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### **TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING January 26, 2021**

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Attendance: Erica Kipp, Chair  
Andrew Strauss  
Cindy Cossuto  
Peter Viteretto

Absent: Richard Whitehead

Staff: Paul Sotnik, Deputy Tree Warden  
Dilene Byrd, Secretary

Others: Allan Broadbent, Norwalk Tree Alliance

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Kipp called the meeting to order at 6:04 P.M.

### **2. PUBLIC INPUT - GUESTS AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS MAY SPEAK TO ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA. (COMMENTS SHALL BE LIMITED TO NO MORE THAN THREE (3) MINUTES PER SPEAKER.)**

There was no input from the public this evening.

### **3. INTRODUCTION OF NEW TREE LIAISONS**

Ms. Kipp said that she has had conversations with Kathy and James Lesco who are very interested in becoming Tree Liaisons. She said she also spoke with John Levin and Steven Klocke who are on the Conservation Commission, which also meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at the same time, so they would not be able to attend the meetings, but they are very interested in tree plantings in Norwalk and becoming Tree Liaisons. She said she thinks it would be good to work with someone on the Conservation Commission. Mr. Sotnik said he agrees and that we already work closely with Ms. Cherichetti who is the staff person to the Conservation Commission. He also said that Tree Liaisons don't need to attend every meeting, but if they are doing work in a neighborhood and can just get the information to the Committee that would work just fine. Mr. Strauss suggested sending the approved minutes to them on a monthly basis as a way for the Committee to interact with them. He suggested getting them involved in identifying locations for tree plantings and provide them with a contact on the Committee who represents the area. Ms. Kipp agreed and suggested sending them a "welcome packet" and include the minutes from this meeting or a link to the video recording so that they can hear what was discussed.

### **4. APPROVE MINUTES OF THE TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 24, 2020.**

**\*\* MR. STRAUSS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**

**\*\* MR. VITERETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**5. UPDATE - CITY OF NORWALK - TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE WEBSITE UPDATE AND INCREASING VISIBILITY OF THE CAPITAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM.**

Ms. Kipp said the website for the Committee now includes photos of the Committee members, but she has requested that the home addresses are removed. She said she wanted to include more information on the website such as links of photographs of the Committee doing tree plantings and past Arbor Day events, etc. and that she wants the site to be more interactive so people can see what the Committee does and increase our visibility, and she also wants to also with Mr. Morgan to get an article in the newspaper. Mr. Sotnik agreed and said he had sent Mr. Morgan an email back in November and asked him to do a press release to try and get more attention for the program and the work that we are doing. He said that he will circle back with Mr. Morgan and let him know that the Committee is requesting that he do some type of press release. Mr. Strauss suggested doing a press release on the upcoming Spring 2021 tree plantings and he will send Ms. Kipp photos that he has of past tree plantings.

**6. UPDATE - CAPITAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM**

a. Development of planting locations list for Spring 2021

Mr. Sotnik reported and said that all of the trees have been planted that we have ordered to date and he is now starting to create the Spring 2021 tree planting list. He said that after the road and sidewalk construction has been completed, there are trees that will need to be replanted. He has a request for trees at 21 First Street. Two have already been planted at 39 First Street and he would like to plant eight to nine more trees at various locations on that street. He said after the trees on First Street are done, there will be enough funds in the budget to plant approximately six or seven additional trees.

Mr. Sotnik said we did complete all of the planting work that was listed as part of the Fall 2020 plantings and planted those 56 trees, as well as the nine that were carried over from the Spring 2020 orders.

Mr. Strauss said that he will be targeting Fifth Street in the Spring for plantings now that the construction in the area has been completed.

b. Available budget for spring 2021

Mr. Sotnik said there is currently \$14,951.23 available in the budget for Spring 2021 plantings from the fiscal year 2020-21 budget. Ms. Kipp asked what period the City fiscal year covers. Mr. Sotnik said July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup>.

## **7. DISCUSSION - 2021 TREE PLANTING CONTRACT RFP**

Mr. Sotnik said the current tree planting contract will expire on June 30, 2021, and we will be putting out an RFP and putting a panel together to interview the firms that respond to that RFP.

Mr. Sotnik said that there have been several requests to try and include more native species on the City Tree Planting Contract list and suggested that we look at the trees that are currently on that list. Ms. Kipp said she was under the impression that was always the focus. Mr. Sotnik said that there are some on the list, but there are others that are not technically native species such as the Ginko trees that were used on Wall Street. Mr. Viteretto said we are not going to get to the point that we are going to only install native species and habitats so this should not be swayed one way or another, and having a list that is flexible is what we need and the focus needs to be broad based. He said that more native trees can be added to the list, but sizing is the issue.

Mr. Strauss said the other focus has been on canopy trees and not on flowering trees and the he thinks the selection moving forward should express that.

Ms. Kipp agreed with Mr. Viteretto and said a flexible approach is the right approach and we do need to take certain things into consideration and we can look at the trees that are on the list, but there are going to be some that will be on the list because they make sense in an urban area.

Mr. Sotnik said he will send the current list of species to the Committee members and suggested that the Committee review the species list in the current contract to see if there is anything that should be included or removed and discuss it at the February meeting.

## **8. 2021 ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION OPTIONS AND LOCATION**

Mr. Sotnik said Arbor Day celebration has a direct impact on the Tree City USA recertification and this year we were unable to have the celebration that we would normally have due to pandemic, but were able to plant the memorial tree at St. Paul's on the Green. He said the Arbor Day Foundation had waived the requirement to hold a celebration for 2020, but they at least wanted to see that there was a Mayor's Proclamation, which we did have. He said we don't know where we are going to be in terms of the pandemic for the 2021 Arbor Day celebration, so he would like to start the planning process now and suggested talking to the Board of Education and Cranbury Elementary School staff to plan something virtual. Ms. Kipp suggested having a city event and putting together a panel of speakers and have a program geared towards the age group.

Mr. Sotnik shared the Arbor Day website that had a list of Alternative events for Arbor Day 2021 and suggested that the Committee look at the website.

Mr. Strauss said since the event will be virtual to make the tree planting available to a number of schools and suggested contacting Ms. Fios of the Board of Education.

### **9. UPDATE - TREE CITY USA AND GROWTH AWARD RECERTIFICATION APPLICATIONS**

Mr. Sotnik said the application has been submitted and that the amount spent on tree programs per capita went from just over \$11.00 per capita to \$9.86 per capital and we should have no issues with getting certified again this year since the requirement is a minimum of \$2.00 per capita. Ms. Kipp asked if 2020 will be the 17<sup>th</sup> year the City received the Tree City designation and the 15<sup>th</sup> year for the Growth Award. Mr. Sotnik said "Yes." Ms. Kipp suggested contacting Mr. Morgan to do a press release once the recertifications are confirmed.

Mr. Sotnik said he was able to assemble the Growth Award package based upon the new categories that are available. Last year all together, we achieved a total of 14 points, but this year but due to the increase in the categories were able achieve a total of 13 points, even though we only planted 17 trees in the latter half of the year. So even though there were less trees planted in the second half of the year than usual due to the pandemic, we were able to make the points up in other areas, so he does not see any issues in getting recertified for that Award.

We should receive notification of the recertification status for both of the Items by early April.

### **10. UPDATE - TREE CAMPUS U.S.A. AND GROWTH AWARD RECERTIFICATION APPLICATION AND NEEF GRANT**

Ms. Kipp said the NEEF grant is the National Environmental Education Foundation which were the \$2,500 grants that she previously spoke about.

Mr. Sotnik said the Tree City USA and the Tree Campus USA applications will be done completely separately.

### **11. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES**

a. Update:

- i. Update on the NTA Annual Planning Meeting on January 9, 2021.

Mr. Broadbent said the annual planning meeting was held on January 9, 2021 and was attended by nine of the twelve directors and generated a lot of good ideas and road mapped some of the activities they would like to do this year and the fundraising they want to participate in to support those ideas.

- ii. Fairfield County Gives Fundraiser

Mr. Broadbent said the first fundraiser we will be doing this year is the Fairfield County Gives and we had participated in this event last year for the first time and it was very productive for us and we will be increasing our efforts this year to try and get more visibility on it and do as well or exceed what was raised last year.

- iii. Arbor Day Tree Planting Plans

Mr. Broadbent said one of the items that came out of the brainstorming session on January 9<sup>th</sup> was the idea of combining one of the activities that we have on our board which is to plant trees along the Norwalk River Valley Trail between Union Park and the Children's Museum. To combine that idea with a potential Arbor Day tree planting project which is intended to be in addition to whatever we help with for the schools and being part of a speaker panel. The concept behind that is to connect that activity with students from NCC and Ms. Kipp had a Zoom call with us and she put us in contact with the Cares Club. He said the concept of the activity is to coordinate with that group as well as the club for environmental students and make this a volunteer planting activity to plant 12 trees along the Norwalk River Valley Trail in coordination with students from NCC, as well as any volunteers that want to join to do that planting, and have a small ceremony which will be held on the Saturday after Arbor Day which is also just before Earth Day. Mr. Viteretto pointed out that is on the First Taxing District property so there is a different permitting process that should be researched.

- iv. Coordination with other Norwalk environmental groups

Mr. Broadbent said there has been increased complaints regarding tree removals in the City and whether or not they should be more regulated which has set up a domino effect of people contacting us and asking about trees so we are using it as a platform to bring the various environmental groups of Norwalk together and show the good work that is already happening and collaborate and encourage everyone to work together and be more visible in terms of what the citizens of the City see happening. He said the coordinated effort was kicked off three weeks ago and discussed the idea of a Tree Summit and work together with the City to continue the good work of planting trees and preserving the trees in the city. Mr. Sotnik agreed and said we want to make sure things are coordinated and that everyone is on the same page so that if there are issues we can let them know

the process that they need to go through to get planting work permitted properly. Mr. Broadbent said this will also educate people on what is already happening in

Norwalk and there is also more that can be done and are hopeful in locking our arms together we can be more consolidated as a team.

Ms. Kipp suggested a representative from the Tree Advisory Committee attend a meeting with the organizations on a rotating basis so that everyone is on the same page.

## **12. OTHER BUSINESS**

Ms. Kipp said that Norwalk Community College submitted the Tree Campus USA recertification application in December and the Arbor Day Foundation has changed the category and it is now called Tree Campus Higher Education because they are starting a tree campus for younger children so middle and high schools can apply to be a Tree Campus and any two or four year colleges will fall under the Tree Campus Higher Education. She said they have also added more categories to try to get more schools and people involved. Mr. Strauss suggested sharing this information with the Board of Education. Ms. Kipp said that she will share the link with the Committee members.

Mr. Viteretto suggested looking into the opportunity to move the five (5) planters on Main Street that have been abandoned and suggested relocating them to the River Street Plaza. Mr. Sotnik suggested getting something in writing from the adjacent property owner that they will maintain them. He also said the property owners where they are now located will also need to be notified and if there are no issues he will contact Mr. Torre to Schedule a time to have them relocated. Mr. Sotnik suggested Mr. Viteretto email the exact locations to the Committee and he will begin to look at the process.

## **13. ADJOURNMENT**

- \*\* MR. STRAUSS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- \*\* MR. VITERETTO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:16 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd