Penn Pump Park. From this information Kistler went to Penn Pump Park and said he found fourteen dead trees in clusters right in the park. Kistler stated he had a contractor coming to remove the trees the next day because dead is dead, there is no argument about it and there is no real need for the Shade Tree Commission because the tree is already dead.
- k. Collins asked if the township wanted to put out something on social media for residents to report trees of concern and Armato thought that was a great idea. Collins mentioned that it will raise residents' awareness and let them know the township is looking to help take care of this problem. Armato equated it to police putting out a wanted sign to have the public help them catch a criminal, they can have the public help them identify dangerous or concerning trees. Kistler suggested first doing their in-house survey, gathering a list and then asking residents if there are other trees that need to be removed. Kistler was concerned about asking residents for this information while also doing a township survey they might end up going out to look at the same tree multiple times. Collins agreed with this, and stated residents might call and continually ask about when their tree will be removed. Kistler thought that perhaps after the township has already begun replanting the one for one tree they will remove, then ask residents for other trees that they want the township to evaluate.
- l. Armato asked Williams where the responsibility would fall with tree removal in developments. Williams stated that the planning commission and now Shade Tree Commission would oversee approving a plan for developments. Collins stated many townships require tree removal plans and tree replacement plans and that

she has helped many clients in New Jersey develop these plans and that these plans specify what landowners will have to do if they remove a large healthy tree. Williams stated to add it to the approval process and that if the planning commission does not discuss tree specifics Armato can add them in later with developers. Collins was adamant that if the township wants to change their process and wants to add tree removal and replacement plans as requirements, they need to change the ordinance and update their checklist. Williams mentioned the stormwater plan and that there can be similar tree removal and tree replacement plans. Williams also stated developers could relocate trees whereas now they just cut them down, but they need to discuss a policy. Kistler mentioned that developers usually have a forester come out to look at the site as well. DeGerolamo and Armato also discussed that they are changing the ordinance to be more specific about tree height and circumference planted in upcoming developments, as well as berm requirements. Williams mentioned Armato also adding tree replacement and Collins offered her assistance to help with what Armato may need since she has experience developing tree replacement plans for other clients.

3. Tree evaluation process

- a. Collins explains the type of reports she does for her career with tree evaluations but also discussed that Kistler had already said he does not need a formal report, just something to show residents what the township saw with the tree and why it was dead or a hazard for documentation purposes. Collins also explained that sometimes Dan Lichtenwalner goes to court when Township homeowners do not want to remove a dead tree from their yard. Collins would need to discuss protocol and his needs from the STC more in depth before putting forth an evaluation process. Williams stated Collins can reach out to him, DeGerolamo, or Armato with any updates or questions. Williams also stated the new board is very environmentally focused and they want a cohesive policy that supports the community and the environment. Kistler stated that about 20 years ago they always thought that if they removed a few dead trees then the problem would be handled never thinking there would be more and more dead trees to remove.
- b. Williams stated that the tree evaluation process is a work in progress. Kistler also told Collins prior to the next Shade Tree Commission meeting he would work on getting a list of trees that are curbside that need to be removed for safety. Williams then stated they will be at Penn Pump Park the following morning to remove dead trees and asked if they were ash trees. Kistler said no most of them are oaks. Collins stated ash trees within two years are very dangerous, but oaks may stand dead for a longer time. Kistler then mentioned Supervisor Mitchell had seen many branches blowing down in the wind from the dead trees in the park as well, so the township wanted to remove them right away. Armato asked about stump grinding on the trees in Penn Pump Park and Kistler said they can grind the stumps. Kistler said he had spoken to their current tree contractor and the contractor had said it would not be bad to thin out the trees in Penn Pump Park by

the pavilions. Armato jumped in and stated he does not necessarily think the whole cluster of trees need to be replanted where they were and DeGerolamo added that less trees would mean less mud by the creek bank. Williams stated they could replant replacement trees a few miles away, as long as there is a tree is planted somewhere for the ones that are removed.

4. Introductions

- a. Williams introduced Strasko to Collins and explained that Strasko will be the administrative support. If there is anything Collins wants added to the agenda to discuss she can contact Strasko to put it on the agenda. Williams also introduces Strasko as the Environmental Steering Committee administrative support, and she has a degree in Environmental Science from the University of Maine. Williams then introduced Lee Hilbert as operational support or boots on the ground, he will be the parks employee that initially goes out to inspect trees that residents call about and can send Collins a picture to keep the Shade Tree Commission up to date on what the township needs help with, or if Collins needs help, she can send Hilbert to look at a tree and converse with her on its status. Williams then introduced Armato as the liaison to the committee, newly elected official to converse with other elected officials and make sure Collins' concerns are heard.
- b. Although Romano was not present, Collins stated she had met him briefly years before and he had wanted to institute a tree removal permit then. Collins said she had told him to start something and never heard back from him about it. Armato asked if there were more applicants to join the commission, but DeGerolamo stated they have not had interest despite putting it on the website and on social media. Collins suggested making the advertisement more friendly by saying you do not need to have a landscaping background you just need a passion for the environment. Strasko mentioned she is trying to convince her father to apply to join the commission because he always had a love for trees. Collins said she thought that would be great if he could come join.
- c. DeGerolamo stated she would reach back out to Romano to follow up and make sure he is still interested.

5. Old Policy

- a. Williams tells Collins the story about removing the rope swing tree a few years ago and how he got push back from the community and the BoS even though the tree was dead and Kistler recommended it be removed. Kistler also described that the rope swing tree used to be a nuisance attractant for teenagers in the township where teens were leaving clothing, cans, and paraphernalia, but because of the location the police could not catch who was doing it and could not witness anything occurring. Williams also said the tree was hollowed out when they cut it down and there were no leaves on it. Kistler also said he cut the rope down many times over the years, but it always came back because the tree was still there. Collins stated in the future if there is public outcry against a tree, they can call her or another certified arborist that will do an assessment and a report and if residents complain about the process or removal, they can hire their own arborist

to refute. Williams also mentioned about 50% of the people that were using the rope swing were from out of town which was an even bigger hazard because they were not used to swimming in a creek and could get hurt very easily. Williams then explained the way the second-class township code is written the Shade Tree Commission has the authority to make the decisions regarding trees. Williams then shows Collins the ordinance that Palmer has giving the Shade Tree Commission its authority and the current tree and sidewalk policy. Collins asked if anyone felt that ordinances need to be changed, she will review them more in depth. Strasko jumped in and stated the tree and sidewalk policy should be revised for the new direction the township is taking. Kistler explained that the ordinance was written to address an issue that was coming up from residents about sidewalk heaving so the ordinance was trying to draw a line for what the homeowners are responsible for. Kistler also explained the public works had a lot do to because the time that the ordinance was written they were also doing street tree trimming and the ordinance in place stated public works had to contact each homeowner individually to tell them they were trimming the street trees and the homeowner had 30 to 60 days to reply if they would allow it or not. Collins asked if those are street trees the township owns and Kistler said yes. He further explained the procedure was put in place by the previous board because residents were up in arms about the township trimming trees. Kistler said the reason for this was that the township got grouped together with MetEd when they did tree trimming, so this sidewalk ordinance was to get around having to contact each property owner.

- b. Collins stated she was going to go through a list of approved street trees for township that she received but that the approved trees should be added to the tree replacement ordinance. Williams asked Armato to follow up about approved trees before they pass a new zoning ordinance and Armato stated he would. Williams also stated they will probably make the tree list official sometime in August and DeGerolamo mentioned the first public meeting will be next month, Armato jumped in and stated sometime in July. Williams and DeGerolamo explained it will not be final for about three months, the first public meeting is with the planning commission then it has to go to LVPC for 30 days then before the BoS. Williams stated Collins is welcome to attend the meetings or send an email, but they need to make sure the list of approved street and development trees needs to be reviewed. Collins stated she would look more at the list.
 - c. Williams and Collins reiterate that they are going to stick with one on one in public right of way, Williams stated he thought one on one is responsible, but Collins stated it depends on the situation. Collins is looking to qualify what the township has and determine what we need to move forward from there. Collins also asked about the right of way making sure they are not just talking about sidewalk strips, but all right of way. Kistler stated typically ten feet off the pavement is the right of way the township is responsible for. Collins also reiterates that the current tree removal policy needs to be updated.
6. Old Orchard Park trees removing tops

- a. Kistler explained a resident has a concern about 80-90-foot-tall pine trees falling onto his property. The resident wants the trees topped (remove the top) to about 40-50 feet. Collins asked if they must top trees and essentially kill trees because someone is afraid. Collins stated that is not a reasonable request, if the trees are a danger, they will be dealt with in a different manner, but trees will not be topped. Kistler asked Collins to look at the trees for him to evaluate the situation so he can respond to the resident and let them know that the Shade Tree Commission evaluated the trees he was concerned about and what her findings are. Collins also said the township can always give residents the option of hiring their own arborist to evaluate the trees as well and bring it to the Shade Tree Commission but usually residents do not take this action.
- b. Collins also brings up that she has seen a lot of trees being topped around Palmer Township and that it should be stopped. Collins explained the only thing tree topping does is open a healthy tree to disease and fungus. She also stated residents should consider planting smaller tree species rather than topping trees. Williams stated that should be stipulated in the new ordinance they are working on for tree removal and told Kistler they will need the staff to evaluate these trees as well. Kistler asked if they should take emails from Collins regarding trees and add them to property files and explained that every property has its own files and Williams agreed they should add these to property files. Collins asked about verbal interactions or phone calls and Williams explained the township employee she is speaking with can hand write a note for what they discussed and add that to the property file as well. Kistler explained how important the property files are for him when residents call and ask questions about their property. Kistler stated he would wait for Collins' evaluation to contact the resident back about the trees they were concerned about, and Collins said she could go out sometime during the week to inspect them.
- c. Collins stated that with the position being volunteer based if it takes up too many of her billable hours, she may need to discuss compensation with the township and Williams stated that would be fine since she is already a hired consultant for the township from other projects in the past. Kistler asked if that would be a conflict of interest, but Williams explained Collins will not be paid for coming to meetings, only where her expertise is needed to evaluate the health of trees and safety of residents. Armato asked if that would be a per diem situation and Williams agreed. Williams stated if Collins is writing a report based on her expertise, she should be compensated but if Collins comes to discuss trees in the township as a resident that is her volunteer time. Kistler said there is Collins the professional and Collins the volunteer. DeGerolamo also stated if they only had three residents on the committee that loved trees and had a passion for the environment, they would need to hire someone like Collins anyway, so they are hiring her. Kistler asked Williams and Armato about the 2023 budget creating a line item for a professional tree consultant and they both agreed. Williams explained that other committees having professional consultants like engineers

and lawyers to make sure they have the right tools and for the Shade Tree Commission to get back to full strength the township would need to fund a consultant for it. Collins also mentioned when they have a full committee the other members who may have more time than her could write posts for social media and she would not need to worry about that aspect of the committee. Williams and DeGerolamo also stated Strasko can assist Collins with social media posts as well. Williams also mentioned Cindy Kramer is the social media person for the other township Facebook pages and Collins can send concepts of posts to Kramer to work with.

- d. Collins mentioned possibly doing fundraisers in the future and Kistler asked Armato about Arbor Day event plans and Armato stated there were plans for an Arbor Day event in the future as well.
7. Closing
- a. Williams asked for comments from the group and Collins if there was anything else they missed that she wanted to discuss. Collins stated they covered a lot and there was a lot to do but there will be more coming up. Williams stated they will exchange emails, start in Penn Pump Park, and meet again at the end of June. Williams mentioned Strasko bringing her father to be on the committee and Strasko stated she knew he needed to write a short biography first. Collins then asked how new members join committees and Armato explained himself and Jeff Young interview members of committees even if residents want to be reappointed at the end of their term. Collins stated she could stay on as a consultant at the end of her term. Williams stated going forward Strasko, Armato and Hilbert will be at every meeting going forward and that the committee is agenda driven so if there is nothing on the agenda there does not need to be a meeting.
 - b. The meeting was adjourned at 7:42pm.