

Minutes of Takoma Park Tree Commission meeting

August 10, 2010

By Nicolien van Schouwen

Location: Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Carol Hotton, Melanie Fosnaught, Nicolien van Schouwen and the Takoma Park arborist Todd Bolton.

Meeting opened at 6:40 pm.

There were two main topics of discussion:

- 1) Trees vs. solar panels. Some residents have argued that the Tree Ordinance should be amended to facilitate the removal of trees to allow installation of solar panels, and Ken Hemphill first raised the topic for discussion at an earlier meeting. The Tree Commission discussed this further in the July meeting and Carol Hotton agreed to write up a draft of our conclusions. Briefly summarized, we agreed that the myriad valuable qualities of urban forest trees far outweighs the environmental benefit of solar panels, and that installation of solar panels is regulated under criterion 12.12.120B(1) of the City Code. Homeowners on shaded plots who desire solar panels should be encouraged to think of ways to keep their trees, such as using smaller, vertical panels, placing them in the sunniest part of the yard, and even possibly using a neighbor's or a business's roof. We stressed that we are opposed to modifying the City Tree Ordinance in any way that would impose a two tier system for tree removal.

Todd Bolton pointed out that the removal of a large tree affects not just the property owner but also neighboring property owners and the entire neighborhood (Section 12.12.120B(5) and (6)). He also suggested adding the concept of reduction of heat island effect to the draft. Carol Hotton agreed to research cost/benefit analyses of urban trees vs. solar panels, incorporate these data into a final report and after getting final approval from the rest of the Tree Commission to forward it onto Jessie Carpenter and the City Council, which is tentatively scheduled to discuss the Tree Ordinance on Sept. 27.

- 2) Burden of cost of replacement trees to homeowners. Commissioner Melanie Fosnaught raised this issue with regard to a neighbor who was faced with a cost of several thousand dollars in addition to the cost of removing a large tree, and raised the possibility of waiving the cost of replacement fees in certain cases. The City Arborist Todd Bolton responded by explaining the work sheet for evaluating tree replacement (Sect. 12.12.100(D)). In summary, larger trees, and trees in better health, receive a higher score and so incur more costs; undesirable trees (mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), mulberries (*Morus alba*, *M. rubra*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), box-elder (*Acer negundo*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) are evaluated separately and cost less to replace. Todd pointed out that the requirement for a substantial number of replacement trees was driven in part by the high mortality rate (up to 80%) for young

trees. He further suggested that one way for homeowners to mitigate possible hazards from over mature trees was to remove dead branches; once the tree was dead or dying it could be removed with a waiver. He also mentioned that replacement trees should be vetted through the arborist to follow the '30-20-10' rule for maintaining tree diversity in a community (the tree cover should include no more than 30% of one family, 20% of one genus, and 10% of one species to avoid pests and pathogens). Todd introduced new guidelines for evaluating tree hazards that most likely will be adopted in Maryland (see attachment). Todd would post it on the website and send it to the City Clerk, Jessie Carpenter.

We agreed with Todd, that the Tree Ordinance works well the way it *should work* and should not be amended for the sake of solar panels.

Meeting adjourned 8 pm.