

TREE COMMISSION JANUARY 12TH, 2016

Present: Carol Hotton, Chair; Denny May, Gresham Lowe, Tina Murray and Colleen Cordes

Guests: Paul Chrostowski, Takoma Park Committee on the Environment

Orientation discussion for new member, Tina Murray. of Ward 4.

Discussion on Tree Canopy Measurements and Goals: The Commission referred to the new data that the Montgomery County Office of Planning has put together, at the Tree Commission's request, a summary of GIS data from 2009 and 2013-14 on tree canopy cover in Takoma Park. The data is based on 2009 and 2014 studies carried out by the University of Vermont on land and water features for all of Montgomery County. Commissioners discussed some of the uncertainties about the data and agreed to the need to research how reliable the Office of Planning data for the entire City and ward by ward are. Following are issues that came up in discussion of how to proceed now to confirm and better understand these raw-data results and then how to apply them to the Commission and the Committee on the Environment's work. Action Item: Colleen will send Paul a list of the items we discussed below related to using this data and his committee's interest in proposing City tree-related goals.

- 1) Diversity and Resilience goals: Paul noted that his committee, in winning Sustainable Maryland designation for the City, had committed to establishing an urban tree canopy goal. He is interested not just in overall percentage of tree canopy cover goal (tree abundance), but also goals for diversity and for resilience. Paul encouraged attention to tree diversity and overall ecosystem biodiversity in the goals for the City that are needed to retain Sustainable Maryland designation. Gresham spoke in favor of more diversity in street trees, and others agreed.
- 2) Need to be able to describe and understand the strengths and limitations of the raw data – requires more analysis and groundtruthing. But groundtruthing is time-intensive and requires a group of people trained and willing to do.
- 3) The Council on Governments at some time in the past came up with a suggestion of 65 per cent tree canopy cover for residential/suburban areas and 40 per cent for commercial/urban. But no one at the meeting was certain how COG arrived at those numbers. Gresham said she sent the raw data from the County Planning Office's analysis to Todd today. Discussion on need to study the county maps to see what's the situation with tree canopy gain, loss, and totals at Washington Adventist University. Paul said he could research origin of COG numbers some more.
- 4) When the analysis of the County Planning Office data is finished, it would be a good candidate for an article for Natural Takoma.
- 5) It would be ideal in coming up with tree canopy goals – which could be overall numerical goals, diversity goals, and resilience goals – to involve a broad range of stakeholders, including besides the Commission and Committee on the Environment, the City Arborist, Friends of Sligo Creek, Historic Takoma, Conservation Maryland, Takoma Horticultural Club. **Action Item:** In the future, it was informally agreed that the Tree Commission was in favor of a joint meeting with such groups to discuss the data and the idea of proposing City tree-related goals. Also agreement that it might be helpful if Chris McGovern and/or others from group in County Planning Office could attend to help all understand the data and its statistical significance.

6) Discussion about need to go back into the County Planning Office maps to analyze what's happening in commercial areas and other particular major areas, such as Washington Adventist College campus. **Action Item: Denny** will do some initial research on the tree canopy on the campus of Washington Adventist College and possibilities for replanting lost trees and expanding canopy.

Solar panels and Tree Ordinance: The Commission discussed the possibility that Council Member Tim Male may decide to introduce an amendment to the Tree Ordinance related to solar panels. **Action Item: Colleen** will contact Councilman Male and ask if the Commission can meet with him to discuss his interests and concerns.

Communications with City Arborist: The Commission discussed the need to work more closely with the Arborist, to keep him better informed of its work and for the Commission to be better informed on his work. **Action Items: Carol** will send City Arborist Todd Bolton minutes of Commission meetings, continue to send him drafts of Natural Takoma articles, and invite him to attend the February meeting. **Gresham** will consult with him further on the new data.

Discussion on Tree Fest: Commissioners agreed informally that there was not enough time or resources to try to organize a citywide Tree Fest this year. Instead, there was agreement about two alternatives in the short term.

- 1) To try to raise money to bring Douglas Tallamy to the City for a talk in October. (See previous minutes.) Commissioners also discussed idea of making that talk a pilot for a series of "Natural Takoma" talks and inviting the CoE and other organizations working together for Natural Takoma newsletter feature to help organize such a series. Possibly the City could officially sponsor such a series, and possibly in Community Center Auditorium on Maple Avenue thus could be the venue. A larger Tree Fest might then grow naturally out of this effort, possibly for 2017. **Action Item: Denny** will talk to Daryl Braithwaite, Director of Public Works Department, about bringing Tallamy to the City for a talk. **Carol** will ask Council Member Fred Schultz for his thoughts about whether there may be money in the City budget for a talk by Tallamy and about a possible Tree Festival in 2017.
- 2) To explore with Daryl possibility of Commission coordinating tree information mailing that could go to all residents and owners in the City. (**Needs follow up.**)

Discussion of Tree Diversity in the City related to free tree saplings distributed on Arbor Day:

Commissioners discussed apparent limits of selection from the state nursery, which is the source that the City buys from for the saplings, which are distributed for free to interested residents on Arbor Day. Denny suggested a special order of desirable but rarer species of trees that the Commission could distribute at a different time, such as at the City Street Festival or at Tallamy's proposed talk.

Discussion on reviving proposal for new paid City staff position that would include coordinating volunteers. (Needs follow-up.)

Update on first article for Natural Takoma: Action Items: Carol will send a draft to the organizations that are working with the Commission on this new newsletter feature: CoE, Friends of Sligo Creek, Historic Takoma, and Takoma Horticultural Club. **Colleen** will send the Newsletter Editor an email that the article will probably be sent to her next Tuesday or Wednesday, after the holiday.

(These minutes were approved in online exchanges.)