

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
February 14, 2024**

Members Present: Chair Peter Loughlin; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; Members Patricia Bagley, Dennis Souto, A. J. Dupere, Michael Griffin, and Deborah Chag.

Members Excused: None.

Also Present: Deputy City Attorney Trevor McCourt; Eversource/Northern Tree Service Representative Scott Richardson; Terrence Parker of Terra Firma.

Chair Loughlin called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the December 13, 2023 Meeting and the Minutes of the January 10, 2024 Meeting

The December 13 meeting minutes were **approved** as presented. The January 10 meeting minutes were **approved as amended**. (The term “chestnut tree” under the Arbor Day section was changed to “horse chestnut tree”).

2. Tree Removal Requests

Note: the following three Pinehurst Rd trees were reviewed as a group.

51 Pinehurst Rd: 1 Sugar maple, fair condition, Eversource request. This tree has a large cavity with decay on its house-facing side about 10' from the ground. Sounding the tree on the road-facing side produces hollow notes, likely caused by a wound from the roots or trunk and extending 5'+ from ground.

115 Pinehurst Rd: 1 Norway maple, poor condition, Eversource request. This tree has been in a state of decline and has a very thin canopy. There is a decent size old wound about 10' from the base of the tree on the road facing side of the tree.

125 Pinehurst Rd: 1 Norway maple, fair condition, Eversource request. The tree displays signs of decline such as dead tips and a thinning canopy. A planned utility upgrade will require intense pruning and leaving the tree in place will be a safety concern.

Dave Underhill of 115 Pinehurst Road was present. He asked if a tree had to be removed just because Eversource said it should be. He said the Norway maple at 115 Pinehurst that was marked in poor condition was in front of his home, and the tree marked at 51

Pinehurst was a magnificent tree and could live for another ten years. Mr. Wiater said the tree at 51 Pinehurst Rd had structural issues but that pruning was always an option in general. He said pruning didn't make sense for the trees at 115 Pinehurst Rd and 125 Pinehurst Rd. Assistant Mayor Kelley asked how the trees were ranked. Mr. Wiater said they were dead, poor, fair, or good and that it came down to how the canopy looked overall and if there were structural issues. Ms. Chag said the 51 Pinehurst tree had some big gaps and showed signs of distress. Mr. Wiater said it was pruned by Eversource and the cavity's location had a lot of weight on top it. Eversource representative Scott Richardson said he could only make recommendations if trees posed problems for power lines and that it was the Committee's decision to either have it pruned or removed and that a tree should be replaced with another tree that was more suitable for under the wires. He said the 115 Pinehurst tree directly in front of Mr. Underhill's house was in bad condition. Mr. Underhill said he spoke to an Eversource contractor, who said the power line was being upgraded and trees had to be cleared out. He asked if there was a plan to change the electric service. Mr. Richardson said that section of road would get an additional span of higher voltage wire and that Eversource wanted the maximum clearance for the additional larger pole.

Chair Loughlin said the Committee did not want trees cut down, but any risk of danger was a tipping point. Mr. Underhill asked if the removed trees would be replaced. Mr. Richardson said they tried to leave as much vegetation as possible but had parameters to maintain. Mr. Rice asked what the percentage of candidates for the 2024 tree planting was, and Mr. Wiater said it was at 90 percent. He said it might be possible to replace the trees on Pinehurst Rd but that there was normally a wait of one or two years. Mr. Dupere said the bark on the 51 Pinehurst Rd tree was barely holding onto the tree.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. Mr. Souto *moved to recommend removal of the listed Pinehurst Rd trees, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

58 Middle Rd: 1 sugar maple, fair condition, Eversource request. The tree displays typical signs of decline such as branch dieback and a thinning canopy. There is a cavity present on the road-facing side.

Doug Tilton of 58 Middle Road was present to speak to the request. He said he noticed that the tree was stressed, its leaves fell off early, and it had a wound on the street side that healed over but he saw rot inside. He asked if the condition was bad enough to remove the tree or if the removal could wait to see how it leafed out in the spring. Mr. Wiater said it was just the wrong tree for the site. He said it would continue to be pruned for the utility lines if it remained, but Eversource had identified the tree as one they would like removed. Mr. Tilton said the tree had been pruned a lot and it seemed to have a much better year this time around. Mr. Wiater said all the trees in that area weren't sited well. Mr. Tilton said the trees provided shade to his house and that the tree in question was more to the north and had a nice symmetry. He asked if it was possible to just prune

it and remove it if it failed. Mr. Dupere said about 20 percent of the top of that tree was dead and the limbs on the side were decayed, which meant the tree was dying.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion.

*Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the sugar maple, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

323 Islington St: 1 boxelder, poor condition, removal recommended by City. This tree is in the backyard of this (at present) City-owned lot. A neighbor is concerned as this tree has had numerous breaks, and there is a good amount of decaying wood in the unions of large branches.

Deputy City Attorney Trevor McCourt was present to provide the City's context on the 323 Islington Street tree removal request as well as the 508 Richards Avenue tree and hedge removal requests. He said the two properties were taken over by the City a few months ago because the owners didn't pay the taxes, and the City had to make the properties safe and protect the City's liability while balancing any funds that it spent with the proceeds of the sales of the properties. He said the City had to spend money on 323 Islington Street to remediate mold for the property to be saleable. He noted that the property at 508 Richards Avenue was a rental property that needed smoke detectors, railings fixed, and so on to make it safe. He said a neighbor said the boxelder at 323 Islington Street was dangerous, so the City had to investigate it to see if it put the building and neighbors at risk.

Mr. Wiater said the boxelder at 323 Islington Street had some wounding and large limbs that were decayed, and a lot of weight was being supported by some poor unions of large branches. He said the tree was well past its prime. He said the tree's removal wouldn't be easy due to the two roll-off storage boxes on the property. Attorney McCourt said those were to remove personal possessions and would be gone at some point.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the boxelder, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

Note: the following two requests for 508 Richards Avenue were grouped.

508 Richards Ave: 1 ash, poor condition, removal recommended by City. This tree is in the side yard of this (at present) City-owned lot. This tree presents large sections of deadwood. There is a large section of necrotic included bark. A neighboring ash was recently removed due to EAB.

508 Richards Ave: hedges on corner of South and Richards. These hedges have been problematic for pedestrians and drivers. They will be removed and their roots ground.

Attorney McCourt said the removal requests at 508 Richards Ave were basically the same situation as 323 Islington Street but there were people living there. The hedge request removal for discussed first. Mr. Wiater said the hedges were near a heavily-used pedestrian corridor for school children and presented a sight line issue to drivers. He said he recommended removing the hedges because they couldn't be contained more. Mr. Rice said the City looked into clarifying the ordinance stating that the City had the right to cut back hedges, and that area was just one of many challenging ones in Portsmouth. He said it was an opportunity to correct a recurring complaint. He said he didn't believe a hedge fell under the Committee's purview but thought it was appropriate for the Committee to be aware of the situation because the City would be alerting citizens that it would be doing drastic hedge pruning in the City. Chair Loughlin said the Committee had the same issue on other city streets.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the hedges, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

The ash tree was discussed. Mr. Wiater said the entire center of the canopy was dead, sections of bark were coming off including a section of the trunk, and the canopy was declining overall. Mr. Wiater noted other ash trees in the area were recently removed due to the spread of Emerald Ash Borer.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the ash tree, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

Langdon Park near 39 South St: 1 Sugar maple, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree presents large sections of deadwood.

Mr. Wiater said the sugar maple was in very poor condition.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to recommend removal of the sugar maple, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed unanimously.*

Langdon Park near City Hall exit ramp: 1 Red maple, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree presents large sections of deadwood and a large vertical crack 15 feet off the ground.

Mr. Wiater said there were large sections of dead wood and a large vertical crack. He said it made more sense to remove the tree completely than do it in stages.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Ms. Chag moved to recommend removal of the red maple, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Griffin abstaining from the vote.*

Ms. Chag noted that a lot of trees in Portsmouth seemed to be aging out at the same time or getting diseases, such as Langdon Park, and asked about the removal and pruning

cycle. Mr. Wiater said trees were being removed from right of ways and next to roadways more frequently, but he would be inclined to replace trees that were being removed from the park. Mr. Rice said the park wasn't treated as an arboretum and said he would support the Committee if it was interested in considering more of a master plan-type vision.

3. Landscape Plan Approval

581 Lafayette Rd: Terrence Parker of Terra Firma is proposing a revision to the previously approved landscape plan for TOUR Portsmouth. The new plan will be presented as a pocket park with trees, benches, and walkways.

Terrence Parker was present to review the revision to the landscape plan for TOUR Portsmouth. He said since the last time they met and discussed planting a bed with two trees, the property owner Mark McNabb asked that the pocket park be expanded. Mr. Parker explained in detail how the pocket park could be expanded.

Assistant Mayor Kelley asked what the total square footage of the pocket park was. Mr. Parker said he didn't have a figure but noted that the lower area was at least 1,500 square feet. Ms. Kelley asked why the public access area of the park would have a gate. Mr. Parker said it would be a fence with an open gate and that the area would be open to the public. Ms. Kelley said her concern was that a gate indicated to a regular citizen that the property couldn't be accessed. She recommended placing some type of signage so that citizens knew they had access to that part of the area. Mr. Parker said the gate was only indicated on the diagram and wasn't actually proposed in that area. He said he would remove it from the diagram.

Ms. Bagley confirmed that the pocket park would be on City property. Mr. Parker agreed. Mr. Rice clarified that the City was responsible for maintaining DOT property on Lafayette Rd. Mr. Parker said that mostly everything from the bus stop to the left was greenery without trees. Ms. Kelley said the City maintained the area but it was owned by the State, and she asked if the City had the right to approve the plantings in that case. Mr. Rice said the City had invested time and money into maintaining it and that the City's goal was to beautify the area and have the property developer maintain it because it was consistent with the City's goal for the gateway. He said he saw it as enhancing what the City was already doing. He said the City would continue the maintenance on one side of the sidewalk and Mr. McNabb would do the rest. Ms. Chag asked if some of the plants in the garden area could be labeled. Ms. Kelley said it would be an interesting aspect of the park for residents and visitors as they explored that new area. Mr. Parker said it could be discussed at a future meeting.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to recommend approval of the landscape plan, seconded by Ms. Chag. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

4. Arbor Day 2024 Update

Mr. Wiater said there were no new updates. He noted that Arbor Day was April 26 and there was an opportunity to plant some Whipple chestnut tree saplings, but he had made a lot of calls and sent several emails to individuals and had come up with nothing, so it seemed to be a dead end for this year's Arbor Day. He said they would do the standard tree planting and proclamation if no other opportunities arose. Mr. Rice said the staff and resources budget was tight and that he wouldn't take on another big project that required staff time. He asked if a spot for the proclamation tree was chosen. Mr. Wiater said a site that was already identified for planting could be used. He said they would also plant a memorial tree for Dr. Geoffrey Clark in May in the right-of-way strip in front of 152 Middle Street, which he was coordinating with Martha Fuller Clark.

5. Update of Tree Planting for the City's 401st Anniversary

Mr. Wiater said the selected sites were at 90 percent and that the City had 150 trees and about 130 sites lined up for them. He said dig safes would be done mid-March and the planting would start during the first week of April. He further explained the process.

6. Programs for Reintroducing American Elm

Mr. Dupere said American elms and chestnut trees were still planted occasionally. He said they had a chestnut orchard in Peterborough and had selected chestnut burrs last fall and sent them to the American Chestnut Foundation in Vermont. He noted that it took two chestnuts to make a viable burr, so they had clones from American chestnuts and Chinese chestnuts crossed together as well as crossed back with American chestnuts again. He said the chestnut flowers would be bagged in the spring.

7. Old Business

Mr. Griffin asked if the red oak at the South Street playground was still on Mr. Wiater's radar. Mr. Wiater agreed and said the biggest projects left were in the Worth Lot. Mr. Rice said there was decreased staff and that he was interviewing technicians.

8. New Business

There was no new business.

Next meeting: Wednesday, March 13, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Recording Secretary