

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

May 8, 2018

By Carol Hotton

Location: Hydrangea Room, Takoma Park Community Center

Present: Tina Murray, Chair; Denny May, Vice Chair; Carol Hotton, Secretary; John Barnwell, Bruce Levine, Commissioners; Sharon Cohen, Committee on the Environment (COE) & Liaison with Tree Commission (TC); Jan van Zutphen, Urban Forest Manager

Meeting convened at 6:45 pm.

1. **Minutes for April 10 meeting approved.**
2. **Discussion of Montgomery College campus trees.** Recap of last month's discussion with residents regarding removal of two trees. Jan noted that Montgomery College had agreed to abide by Takoma Park Tree Ordinance. Jan follows criteria set out in the Ordinance to assess condition of trees, and deems it within the Ordinance to remove trees judged to be in significant decline without issuing a waiver.
3. **Report from COE Liaison Sharon Cohen.**
 - A. Paul Chrostowski of COE shared history of environmental studies of Takoma Junction site; Sharon will share it with TC.
 - B. Working Committee on road salt created. Issue discussed with Daryl Braithwaite, Public Works Director. Daryl noted that excessive salt on roads could be due in part to use of temporary workers and insufficient training. Residents should contact Public Works to have excess road salt removed. COE will meet with Daryl in fall to discuss solutions to road salt. Suggested alternatives include CaMg acetate, MgCl₂, although these still have toxicity to plants and probably wildlife. Denny noted that Fairfax County uses more environmentally friendly alternative to salt. TC should find out specifically what Fairfax Co uses to convey that information to the City. Jan noted that one problem with Takoma Park is variable width of streets, which complicates deployment of spreader. One possible solution: use trucks with different widths for different streets?
 - C. Brief discussion of Section 12.08.060 of City Code regarding height of grass. A COE member was cited for excessive height of lawn under this section; it was seen as contradicting sustainability goals and environmentally desirably practices (e.g., eliminated use of lawnmowers, establishment of native grasses and meadows rather than lawns). Perhaps this aspect of Chapter 12 should be revised.
4. **Takoma Junction development update.**
 - A. Street Sense rendering of NDC plan on City website discussed. Footprint of building unclear. Jan has met with engineer responsible for site planning. He awaits submission of tree removal applications and protection plans, and has no idea how many trees will be

affected. Bioretention plan of NDC unclear from blueprint. Trees at top of slope in undesirable category, include box-elders, mulberries, which means they can be removed at lower cost to developer.

- B. Denny noted commentary by City resident Roger Schlegel that estimate loss of 4600' of woodland would be lost, as well as undisclosed amount lost to bioretention. Unclear whether Montgomery County would grant permit for bioretention on slope.
- C. Tina awaiting response from Kate regarding TC letter to Council on protecting trees in process of development of Takoma Junction.

5. **Arbor Day and Green Fest debrief.**

- A. ~ 300 trees given away at Arbor Day. Should start giveaway at 10 am, and not before, to give everyone an equal chance at the trees. Giveaways started early, and dogwoods were gone by 10:15.
- B. Green Fest – most of remaining trees given away; mostly larches and oaks left. Tina noted that we should have our own banner rather than using Arbor Day banner—some attendees thought we represented Arbor Day Foundation, and many didn't know what organization we represented (no sign).

6. **Urban Forest Manager report.**

A. City tree funds.

- a. Application fees for tree removal or tree protection plans are added to General Funds.
- b. Fees in lieu of planting go into special account for tree planting only. Set at \$25000. Excess funds are carried over to following fiscal year. If funds fall below \$25K, will be replenished. Current balance in tree fund: \$76,881.15. Average over 3 years at end of fiscal year (June 30) = \$65,500. Should fees charged in lieu of planting be reduced? (But see (d) below).
- c. Separate line item for general tree maintenance (watering, pruning, removal): current amount \$70,000.
- d. Discussion of lack of follow-through after City trees planting, specifically lack of watering, re comment by resident. It was noted that Washington DC includes funds for maintenance and watering in tree planting fund. Jan noted that in his work in Annapolis, he calculated that the real cost for maintaining a tree through its lifetime is \$1300/tree, far more than \$175 fee-in-lieu that Takoma Park charges. Carol suggested that it would make more sense to change regulations that currently allow in-lieu funds to apply only to tree planting to also include watering and maintenance, even if that means planting fewer trees overall. It was noted that planting trees and allowing them to die from lack of watering, especially given our recent and probably future pattern of very high temperatures and little rain during the summer, it makes more sense to plant fewer trees and ensure higher survival.

- B. Planned tree work. Pruning and removal on Holton and Boyd Aves. Jan typically receives call from resident and then assesses entire block. City tree planting will take place over the next 2-3 weeks.
 - C. Tree canopy assessment will become available after the next fiscal year, after July 1; public discussion deferred to fall.
 - D. Possible hearing dates: May 24, 31, Jun 7, 14.
7. **Discussion about possible volunteer/graphic designer for tree commission.** A woman at Arbor Day, Laura DiCurcio, introduced herself as a graphic designer who was interested in working with the Tree Commission on communication and perhaps other issues. She gave no indication of expecting reimbursement.

Action Item: Carol will contact Laura DiCurcio to explore possible working with her on volunteer basis.

Tina will contact Mayor again on response to TC letter on Takoma Junction development.

Denny will explore alternatives to road salt used by Fairfax County.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.