

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

January 8, 2019

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; Nancy Cohen, resident

Meeting convened at 6:50 pm.

1. **Minutes** for December 11 meeting approved with slight modification.
2. **Urban Forest Manager report**
 - A. Seven Princeton elms planted on Lee and Hancock Aves around Carroll Gardens apartments; sod and silt fence installed. Tree protection installed around remaining trees.
 - B. Fifty seedlings each of the following: bald cypress, hazelnut, persimmon, redbud, sycamore, white oak ordered from Maryland State Department of Natural Resources for Arbor Day. Discussed additional species: serviceberries, figs (non-native, not very frost tolerant)
 - C. Brief discussion of whether Tree Commission (TC) should participate in Montgomery GreenFest, to be held at Brookside Gardens in Wheaton; we decided it was too far afield and not relevant to most visitors.
 - D. Tentative date for canopy assessment set for March 16; Jan will finalize with Jarlath O'Neil-Dunne (University of Vermont) next week.
 - E. Site plans for construction at Montgomery College and Takoma Park Middle School; both are exempt from City Tree Ordinance as state-owned entities but have agreed to tree protection and replacement plans. *Montgomery College exploring options for non-site replacement trees.*
 - F. Development at 434 Ethan Allen Ave: tree removal and tree protection permit applications have been submitted by the developer and approved by the City. More trees will be replaced than are currently on site. Development slated to begin in July.
 - G. Little Eastern Ave sewer replacement project. Alignment *tentatively* has been decided. Three houses located near high end of Eastern Ave retaining wall to get grinder pumps; others to have front end alignment. Fewer trees impacted compared to backyard alignment. Jan will find out how many trees will be impacted.
 - H. Ian Chamberlain still looking for requested data on removals and permit waivers. Also TC would like to know how many bulk buy trees have been planted in the last three years.
 - I. Discussion of City survey for citizens' attitudes towards Tree Ordinance. Draft shared with Tree Commission at last minute--we expressed concern over failure of City Council to engage expertise of TC. Discussed ways to increase engagement with City Council with TC.

Consensus of TC was that draft survey too specific and would probably be unintelligible to most would-be respondents. Tina conveyed the substance of conversation held with the mayor, to include amendments to the survey. Amendments were made and the survey was used *sent to production* without further review.

J. Joint meeting of Committee on Environment and City Council on January 14; some Commissioners will join. TC should meet with City on annual basis.

3. Discussion of Vision & Goal Statement and Tree Ordinance

- A. John summarized meeting of Joint Committee on Tree Canopy (consisting of members of TC and COE). Primary focus of committee is on general goals for enhancing urban tree canopy, in contrast to TC remit to provide guidance on Tree Ordinance. Jeff Brokaw to present vision statement laying out value of and goals for tree canopy. Focus on expansion of definition of tree canopy and community partnerships in achieving goals. The draft vision statement was amended to include language regarding growth of the canopy, not just maintenance.
- B. Commission discussed draft of Vision and Goal Statement on Tree Ordinance and Canopy for City Council and suggested revisions, mainly clarifications in wording. Also added: Review the clause establishing the Commission in Chapter 2; review City regulations on urban tree management. Revised draft will be sent to Tree Canopy Working Group.
- C. Additional comments on Tree Ordinance
 - 1. Preamble of current Tree Ordinance emphasizes preservation of existing canopy. Should be expanded to include importance of growth and diverse forest elements, including smaller trees and shrubs.
 - 2. Wording of Ordinance itself can be simplified up to a point, but hampered by fact that this is a legal document. Desirable to include an explanatory ‘front page’ summarizing main elements of Tree Ordinance.
 - 3. Duties of City Arborist should be spelled out in greater detail.
 - 4. Slow response time generates many complaints. City should determine how long it takes to respond to questions, legal decisions, etc. and mandate response time in Ordinance. Ian Chamberlain and Jan are reviewing response times for permits and tree protection plans and are making sure applications are turned around as quickly as possible.
 - 5. TC should review criteria—several overlap.
 - 6. Discussion of dual role of TC, both advisory and adjudicatory. Has been seen as in conflict, but City attorney Ken Sigman considers both to be appropriate for Tree Commission.
 - 7. Chapter 2.16 creating TC should also be more specific, closer to the detailed mandate for the Committee on the Environment, as an example. Number of Commissioners should be expanded to seven.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.