

**MINUTES of the  
City of Portsmouth  
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting  
June 8, 2022**

**Members Present:** Chairman Peter Loughlin; Vice-Chair Richard Adams; Peter Rice, Director of Public Works; Members Michael Griffin, Dennis Souto, A .J. Dupere, and Deborah Chag; Arborist Foreman Chuck Baxter

**Members Excused:** Patricia Bagley

**Also Present:** Scott Richardson, Eversource Representative

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Chairman Loughlin called the meeting to order at 8 a.m.

**1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the May 4, 2022 Meeting**

The minutes were **amended** to reflect a change by replacing the word “postings” for “drafts” so that the sentence now reads as follows: Ms. Chag said the postings of the Tree Committee provided a way to make the committee’s process more transparent and was a mechanism for people to come to the meetings and discuss their issues.

The minutes were then **approved** as amended.

**2. Tree Removal Requests**

- **777 Middle Road** – 1 white pine, 1 pin oak, 1 black cherry, Eversource request.

Eversource representative Scott Richardson was present and said the condominium residents had trouble getting out of the parking lot due to the pine and oak trees growing out into the lot. He said the black cherry had a big rot spot on its side.

- **860 Middle Road** – 1 black locust, Eversource request.

Mr. Richardson said the tree had a rot issue at its base and further up.

Ms. Chag said she talked to the neighbors at 777 Middle Road and discovered that a pedestrian-triggered light was to be installed that would be adversely affected by the trees and that the neighbors agreed that the trees should come down. Mr. Baxter said he was in support of removing trees at both locations.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere recommended **removal** of the four trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote.*

### **3. Update from City Arborist Chuck Baxter**

Mr. Baxter distributed a tree watering list to the committee that included tree species and locations. He said trees planted under wires needed to be under 25 feet tall and were difficult to get from nurseries because many other municipalities wanted them. He said they had planted “a ton” of different species this year. He noted that the five Zelcovas that were planted the previous year that he didn’t think would survive were thriving, and this year’s Katsura trees and a few lilac trees were struggling, even though they were from the same nursery and stock. He said the sidewalks were redone at Columbia and State Streets and lacked trees, so he was trying to plant a few trees there as well as in other neighborhoods. He said he focused on having them somewhat grouped together for watering purposes. Ms. Chag asked if there would be more of a variety of trees next year. Mr. Baxter said there was a lot of variety now, especially compared to other municipalities. Vice-Chair Adams asked if there was any point in presenting the nursery with a list of desired trees for next year or a few years ahead. Mr. Baxter said he had done that but the nursery wouldn’t do a custom order. Ms. Chag asked if anything would be planted in the workforce housing areas. Mr. Rice said those areas were managed by the Housing Authority and weren’t in the City’s purview but he could find out if they wanted the trees watered by Public Works. It was further discussed.

Mr. Baxter said the 2022 planting list was actually combined with the 2021 list and that Public Works wanted to add a third watering tank. Mr. Rice said many more trees would be added next year and he was trying to get private residents to contribute 100 trees. Mr. Griffin asked Mr. Dupere if above-average growth was seen this year. Mr. Dupere said it was seen on some plants, and it was further discussed. Ms. Chag asked where the water to water the trees came from. Mr. Baxter said it was city water but that they had to use dechlorinated water, and he discussed the adverse effects of chlorinated water on compost. He said there was huge growth on the second-year trees this year and discussed which species were suitable for various locations and which trees made good street trees. Chairman Loughlin said when he went down streets that had tree planting programs, he found it very significant and he was proud that he lived in a city that planted and maintained those trees. Mr. Rice said his department implemented what the residents requested and that it was the impetus that the Trees Committee brought to the table that allowed all that. It was further discussed.

Mr. Griffin asked if the committee had a dedicated City Council representative yet. Mr. Rice said the first reading would be on June 21. Chairman Loughlin said the committee was probably one of the few that didn’t have a City Council representative, and it was further discussed.

Mr. Griffin asked what the status of the Pannaway sidewalk project was. Mr. Rice said they separated State Street sidewalks from Pannaway and Maple Haven and planned to circle back for a fall bid for spring construction. Ms. Chag asked if the committee would weigh in, noting that the bidding process led her to believe that all those trees would come down. Mr. Rice said the intent was to confirm that the neighborhood was interested in the sidewalks and understood the

impacts to the trees. He said there would be another public meeting to show the residents which trees would be removed. He said areas that had trees removed and replanted would provide the community with a new tree canopy within 5-10 years.

Mr. Rice discussed the sidewalk process. Mr. Souto asked how it was known what the community wanted and what the decision-making rule was, like whether 51 percent had to be in favor. Mr. Rice said it was impossible to come up with a metric that fit all situations because it was a combination of things. He said they held public meetings, did surveys, and worked with the residents to come up with a consensus. He said it was nice to have a solid majority above 50 percent but it wasn't always that way. Chairman Loughlin said the public process wasn't always just on the trees but was a broader topic. Vice-Chair Adams asked if the committee's opinion would count for nothing if 100 percent of the committee didn't favor removing trees. Mr. Rice said it came down to the context of the situation. He said sidewalks involved traffic volume and speeds, population density, and safety concerns. He said he'd have to talk to the Legal Department relative to the committee's jurisdiction or ability to dictate City policy but thought there would be compromise in figuring out how to make it work, e.g. some sidewalks could have asphalt in certain spots or there could be easements for private properties. Vice-Chair Adams said he got the sense at the last meeting that people didn't fully understand how many trees would come down and what it would look like, and he said he'd like to think that the City had the capability to show what removing 30+ trees would look like because it would have a powerful effect on the neighborhood. Mr. Rice said some people who were opposed to something looked for any reason to be opposed to it, which included the removal of trees. He said all the people that his department spoke to were opposed to the sidewalks and that it had nothing to do with trees originally. He said Photoshop and pictures could be a way to conceptualize what it would look like when the trees were gone, but it took lots of time and was expensive and it still wouldn't change anyone's mind. Chairman Loughlin agreed with Vice-Chair Adams and said if the City Council approved it, he wouldn't say the sidewalks shouldn't be installed because the trees shouldn't be cut down, but he wondered what the extent of the community process was. Ms. Chag said it was a very long process and felt that the committee was late to the party and playing catch-up. Mr. Rice said there was ample opportunity for the residents to participate in the process, and it was further discussed. He referred to the Little Harbor situation that ended up being a better solution for everyone and said maybe the City could just be a little more sensitive. Mr. Dupere said it was a different situation because a lot of people other than the residents liked to walk in the Little Harbor neighborhood and very few residents who lived there actually went to the meeting. Mr. Rice said he would not encourage the committee to extend their involvement to things that could become more political in nature and could detract from their mission and erode some of their support. He said the committee should focus on what they did well, and it was further discussed.

#### **4. Tree Planting for the City's 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Mr. Rice said he received money from the Rotary Club and had to think about adding a third watering system. He said additional seasonal staff would be needed and that he might start thinking of an outreach effort for residents. Mr. Baxter said it was a huge stretch for the City to

plant 400 trees because they didn't have enough staff or trucks, so the idea was to have 200 of those trees watered by a seasonal employee and the other 200 sourced from the State or paid for by residents who could plant and maintain them on their properties. He said planting a total of 400 trees for the City to water and maintain would require a drastic change in staff. He said residents could be given smaller trees or saplings because heavy trees might be too much for them to handle, due to bare root issues, etc. He said Eversource would donate ten trees. Mr. Richardson said he didn't know if Eversource would water the trees. Mr. Dupere suggested that a nursery could prepare 3-ft to 5-ft trees for the City to pick up that would be easy to plant.

Ms. Chag asked if the project would be integrated into the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Mr. Rice suggested deputizing a committee member to represent the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Vice-Chair Adams said he was already involved.

*Mr. Rice **moved** that Vice-Chair Adams and Ms. Chag participate in the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary process and be the committee's eyes, ears, and voices to help coordinate it. The motion was seconded and **passed** unanimously.*

Ms. Chag said a tree trust could be a legacy opportunity for people who lived in apartments and couldn't plant a tree. Mr. Baxter said the trust was formed five years ago but he didn't know how it worked. Ms. Chag said the trust was on the City's website but didn't look active. Mr. Rice said if Ms. Chag generated something, he could add it to the website. She said it would just highlight a place for people in apartments to donate their money. Mr. Souto said it was a good idea but that it didn't have a lot of support among the committee members before.

## **5. Old Business**

There was no old business.

## **6. New Business**

Vice-Chair Adams said there was a row of 30-40 tall, beautiful purple irises near the Fish Pier parking lot in Peirce Island and asked who planted them. Mr. Baxter said a summer hire planted them three years ago. It was agreed that the intern should be complimented for her superb effort.

Ms. Chag said she sent the committee members an article about the increase in Monarch butterflies and said there was an increase of 35 percent in the Midwest. She asked whether there would be opposition to sprinkling seeds in nearby conservation lands. Mr. Baxter said tree crews didn't do that type of thing but citizens could. Mr. Rice said the City had a horticulturist now in addition to Mr. Baxter and three licensed arborists. Chairman Loughlin said it was important to note in the Trees Committee Report that the City had been able to hire three people who were certified arborists in a time when it was hard to hire anyone. Mr. Rice said his department trained employees who worked with arborists to become certified, and it was further discussed.

Vice-Chair Adams said the committee was formed in 2002 and he and Chairman Loughlin were charter members. He said he remembered speaking to an individual who was powerful on the City staff and telling him that the committee wanted a full-time arborist. He said the person's response was "we don't need that, and someone from Public Works who put about 15 percent of

their time into tree work would be adequate”. Vice-Chair Adams said times changed and needs changed

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, July 13, 2022

The meeting was **adjourned** at 9:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault

Trees and Public Greenery Committee Recording Secretary