

Metuchen Shade Tree Commission – Meeting Minutes – February 7, 2023

Attending: Dorothy Rasmussen, Bettina Caluori, Ken Sammond, Jeremy Campbell, Rebecca Sabreen.

Guests: Saeryon Park, Alvin Nazario, Kunhan Lee.

Meeting began at 7:38 pm.

Approval of Minutes from January 3, 2023

Ken Sammond moved to accept minutes, and Rebecca Sabreen seconded. Minutes accepted.

Updates on Annual Report

Jeremy Campbell reported that, due to illness, he had no chance to meet in person with Melissa about the Annual report.

He emailed Becky Cuthbert, Finance Director, and Brian Lewis, Supervisor of Public Works.

Brian Lewis responded and provided data for annual report.

He asked if Ken could submit volunteer hours for this report?

Spring Plantings

Dorothy Rasmussen reported that she spoke to Melissa Perlstein & Brian Lewis who stated they will work in a timely manner to get new trees in. She also shared two documents from Brian detailing spring tree plantings, including types of trees and locations of plantings. 33 trees are being planted.

Another document listed the cost and the vendor. She also said that the borough wants to add a memorial tree and announced that there will be a fall planting too, so we should go through neighborhoods to see where trees are needed.

Shade Tree Commissioners should email Dorothy and Jeremy, as chair, for requests for trees for the fall planting. When asked, Dorothy stated that she needs to confirm use of gaiters and stakes for the tree planting.

Kunhan Lee asked if there are any sidewalk concerns or prep done due to potential damage to sidewalks? Dorothy stated that the borough has a right to plant on the right of way. Jeremy noted that any tree will impact its surroundings over the lifespan of a tree (40+ years)

Bettina made a motion to accept the planting locations and tree types and costs. Rebecca seconded. All voted aye.

Bi-Annual Plantings and Budgeting

Jeremy asked how Melissa wants to work with us for the rest of the year? We discussed that we should have walkabouts and correspond with homeowners. We would construct the planting list. Brian will also make suggestions and send it out for bid.

All commissioners agreed with these suggestions.

Part of our purview: Annual accomplishment report.

Ken asked where funding for trees comes from as he

Dorothy stated that it comes from the tree bank budget run by the borough, which is funded by developers.

Ken asked if we can get a fixed budget amount that increases based on inflation indexing? Or if we can see the numbers to plan better.

Jeremy pointed out that we need to ensure good consistency and quality of trees when going through the bidding process. Melissa will work with us to make sure we get what we need.

Bettina pointed out that we had a tree inventory but that we need to ensure that we update it prior to our updated borough shade tree plan.

Dorothy stated that funding for the inventory was cut from budget. Davey Tree did it in 2008.

Bettina asked if they analyzed where we are overinvested in certain species

Dorothy pointed out that DPW does some assessment. Only PSEG and contractors can cut where wires are.

Jeremy suggested that should create a collaborative relationship, noting that it might good if PSE&G could take down some of the problematic trees while they are trimming the area?

Bettina asked if we can do an inventory of dead trees. And she discussed also how we pick trees for planning and how we educate the public about our work.

Ken pointed out that based on the end of lifespan of the London Plane trees throughout town, looks like we need a plan to reinvest and replant. He stated that we need a comprehensive plan to replicate the allees in Metuchen, which are part of the personality of Metuchen. And that we should maintain that sense of aesthetic balance on the Main street, Plainfield Rd and Amboy Avenue

Bettina asked how the shade tree commission can advocate for a plan to replace the allées. Build a systemic plan. Continue the historic look and feel.

Kenhun asked if there are forestry grants to replace trees.

Dorothy stat that yes, there are some. She pointed out that the Mayor had proposed a grant to remove dead and dying trees. First and only to get that.

Kenhun asked what the plan is going forward?

Dorothy stated that Brian Lewis is assessing and that the borough has a new tree truck.

Kenhun asked what amount of trees can DPW remove each year?

Jeremy stated that according to Brian Lewis there were 21 removals and 3 significant prunings in 2022

Dorothy pointed out that in 2009, when an inventory was done, there were some 500 trees that should were listed as needing to come down.

Jeremy said we should be creative, perhaps remove as part of traffic/safety grant

Dorothy – Metuchen got a \$9 million traffic grant from NJTPA and that some might be used to remove some trees as the streetscape is redone near downtown.

Jeremy asked what we planned to do for Arbor Day, which is falling on April 28, 2023.

Conversation by all: Look for property to plant for that day. Many sites were mentioned, but none were chosen. One option was the walkway by Creative Twist. A row of cypresses perhaps.

Next meeting on March 7, 2023. Jeremy will be in Florida. Ken Sammond volunteered to moderate. Bettina volunteered to do the minutes.

Rebecca made a motion to adjourn. Ken second. All said aye.