

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

August 12, 2014

By Carol Hotton

Location: Azalea Room, 2nd floor, Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Linette Lander, Chair

Colleen Cordes, Vice-Chair

Carol Hotton, Secretary

No meetings were held in June or July.

Before the meeting formally convened, a resident stopped by to discuss his concern about the high cost of replacement trees on top of the already high cost of tree removal. He asked about possible subsidies for replacement trees. Linette and Carol explained the rationale for replacement. Carol stated that over her 15 years on the Tree Commission, she had heard probably dozens of other residents express similar concern about this aspect of the Tree Ordinance. **Action Item:** Carol will send the resident a list of tree companies that might give him lower estimates for removal, and cautioned him about using non-licensed companies, with which he readily agreed.

The meeting convened at approximately 6:45 pm.

1. Suggested changes were made to May 13 minutes; a revised draft for approval will be circulated before the next meeting.
2. Discussion and follow-up on tree walk in Ward 1 on Sat., Jul 12. After several unsuccessful attempts at a pre-walk, Todd agreed to lead the tree walk. Twelve people attended, including several from other wards. The walk began at the intersection of Albany and Baltimore Aves, thence to New York and then Buffalo Ave. and back to the start. Todd provided an excellent outline of appropriate tree siting and care, emphasizing the destructiveness of lawns to soil health and the value of wood chips in maintaining good soil structure and fertility. A second tree walk was proposed in October. **Action Item:** Colleen to set date and place with Todd.
3. Revisions to Tree Commission web page were discussed.
 - a) Add hyperlink to Art 2. 16.040 in section under heading of Takoma Park Tree Ordinance.
 - b) Under heading of 'Tree Commission', where roles are defined, replace third function 'Advisory' with "The Tree Commission proposes rules, regulations and procedures to protect the urban forest, subject to approval by the City Council and with assistance of the City Arborist."
 - c) Post all past Tree Commission decisions. Rationale - This will serve as an additional public education tool for members of the community who seek to

challenge a permit or tree protection plan, or who simply wish a clearer understanding of the operation of the tree ordinance and those who implement it. Ken Sigman agrees with this, but suggests adding a disclaimer to this page noting that every case has its own unique aspects and cannot be used as a guarantee to future outcomes. Also suggested: posting hotlinks to page with updated pending permits on Arborist page.

- d) Add FAQ page to website. **Action Item:** Linette will begin a preliminary set of Q&As and circulate it to other commissioners for comments and additions; once completed it will be submitted to Ken Sigman for approval.
4. Brief discussion of importance of prompt notice of resignations from Commission and quick replacement to ensure quorum.
 5. Discussion of suggested improvement of hearing process from Linette.
 - a) Always consolidate tree removal and tree protection decisions. Ken's response: he agrees that Arborist "should issue his preliminary tree permit decision and tree protection plan decision at the same time. That way, we would know whether there will be an appeal of both decisions..." and Tree Commission will have an opportunity to determine adequacy of tree protection plan.
 - b) Drafting guidance to residents on how to challenge or support their own appeals/plans. Ken's response: Brief guidance is good idea, e.g. hiring an arborist to review plants and testify at hearing. Guidance can be provided in emails to parties in hearings, or placed on Arborist or TC website.
 - c) It was suggested that individual commissioners keep a checklist of criteria during hearings for their own use, to make sure that all criteria are being addressed during testimony. Discussion: Arborist already runs through criteria during hearing; having TC do identical checklist was considered redundant. Fine to refer to it as a reminder during hearing to ensure that all points are being covered in hearing.
 - d) Include statement in hearing introduction on what testimony Commission will consider, and what testimony it will not. Ken noted that allowing community members to vent is one of functions of hearing, as long as it stays within bounds. **Action Item:** Ken will draft a new, expanded hearing introduction.
 - e) Always seek site visits in all new construction cases, and examine potential for procedural errors from site visits. Ken responded that he was wary of site visits because of concerns over increasing chances of procedural errors. **Action Item:** Ken and Linette will discuss ways of avoiding possible procedural errors during site visits.
 - f) Sufficient advance notice of hearings to ensure quorum. Total consensus on that. Recent problems due to retirement of City administrative assistant who took care of permits, paperwork, etc. Again, problem due to insufficient staffing.
 - g) Advance submission of exhibits should be marked as they will be numbered at hearing, while also allowing for additional exhibits at hearing. There was

complete consensus on this suggestion.

- h) Greater control of hearing (no jumping up, showing exhibits, interjecting testimony). Ken's response: prefers greater informality at some cost of maintaining strict order.
6. Improving communication with City Council on changes to Tree Ordinance and other tree related issues was discussed. One possible mechanism is through yearly reports to City Council. In the past reports to the City Council have been initiated by the Tree Commission. A further problem is the absence of yearly Arborist reports to the City.
7. Discussion on using ideas from other Tree Commissions/Committees (e.g. Chevy Chase Village Tree Commission) and organizations such as Casey Trees to help direct our own activities/agendas. Examples:
- a) Casey Trees provides gator bags and rain gauges to residents at cost—City could do the same. Casey Trees has good video on how to water a tree; encourages residents to take watering pledge: 25 gallons a week if no rain for a week. Explore use of citizen scientist tree inventory, as done by Casey Trees. Contrast with experience of Committee on the Environment Open Space Committee: City plats out of date, city maps inaccurate—need for better data in order to develop plan for protecting trees discussed.
 - b) Discussed developing a liaison relationship with Sustainability Coordinator. Determine her scope of work. Suggest meeting with SC at some point. [Not sure if this was a specific action item at this time.]
 - c) Tree Fest (suggestion from City Council Member Fred Schultz) – celebrate all things tree-related (separate from Arbor Day).

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm