

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

November 14, 2017

By Carol Hotton

Location: Rose Room, Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Tina Murray, Chair; Denny May, Vice-Chair; Carol Hotton, Secretary; Bruce Levine
Commissioner;

Jan Van Zutphen, Urban Forest Manager

Absent: John Barnwell

Meeting convened at approximately 6:40 pm.

1. **Meeting minutes.** Minutes for Oct 10 2017 meeting approved. Chair will submit minutes to City Clerk. Chair will circulate minutes from earlier in 2017 for final approval at December meeting.
2. **Welcome and orientation for new member.** Discussion of varying activities and roles of Tree Commission, including dispensing tree seedlings on Arbor Day, tabling at other public events such as the Fall Street Fair, conducting educational tree walks and workshops and bringing in speakers. UFM expressed desire to expand tree giveaways, especially in working with children and school groups. Tree Commission has 3 roles: judicial, educational and advisory, which potentially can conflict; important when communicating with public. Effectiveness and clarity of Tree Ordinance (Chapter 12) discussed; desirability of reducing the amount of paperwork and 'rigidity' of ordinance. Considerable confusion exists among residents over role of Tree Commission and Tree Ordinance. Opportunity to review ordinance—can it be improved? Discussion of the age of Ordinance—early 1990's, offshoot of Maryland State Forest Conservation Act of 1991. TP has one of strongest tree ordinances in country.
3. **Plans for Denny's continued participation in Commission meetings.** Denny will be gone for 3 months, from January through March, and plans to participate in meetings through Skype. The UFM will ask Director of Public Works if this is acceptable.
4. **Review of Tree Commission Priorities for City Council.** Background: Lack of communication among City employees, PEPCO, Tree Commission and City residents over PEPCO tree work in 2016 led to serious friction. City Council met with Tree Commission in first joint meeting to brainstorm ideas for improving process and communication and protecting City tree canopy. Tree Commission generated a formal set of proposals (see Tree Commission Meeting Priorities January 23 2017). The following elements were discussed:
 - A. *Outreach and Education.* Many ideas discussed: seminar on tree care and maintenance, enlisting Scouts in planting trees on private property; partnering with schools and children for Arbor Day activities; involving children in landscaping their schools; recruiting children to clear invasive vines from property adjoining school; using social media to communicate information; sending out mailings on tree ordinance and tree care to residents. UFM included QR code with tree information in leaf collection mailing. UFM emphasized educating residents on importance of maintaining trees.

- B. *Discussion of amending Ordinance.* Discussed changes to Ordinance to encourage new planting and increase demographic diversity as well as preservation of old trees. Publicize pre-planting credits; encourage preservation of desirable volunteer seedlings. Hardship for applicants for tree removal permits should be defined more rigorously. Caution in amending Ordinance advocated. New City Council members views on Tree Ordinance should be sought.
- C. *Public Utilities:* Memoranda of Understanding for PEPCO was drafted in 1990's and was very general. Discussed negotiating new MOU with utilities, spelling out details on notification, process of trimming and tree removals, but utilities have no legal requirement to follow City ordinance – Maryland state law regulating electrical service explicitly overrides local ordinances. City Council expressed no interest in negotiating new MOUs. UFM considered it best to work cooperatively with utilities and closely monitor their actions. Discussion of PEPCO incentivizing homeowners to remove trees not deemed hazardous but considered likely to fail 'at some point'. UFM emphasized that tree removals require City approval and a decisions is based on the health of the tree.
- D. *Canopy assessment.* Discussion of 2014 tree canopy assessment (LIDAR map) that Tree Commission obtained from Montgomery County to quantify City canopy changes. Comparison with previous assessment (completed in 2008-2009) indicated net gain but was problematic because data collection/extraction had improved over interim, so hard to tell whether apparent gains were real. For this reason, Tree Commission did not publicize the most recent canopy assessment. It is still useful for a ward-by-ward comparison. Discussed possibility of including assessment in Arborist's annual report. Discussion of Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis National Program <<https://www.fia.fs.fed.us>>. Lauren Marshall (previously with the Committee on the Environment) gave a presentation on this to the Tree Commission recently. Over the coming winter month the Department of Public Works will evaluate which tools will be most helpful for maintaining and growing the City's Urban Forest.
5. **Advisory letter to City Council on Takoma Junction development project.** Concern expressed over absence of trees in development proposal, and over impact on trees growing on wooded slope behind parking lot, treatment by NCD Corp of wooded slope as 'green space'; putting in path on wooded slope. Tree Commission agreed it would be desirable to send a formal advisory letter to City Council before next vote on development plan expressing these concerns and desirability for more green space in development. TC also agreed to do a site visit with UFM to evaluate tree protection for trees on slope.
6. **Urban Forest Manager report.** PEPCO trimming of trees around distribution lines complete; will start trimming of trees under transmission lines. One tree removal permit granted; two denied to PEPCO. Washington Gas work on Garland Ave wrapping up. Planting of crape myrtles in tree boxes along Carroll Ave. Planting in parks.
7. **Open Forum.**

- A. Keith Pitchford will do presentation on changes in tree/human relationship on Dec 7 in Community Center.
- B. Suggestions for planting hybrid American chestnuts in City parks solicited from UFM.
- C. Dates for dinner for previous commissioners Colleen and Gresham suggested: Nov 28, Nov 30; Dec 5, 7

Action Items:

All: provide timely review of minutes

Jan: set up date for dinner

Jan: set up date for Junction site evaluation

Jan: provide copy of inventory forms to Tina for review

Jan: to review the Forest Service website to present ideas for evaluation of tree canopy

Denny and Tina: contact local school contacts to determine next steps for Arbor Day expansion.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.