

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

December 11, 2018

By Carol Hotton

Location: Hydrangea Room, Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Tina Murray, Chair; Carol Hotton, Secretary; Bruce Levine, John Barnwell, Commissioners; Jan van Zutphen, Urban Forest Manager (UFM); Sharon Cohen, Committee on the Environment liaison; Kacy Kostiuk, Ward 3 Councilmember, Peter Kovar, Ward 1 Councilmember, Mark Sherman, resident

Meeting convened at 6:50 pm.

1. **Minutes** for November 13 meeting approved with slight modification.

2. **COE report from Sharon Cohen**

- A. Report on meeting with Daryl Braithwaite, Director of Public Works, regarding road salt. Applying road salt is 'art, not science.' City is responsible for 30 miles of road, with 5-6 drivers to apply salt. City does not pre-treat before storms. All jurisdictions obtain raw materials from same source in Maryland, but then City mixes its own formula of salt and sand. Daryl is looking for less harmful alternatives, such as beet juice. If excess salt on roads, call Public Works and they will clean it up.
- B. COE has placed carbon mitigation as Tier 1 priority, above all other goals, such as storm water management.

3. **Meetings on small cell antennae installation**

- A. Report from Bruce on citizen teach-in on small cell antennae that took place November 30. Telecommunications industry to begin installation of small cell antennae to boost transmission of 4G and 5G phones, resulting in increased density of cellular towers, with potential for increased exposure to radio frequency radiation and impact on the environment, including trees. Recent FCC proposed regulation prohibits jurisdictions from limiting placement of cell towers on basis of possible negative health impact. City is limited to regulating placement of towers on right of way. Bruce will share website with more information.
- B. Additional information from City Council members Kovar and Kostiuk: FCC regulation to take effect on Jan 14, after which it will be virtually impossible for City to regulate placement of towers. City Council passed resolution to pass an ordinance before Jan 14 that regulates permitting process of small cell towers in City rights of way. City will work with other jurisdictions to pursue other means of regulating cell towers, including legal challenges to FCC ruling. Impact to trees includes root disturbance from trenching for installation of underground wires and excessive pruning of limbs. Tree Commission decided that it will not be further involved in this process.

4. **Report from Urban Forest Manager**

- A. Canopy analysis. University of Vermont timeline: December - data collection; January – mapping; February – data analysis; March – reporting. Proposed dates for workshop –

March 16 or 23. Workshop to include presentation to public, and detailed discussion involving Tree Commission, Committee on the Environment and City Council on implications for ordinance.

- B. Arbor Day to take place April 6 this year outside of library from 10 am to 2 pm. Suggested trees to include: pawpaw and persimmon.
- C. Tree bulk buy program. 16 trees planted in 12 locations: 1 black gum, 6 bald-cypress, 5 lindens, 2 Princeton elms, 2 swamp white oaks.
- D. City pruning and tree removal on Sherman, Jackson, Takoma Aves and around Spring Park.
- E. Carroll Gardens. Owner of building has agreed to plant 7 1 ½ “ caliper sized, canopy trees along Lee and Hancock Aves within next 2-3 weeks in order to replace those lost over the years, including in recent sewer line leak (more information below from Mark Sherman). Site will be marked for utilities in order to determine where to plant. Silt fence erected.
- F. Brief discussion of Tree Montgomery program (treemontgomery.org). Takoma Park residents eligible are eligible for this program. Can this model be used in Takoma Park? County provides trees for free; currently there is a wait list for trees.
- G. Date presented on number of tree impact assessments (from 2011) and tree protection plans (from 2003). Significant drop in 2009 and 2010 related to Great Recession; spike in 2017 and 2018. Changes probably track economic downturn and upswing over last ten years. Tree permit applications appear to be steady over time – UFM will provide more data at next meeting.

4. Comments from Mark Sherman regarding emergency sewer work at Carroll Gardens.

- A. On approximately Oct 22, a sewer pipe burst in front of 7407 Hancock Ave (Carroll Gardens apartments), necessitating emergency excavation by a plumbing contractor to stop the leak. The UFM was out of town, so the City construction manager assessed the site and issued an emergency permit for excavation and tree removal. Ultimately 2 evergreens and 2 large deciduous trees (Norway maples) were removed. In addition, late in the process, after requests from Mark to provide protection for the remaining trees, one red maple was deeply gouged by heavy machinery. Mark suggested that one large tree that shaded his apartment was 10 feet away from the digging and might have been saved. Loss of large trees around apartment buildings makes them much hotter in the summer, as there is no central air conditioning in these buildings, necessitating use of window air conditioners, which increases energy use/carbon emission.
- B. Jan responded that Ian instructed contractors on tree protection but apparently this was not followed. It is unclear whether the large tree in question could have been saved. Jan stated that the apartment complex owner had agreed to replace the lost trees with 7 canopy trees along Lee and Hancock Aves.
- C. Suggestion to Council members: can provision of shade be considered part of the infrastructure that owners must provide to renters, such as heat, water and sewage?

5. How to incentivize planting.

- A. Suggestion: can fee-in-lieu of planting be reduced if owners replant on their own property? Will that change increase planting on private properties, or will it result in greater loss of trees?

Jan pointed out that fee in lieu charged by City (\$175 per tree) does not cover the cost of the tree and tree planting and does not factor in any tree maintenance cost. Fee-in-lieu amount for tree planting is quite a bit higher in, for example, Annapolis.

6. Revision of Tree Ordinance – continued discussion

- A. Bruce put together draft goals for Joint subcommittee on Tree Ordinance and Canopy, derived from documents provided by Gary Allen of Sustainable Maryland Workshop on Community Forestry. General discussion – draft a mix of practical goals and aspirational statements. Desirable to establish transparent process of for periodically reviewing ordinance.
- B. Canopy goals and Ordinance review intertwined, but should they be? Use canopy goal to inspire and educate public on value of trees.
- C. Councilmember Kovar notes many residents dislike Tree Ordinance. Could loosening requirements in allowing tree removal in exchange for increased planting work?
- D. Racial equity also has to be addressed. Wards 4 and 6 have fewest trees and largest number of persons of color.
- E. Should canopy goals be included in Ordinance? Best way to assess tree canopy is bottom up (inventory of woody plants, including shrubs) as well as top down (satellite survey). Lidar survey is one measure but limited – misses demography, species diversity etc. If canopy goal is set, it requires an implementation plan.
- F. Joint subcommittee of TC & COE needs to set goals. John will send around a draft agenda to members after this meeting. Subcommittee needs to establish what outcomes are desired in Ordinance revision and canopy goal.
- G. City will establish blog in January to inform public of process.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.