

TREE COMMISSION MAY 10th, 2016

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

Guests: Talisha Searcy, president of the New Hampshire Gardens Association, and three Westmoreland residents: Bill Brown, Jason Peckenpaugh, and Ann-Mari Gemmill.

Discussion about Tree Ordinance with Talisha Searcy of Ward 6 about the replanting requirements and the adequacy of the City's website descriptions to Ordinance requirements. Talisha Searcy described her frustrating experience with not understanding why she is being required to replace one mature tree that she was issued a City permit to cut down with five young trees. She said the tree accidentally had been impacted by regrading and other work she had to have done after flooding in her basement. She recommended that the City routinely include a written form explaining how the exact number of replacement trees is derived. Commissioners agreed that that would be a good practice they would also recommend. Commissioners noted that both of her contractors failed to secure the appropriate permits for the initial work. Commissioners recommended that she consult with contractors to secure funds for the replacement fee.

Ms. Searcy also recommended that the City's website descriptions of the Tree Ordinance are not written in a way that many residents will find easy to understand. She proposed changes in wording. Commissioners agreed to look into that further. Commissioners and Ms. Searcy agreed to stay in touch and that it would be good for the Commission to work with her to find opportunities to meet with members of the New Hampshire Gardens Association to exchange information and ideas for the future. Ms. Searcy also said that some Ward 6 residents prefer communications in writing, such as in the Newsletter, rather than information sent via email or posted online and advised the Commission to let her know if there is tree-related information that the Commission would request to be printed in her neighborhood association's newsletter, which can also be translated into Spanish. The Commission was enthusiastic about that possibility. **Action Item:** The Commission needs to develop a plan for recommending residents receive more information about how the number of trees they must plant or pay for planting is derived when they receive a permit to remove a tree and a plan for revising the City's website information about Tree Ordinance requirements.

Discussion with three Westmoreland neighbors representing residents who are involved in the Save Our Trees initiative, related to the WSSC sewer replacement project on Little Eastern. The three residents told the Commission that Westmoreland neighbors have not been included in the WSSC's ongoing planning for how to align the new sewer main for a stretch of Eastern Avenue since 2014, even though the Eastern Avenue homes involved border in the back on Westmoreland backyards. They were concerned about the most recent WSSC plan to remove all trees within a 20-foot easement along a long stretch of Eastern properties. The easement would extend all the way back to the backyard borders of Westmoreland properties. They were concerned about the impact of the construction there on mature trees in their own yards because of soil compaction and root damage. They said they were also concerned that the loss of and damage to trees may create problems with soil erosion and stormwater management, especially as their homes are on a slope below the homes on Eastern. The residents asked the Commission to bring their concerns to the City Council and to recommend that the City Arborist do an independent tree impact assessment of the WSSC's current plan for a backyard alignment for the sewer main that would serve many of the homes on Eastern. The residents asked the Commission to press for such an assessment to be part of the County Department of Environmental Protection's environmental impact assessment of the WSSC's plan and for that county assessment to be available before a final decision is made about where to place that sewer main. The residents also noted that the City's Tree Ordinance reflects what a high community value is placed on trees in Takoma Park and expressed their concern that the sewer replacement process does not seem in line with that value. **Action Item:** All Commissioners agreed that the Commission would send a letter asap to the City Council with specific recommendations related to our concern that residents on both Westmoreland and

Eastern, the City, and WSSC all need to have access to a full environmental impact assessment, including much more information about the impact on trees, before a final decision is made.

April minutes were approved.