

Minutes of the City of Takoma Park Tree Commission

March 13, 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; Jan Van Zutphen, Urban Forest Manager; Sharon Cohen, Committee on the Environment (COE) & Liaison with Tree Commission (TC)

Meeting convened at 6:45 pm.

1. **Minutes for February meeting.** Approved, with minor modification.
2. **Decision made to convene meetings at 6:45 and adjourn at 8:30 pm.**
3. **Memo on Takoma Junction Development.** Approved for presentation to City Council, with some modifications.
4. **Green Team Meeting Debrief & Discussion – Sharon & Carol**
 - A. Sharon indicated that she had just received reams of material from previous liaison Paul Chrostowski and would review it in order to discuss future efforts at the next TC meeting.
 - B. Sharon summarized Green Team meeting: purpose is for COE and City Council to meet yearly to prioritize sustainability goals and determine how COE can help CC toward those goals. Emphasis on energy efficiency.
 - C. City Council & COE agreed water quality should be raised from Third Tier to Second Tier priority. Discussion of use of excessive road salt by Department of Public Works—negative impact on aquatic and plant life.
 - D. Jan announced that state of Maryland has commissioned a new LIDAR study to be released in June, to include canopy height analysis and ward-by ward-analysis of urban tree canopy (UTC) for Takoma Park, as well as more realistic comparison of current and previous 2009 and 2014 studies (cost ~ \$4500).
 - E. Carol noted that City Council had incorporated recommendations from joint meeting of TC and CC on Nov 14, 2016 on tree issues. Priorities adopted by CC March 2018: Preserve and grow tree canopy through programs and education; ensure that proposed tree ordinance review do no adversely affect tree canopy goals. Improve policies and processes for tree ordinance; review existing ordinance to improve readability.
5. **Discussion on how to improve process for hearings.** After discussion with Ken Sigman, Jan proposed following changes:
 - A. In permit denial letter, present specific reasons addressing appellant's concerns about tree(s).

- B. Include ratings sheet, with explanation for what ratings mean.
- C. Include information about hearing process, with language directly from Ordinance indicating burden of proof is on appellant to produce evidence for why decision should be changed.
- D. Information packet will be mailed to appellant and TC a week before hearing.

6. **Arbor Day Preparation.** Date: April 7, 10 am – 2 pm, outside of library.

A. Whips for giveaway. 50 each of sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), river birch (*Betula nigra*), eastern larch (*Larix laricina*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), red maple (*Acer rubra*), Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*), eastern sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*).

B. Include information sheets on each species and planting guide.

C. Display Arbor Day banner.

E. Bring in cherry picker(s) and tree climbing rigs from County Park & Planning

F. Encourage library to display books on tree related subjects.

G. Publicity: notice in monthly newsletter; put out notice on neighborhood listserves; Jan will contact person in charge of social media to publicize.

7. **Tree Ordinance Review.**

- A. During Green Team meeting, Mayor and Councilmember Dyballa both emphasized that review of ordinance was priority for City.
- B. We discussed whether COE and TC should work together on Ordinance revision but no final decision was made.
- C. As a prelude to discussing revisions of the ordinance, it might be wise to prepare and post a user-friendly manual on what the Ordinance says, and how to comply with it.
- D. Ken Sigman notes that ordinance is over 30 years old and has accreted many layers of verbosity – may have to completely rewrite to make more comprehensible.
- E. Tree fund budget: tree permit and citation fees go into general fund; fees in lieu of planting go into tree fund, strictly for tree planting. This is set at \$25K, but it can vary. Bulk buy fund is a separate line item. Question to Jan: Who monitors the tree fund, and how much is in it currently?
- F. First decide: what is goal of tree ordinance? Strictly protection? How do we encourage homeowners to maintain trees and to promote new growth? No current legal requirement to prune trees, unlike house maintenance, except through issue of citations for maintaining hazardous trees or limbs.

Action Item for Jan: Determine who keeps track of tree fund, and how much money is in it.

Action Item for Jan: Publicity and preparation for Arbor Day.

Action Item for Carol: Circulate proposed dates for educational tree walk in late May-early June.

Action Item for Carol: Send bare root tree planting guide to Jan for tree giveaway.

Meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.