

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

October 10, 2017

By Carol Hotton

Location: Rose Room, Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Tina Murray, Chair; Denny May, Vice-Chair; Carol Hotton, Secretary; Colleen Cordes; Jan Van Zutphen, Urban Forest Manager

Meeting convened at approximately 6:35 pm

Gresham Lowe resigned from Tree Commission. Commission thanks her for her service.

1. **Discussion on format for minutes.** Commission agreed to include only pertinent information, and in general avoid attributing specific comments to individual commissioners, with the exception of the Urban Forest Manager (UFM). Outgoing secretary will review minutes for FY2017 and resend for final approval and transfer to City Clerk.
2. **Urgent need to set dates for appeals hearings.** UFM proposed following dates: Oct 26, Nov 2, Nov 9, Nov 16, Nov 30, Dec 7, Dec 14. Commissioners will respond with dates that they can attend ASAP.
3. **Timely action on vacancies and expiring terms.** Commission discussed lack of notification to two commissioners before expiration of their terms. Concern expressed over timely action on vacancies or expiring terms in the future to avoid negative impact on ability of Commission to perform its mission. One hearing has already been canceled due to lack of quorum.
4. **Search for new commissioner.** Commission recommended that City focus on Ward 6 residents, but also look for technical expertise in landscape architecture, regardless of Ward residence. It recommended that Ward 6 Councilmember be contacted to get word out to potential applicants.
5. **Review of tree planting training.** There was brief review of training provided by UFM to Commissioners on Commission met on how to identify spaces to plant trees in City right of way as well as private property. Tips include: look for dead or dying City trees, note wires and underground utilities, take photos and write down affected addresses. Trees will be planted in the City right-of-way. At times the City right-of-way can be a bit hard to determine. UFM will work with the tree commissioners to determine City right-of-ways.
6. **City replanting shelved for spring.** UFM indicated planting on City right of ways will be postponed to Spring, 2018. In the meantime, Commission will continue to identify potential planting sites on City ROW. Suggested streets: Ward 6, Maple Ave., Columbia Ave., Takoma Ave, and other streets.
7. **Tree walk scheduled for 1:30-3:00 pm, Oct 29.** Commission apprised UFM of format for previous tree walks: covered several blocks, focus on residences, point out trees in good and poor health, share tip for maintaining trees, sites for potential plantings. Dry run suggested for Friday Oct 20 at 9 am.

8. **UFM updates on proposed PEPCO tree work.** UFM has received map of proposed PEPCO pruning around distribution lines (lower voltage lines from transmission lines to houses). Only one removal proposed (and removed); tree was deemed hazardous. Permit for this removal on file with City. Most proposed pruning only back to previous cuts. UFM made clear that no tree work could begin without all necessary approvals, including contacting affected homeowners (done by Pepco). UFM shared Pepco model letter that has been ~~to be~~ sent to homeowners before tree work is to begin. PEPCO proposed tree work to begin in November for distribution lines. UFM has not received a tree pruning map and tree removal applications for proposed work on transmission lines to date. General discussion over fairness of “free” tree removal for certain property owners through PEPCO. The City’s position is that Pepco can only remove trees in the City of Takoma Park if they threaten their powerlines and the removal of the tree meets the City’s requirements. UFM discussed Pepco tree pruning—PEPCO resists removal of dead wood from trees it had targeted for removal, on the grounds that removing wood away from wires is not part of their mandate.
9. **UFM discussion on Washington Gas work.** Washington Gas is installing new external meters and new gas lines in area of Central, Garland Aves, and surrounding streets. UFM outlined his process reviewing impact on trees: meets with contractors, requires air spading as needed and supervises during air spading. Washington Gas did not adhere to some of the required tree preservation measures and the City is working with Washington Gas and the affected property owners to resolve the issue
10. **Brief update on WSSC sewer replacement for Little Eastern Ave.** 6617-6705 block voted for back yard alignment, WSSC in process of obtaining easement agreements. Block 6711-676 given 3 options to vote on: front yard gravity, front yard pressure with grinder pump and back yard horizontal drilling, so essentially no progress made on final sewer alignment. Still no environmental impact report from County. Commission and UFM agreed no need for action at this time.
11. **Takoma Junction redevelopment – impact on trees.** Commission agreed that we should remind City Council to consider tree impacts in redevelopment plan. UFM pointed out possible effects from development, including possible increased shading, impacts on root systems, especially from a retaining wall, and hydrology. Will try to include statement during public comment period.
12. **Mailing to residents.** UFM described proposal to include QR code that links to tree related resources in leaf collection mailing to homeowners, including Urban Tree Risk Manual, Maryland extension site, number to report hazardous trees to M-NCPPC, native plant manual, etc.
13. **Puerto Rico reforestation.** Commission discussed possibility of partnering with comparable Puerto Rico organization to assist in post-hurricane reforestation. Will pursue in later meetings.
14. **Keith Pitchford talk.** City has accepted arborist Keith Pitchford’s proposal to speak on changing relationship of humans to trees, as part of Arts and Humanities speaker series. He was selected for a December date but will change that to a later date.
15. **Old Business - Follow-up from UFM from Sept 12 Tree Commission Meeting:**

- A) UFM was asked to check with the city if Keith receiving the honorarium will present a conflict of interest. Answer is no.
- B) UFM was asked to consider if it might be possible for the city to invest in training and equipment for Level 3 analysis. Answer, only for trees on public property, training would be possible, not sure if purchasing a resistograph, etc make sense considering that UFM would not use it that often.
- C) UFM was asked about planting locations: Answer is, he is in touch with MHP regarding the possibility of planting more trees on their properties.

Action Items: All: (1) Determine available dates for hearings and send to UFM. (2) Send out mailings on City bulk buy program and tree walk to neighborhood list serves ASAP.

Carol: (1) Draft letter for Jessie and/or City Council to clarify process for reappointment of Commissioners; will first circulate among Commissioners and then send to Chair, who will forward to appropriate recipients. (2) Draft comment on Takoma Junction redevelopment plan and tree impacts. (3) Try to locate FAQs on trees and ordinance and send to UFM.

Tina: Redraft meeting minutes for Oct 2016-Sept 2017 and send to commissioners for final approval.

Jan: Verify that contractor doing PEPCO work is in fact Asplundh. [UFM subsequently verified this.]

Meeting adjourned at 9 pm.