

MEETING MINUTES

Shade Tree Committee
City Hall – 280 Grove Street, Jersey City NJ 07302
Councilmember Mira Prinz-Arey, Chair

Meeting: Jersey City Shade Tree Committee Meeting

Date / Location: 10 February 2020 – 6:30 p.m.
BA Conference Room, City Hall, 280 Grove Street, Jersey City, NJ 07302

Attendees: **Voting Committee Members**
Councilwoman Mira Prinz-Arey, Chair (*arrived late due to Council Caucus Meeting*)
Theodore G. Tasoulas, Vice-Chair
Denise Bailey
David Hurtle
Marc Wesson

Non-Voting Committee Members/City Representatives
Edward O’Malley, Jersey City Forester
Cameron Black, Senior Planner, Jersey City Division of Planning
Kate Lawrence (Secretary), Director, Jersey City Office of Sustainability

Members of the Public
Matthew Trump
Debra Italiano
Robyn Warren
Shirin Khushnood
Ricardo Pereira

Prepared By: Kate Lawrence

Date Prepared: June 1, 2020

Date Approved: October 19, 2020

ROLL CALL

The Committee meeting commenced at 6:38 PM. Four of five voting committee members were present at the time of the roll call (Councilwoman Prinz-Arey arrived later). Three members are needed to meet quorum.¹

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Meeting notice was sent to the City Clerk’s Office, Jersey Journal, and Hudson Reporter on February 5, 2020.

¹ Matthew Trump is not yet an appointed member of the Committee. A resolution regarding his appointment to the STC is scheduled to be included in the February 26, 2020, City Council agenda.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Committee Member Denise Bailey added a minor change to the meeting minutes for the January meeting. The minutes were then approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Update from City Forester

City Forester Ed O'Malley gave an overview of tree-related activities in the City.

- New bid for tree planting for spring
- Ordering new trees, looking to order 220 this spring
- Goal is to plant 500 new trees in total this year (2020)
- Forestry has been conducting tree health analysis and data entry for CSIP grant with the assistance of interns from the Office of Sustainability
- Committee Member Marc Wesson asked if he had secured a contractor yet to deal with the Emerald Ash Borer [EAB]. Forester O'Malley said they had not but he hoped to do by the spring.
- Forester O'Malley noted that he had been discussing training for City Staff maintenance crew that can be transferred to public. He stated he was currently focusing on the spring planting and EAB.
- Committee Member Dave Hurtle asked if members of the public requesting tree plantings needed to re-apply for spring if they applied in winter. Forester O'Malley said they did not.
 - Secretary Lawrence asked if people who couldn't get their tree planted in the fall have received notification. Forester O'Malley said they had not.
- Ms. Bailey asked who had applied for trees. Forester O'Malley stated that he didn't have that info at the moment.
 - Ms. Bailey then asked which parks were getting trees. Forester O'Malley stated that he did not know yet.
- Ms. Bailey stated that it is important to make sure trees are planted in areas of need.

Open Discussion

Secretary Lawrence stated that Chair Prinz-Arey was delayed due to the City Council Caucus Meeting, which was still ongoing. She then asked the group about what changes they would like to see made to the Shade Tree Ordinance (Chapter 321 of the City Code) or the Forestry Standards.

- Items that were discussed included, but not limited to: violations, fines, maintenance, and what Chapter 321 of the City code actually covered. It was noted during the discussion that many of the topics were actually under the purview of the Forestry Standards – a separate document referenced by Chapter 321 – and others were under the purview of the Zoning Code (Chapter 345) or other chapters of the City code.
- Mr. Hurtle stated he would like to see how they can allow people to help with tree pruning. Community needs to be involved.

- Vice-Chair Tasoulas stated that he would like to see a better assessment of the health of the City's trees.
 - Secretary Lawrence noted this wasn't something that would be included in the City Code.
- Forester O'Malley stated that he would like to make the section that dealt with covering the area around tree more explicit.
 - He also stated that the section of the code that allowed for up to 20% of a tree's canopy to be pruned without a permit is too vague.
 - He would also like to see increased fees for violations.
- Senior Planner Cameron Black stated that the prohibited activities section should be revisited.
- Mr. Wesson agreed that the fines should be increased.
 - He added that he felt the sections that dealt with who was responsible for the care of tree and for sidewalk issues needed to be clarified.
 - Mr. Wesson stated that he would like to see a prohibition for climbing trees
- Ms. Bailey agreed that the ordinance needed to better address responsibility of tree maintenance.
 - Ms. Bailey then requested that everything to be discussed at the meeting be on agenda beforehand. She said no one was prepared to discuss 321.
- Secretary Lawrence suggested that they break into groups to further discuss preferred changes to the ordinance.
 - Ms. Bailey and Mr. Wesson stated that they did not like the idea of breaking into groups. They stated that they wanted a larger discussion.
 - The group agreed to discuss potential changes to 321 all together
- Forester O'Malley revisited the idea of adjusting the fees. He suggested raising the minimum / range. Currently it is just \$100 for each offense.
 - The group discussed different fines for breaking different acts
 - Forester O'Malley mentioned that the lack of enforcement was also an issue. There are no dedicated inspectors and it is not clear whose responsibility it is to enforce.
 - Vice-Chair Tasoulas asked if any fines are currently levied.
 - Forester O'Malley stated there are, but it's usually after the fact, hard to prove. He mentioned a recent event where a resident tried to cut down a tree. The ordinance was enforced because their neighbor complained
- Vice-Chair Tasoulas brought up littering fine. Suggested increasing fee as scare tactic. He said he didn't know how reasonable it was to do anything else.
 - Mr. Wesson. – We should definitely raise the minimum.
 - Secretary Lawrence asked how much. \$500?
 - Forester O'Malley – somewhere in that range.
- Mr. Wesson stated that people should not be allowed to climb trees.
 - The group discussed how this could be enforced. Mr. Wesson stated it doesn't need to be enforced, but it would allow him the authority to reprimand people in the park.

- Mr. Hurtle suggested that people should be stopped from filling in empty tree pits. Empty tree pits are a problem
- Secretary Lawrence inquired about existing permit process
 - Forester O'Malley noted that processing permits was currently very time-consuming. There is a \$2 processing fee – should be increased or removed altogether.
 - Vice-Chair Tasoulas asked Forester O'Malley how many permits he typically receives.
 - Forester O'Malley – Hard to say. Probably a couple a week with more in summer. He noted that each one required a lot of back and forth, dragging on the process.
- Secretary Lawrence asked about the permit process. Do the permitted activities in the ordinance make sense?
 - Forester O'Malley noted that spikes should never be allowed.
 - Mr. Wesson stated that he had issues with number 8 – fastening wires and guards to trees.
- Vice-Chair Tasoulas brought up the forestry management plan. He stated that it would be helpful to follow a management plan. Provides structure.
- He said he would like to know the current numbers on cost, plantings, removals, etc.
 - Forester O'Malley stated that Parks & Forestry Director Sammy Ocasio would have that information.
- Mr. Wesson asked if there is budget a line item for trees.
 - Forester O'Malley and Secretary Lawrence stated that there was not.
 - Forestry O'Malley clarified that there was a line item for tree maintenance but not for tree planting. Each department has been tasked with a neutral budget for the coming year.

Public Comment

- Member of the public Debra Italiano talked about Open Tree Map [OTM] and began to share a presentation on her organization's work with the platform.
 - She stated that her organization, Sustainable Jersey City (SJC), was working on building a version of the platform specifically for Jersey City that would link to the iNaturalist platform to aid in the identification of tree species.
 - She stated that she had already trained people to identify thousands of trees and was planning on training additional tree mappers and neighborhood captains to map trees using the platform.
 - Ms. Italiano recommended that the City use the OTC platform for tree inventory management and noted that platform provides visualization of tree data.
 - She stated that SJC was looking to launch a tree mapping campaign using OTM for Earth Day/Arbor Day and is seeking support from the STC for this initiative.
- Secretary Lawrence stated that there was a five-minute time limit for individual members of the public.
- A disagreement regarding procedure ensued.
- Chair Prinz-Arey arrived.

- Chair Prinz-Arey wrapped up the public comment portion and asked the Committee what their priorities were.
- Mr. Wesson stated that he wanted the agenda set in advance
- Chair Prinz-Arey stated that she would do that in the future. She added that there should have been the ability to have a discussion on Chapter 321 since the Committee had repeatedly requested such discussion.
- The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Jersey City Shade Tree Committee was schedule for Monday, March 16, at 6:30 p.m. in the BA's Conference Room at City Hall, Jersey City, NJ 07302. *****NOTE: due the Covid-19 Pandemic, this meeting was postponed until July 20, 2020.**