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## TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING February 23, 2021

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Attendance: Erica Kipp, Chair  
Richard Whitehead, Vice Chair  
Andrew Strauss  
Cindy Cossuto

Staff: Paul Sotnik, Deputy Tree Warden  
Dilene Byrd, Secretary  
Others: Tom Arbron, Norwalk Tree Alliance

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

Ms. Kipp called the meeting to order at 6:03 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 public input this evening.

### **3. APPROVE MINUTES OF THE TREE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF JANUARY 26, 2021**

- \*\* MR. STRAUSS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**
- \*\* MR. WHITEHEAD SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- \*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **4. CAPITAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM**

- a. Development of Planting Locations List for Spring 2021.

Mr. Sotnik said the list for the Spring tree plantings needs to be developed now and that one tree will need to be planted at 21 First Street and he would like to plant eight additional trees on that street. Ms. Kipp asked if the cost of the trees is what is remaining in the budget for this fiscal year. Mr. Sotnik said “no” and they are replacement trees for the trees that were removed as part of the curb and sidewalk replacement project that was done last Fall. Ms. Kipp asked if the cost to replacement trees will be coming out of the Tree Planting budget. Mr. Sotnik said “yes,” but as of last month the remaining balance in the budget was approximately \$14,900, so there is enough funds remaining in the budget to plant approximately six more trees. He asked that the list of new locations be sent to him as soon as possible.

Ms. Cossuto said she may have one tree to be planted on Ponus Avenue, but she needs to reach out to the homeowner to confirm.

Mr. Strauss reminded Mr. Sotnik that replacement trees are still needed at Fodor Farm. Mr. Sotnik said he is currently in the process of working with Mr. Norman on the replacement tree and that has not, and will not be forgotten.

Mr. Whitehead said that last Fall, he looked at West Rocks School when the

construction of the new field began because the neighbors had some concerns regarding the trees that were removed and that he will work with Mr. Hughes on the replacement plantings because the trees will function as street trees, but will need to be planted inside the fence on the school property.

Mr. Sotnik said he would like to have the list of locations for the March meeting so that the orders can be placed in April and have them planted by May.

#### **5. UPDATE - FY 2021 22 CAPITAL TREE PLANTING BUDGET REQUEST/STATUS**

Mr. Sotnik said that D.P.W. had originally requested \$65,000 for the Capital Budget and the Committee had requested that the request be revised to \$80,000, but he had spoken with Mr. Carr and he had recommended not asking for the additional increase at this time. He said the good news is that the Planning Commission as well as the Finance Director have recommended the \$65,000 and we will now need that to be approved by the Mayor and the Common Council.

#### **6. UPDATE - NEEF GRANT APPLICATION (LUDLOW PARK) AND ARBOR DAY FOUNDATION 2021 COMMUNITY RESILIENCE GRANT APPLICATION**

Ms. Kipp said she had sent emails out to find a location for the planting for the NEEF Grant application and the grant is for \$2,500 and will support a bench and two trees. Mr. Sotnik had suggested Ludlow Park and we looked at the area and determined that the area near the children's playground would be a great location. She said the grant application was due on February 1, 2021, and will have an answer back by the end of March. If approved, it can be part of the planting plan going forward. Mr. Strauss asked if Mr. Roberts has approved the plantings. Mr. Sotnik said "yes."

Ms. Kipp said that there is an Arbor Day Foundation grant that Mr. Sotnik had been emailed and only designated Tree City USA's are eligible to apply, and the grant is for \$50,000, and \$25,000 of it can be used for trees. We are not required to match funds with this particular grant. She said the remaining 50% of the grant funds can be used for maintenance supplies, community outreach, education or other vegetation such as shrubs. She said there are some conditions that need to be met, but she is not concerned about them and that they are very similar to the TD Bank Grant that we had received with the exception that this one is for more money and is through Bank of America. She said the grant is only eligible for low income areas and areas based on zip code and that the application is due on March 5, 2021.

Mr. Sotnik said that he had spoken to Ms. Young regarding a location and that Townhouse Gardens may be a potential location. Mr. Arbron agreed and said there is a Community Garden there and near the gazebo there, is a need for benches. He also indicated that there is also a hill that overlooks the Community Garden that has a wide open area for trees. Ms. Kipp said that if everyone agrees with the location she will just need some pictures and she will begin the grant application. It was decided that Mr. Sotnik, Ms. Kipp and Ms. Cossuto would meet on Friday to take the pictures and that Ms. Kipp would build the grant application around that space. Mr. Whitehead said he will also join the meeting and requested that the meeting location is sent to him.

Mr. Strauss introduced Mr. Arbron and said he is the Vice President of the Norwalk Tree Alliance and is standing in tonight for Mr. Broadbent.

## **7. UPDATE - 2021 ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION OPTIONS AND LOCATION AND TREE CAMPUS USA**

Mr. Sotnik said he has tried to make contact with the school and that he has left messages for the Principal to coordinate and see if they will allow a planting on school property, but he has not yet received a final answer.

Mr. Strauss asked if there is a role for the Tree Alliance because it is a co-sponsored event. Mr. Sotnik said if it is held as a virtual event that something can be read by the Tree Alliance. Mr. Strauss requested that if the event is approved that Mr. Sotnik send a message to Mr. Broadbent so that he and his team can discuss if they would like to participate. Mr. Sotnik said once he receives a commitment he will send out an email to the entire group.

Ms. Kipp suggested they stop by the school on Friday. She said there should be no reason they would not let a tree be planted at the school because no one will need to be there for the planting with the exception of the person planting the tree and someone taking a picture.

Mr. Arbron said the Tree Alliance has teamed up with Norwalk Community College Cares Group as well as the NRVT and they have a couple of areas they were going to do an Earth Day and Arbor Day celebration to replace trees at Woodward Park and also do a planting at Union Park.

Mr. Sotnik said for the Tree City USA designation, related to Arbor Day, there has to be an affiliation with a 501c3 non-profit organization for the Arbor Day event, which has always been the Tree Alliance. Therefore, doing other things without being part of that was something that was not in the theme of what we are trying to do and that he will have a discussion with Mr. Broadbent. Mr. Arbron clarified the Tree Alliance is not pulling away, but due to Covid-19 schools would not allow any plantings to be done and that was why they teamed up with the Cares Group at Norwalk Community College.

Ms. Kipp said in 2019 we applied and received the Tree Campus USA status from the Arbor Day Foundation and have applied for 2020, but have not heard back as of yet. However, we are hopeful that we will receive it again. She said they will need to host a function on campus in honor of Arbor Day and she has decided to do a virtual program and the Audubon Society is going to Zoom Link in to discuss backyard birding and how to attract birds to your backyard particularly in urban areas like Norwalk. She said the program is an hour long and will be paid for with funds from the College and she will use it for the Tree Campus USA/Arbor Day Foundation program. She also said we will be planting a tree on the grounds like last year, but there will also be a more formalized program to look forward to as well, and it will be held on Thursday, April 22, 2021. Mr. Whitehead asked if the trees should be planted prior to April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Ms. Kipp said they don't need to be just as long as the trees are planted within 2021 and suggested whatever date works best for his schedule.

## **8. REPORT - NTA ACTIVITIES**

### **i. Fairfield County Given Fundraisers, February 25, 2021**

Mr. Arbron reported and said Fairfield County gives week is this week and the Tree Alliance is working to try and get people to donate to the Norwalk Tree Alliance and they have raised approximately \$4,400 in the past and have set a goal of \$7,000 for this year.

### **ii. Arbor Day Tree Planting Plans**

Mr. Arbron said that Omens Landscaping has agreed to dig the holes for the trees for Arbor Day and we are still exploring options on where the Arbor Day celebration will be held.

Mr. Arbron said six Red Bud Trees will be planted next week using the grant funds from the Sixth Taxing and will be planted on the gateway into Rowayton. He said the email will go out next week regarding the lottery for the tree plantings in the Third Taxing District, and because last year we had a hard time finding locations to plant larger trees we have agreed to use the smaller and medium sized trees. This will allow for the planting of more trees than they originally anticipated.

### **iii. Coordination with other Norwalk environmental groups**

Mr. Arbron said that Mr. Jeff Shore along with Mr. Frazier have worked on a google map of trees that are needed in the City and were contacting the homeowners directly and the Cares Group at Norwalk Community College may also get involved with that. Mr. Sotnik said we will be working together to

try and Integrate the map with the City GIS mapping of where trees have been planted by both the Tree Alliance and Tree Advisory Committee.

Mr. Arbron said that on May 8, 2021, The Norwalk Tree Alliance will be planting a tree at the Norwalk Hospital for Nurses Day to honor first responders.

## **9. OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Whitehead said that he had sent Mr. Sotnik a few species of trees to be included on the list of trees for the new Tree Planting contract. Mr. Sotnik said that if anyone else on the Committee has any other species to send them to him so they can be added to the list because he would like to have the Purchasing Department have the contract advertised within the next month or so.

Ms. Kipp suggested indexing the binder in a way by referencing it as the "Right Tree For the Right Spot" so that when tree liaisons are going out they can suggest a species of tree that will work in a certain area.

Ms. Kipp asked if at the end of the year the Tree Alliance can give a list to Mr. Sotnik on the number of trees that were planted through their programs. Mr. Sotnik asked that the list also include all of the volunteer hours involved related to those plantings for the yearly Tree City recertification applications.

Mr. Strauss asked if Mr. Donnelly has retired. Mr. Kipp said "yes," but there is a replacement. Mr. Strauss suggested sending Mr. Donnelly a letter of thanks for all that he has done for the Norwalk Tree Programs over the years. Ms. Kipp agreed and said that she will send Mr. Strauss the address of where to send the letter. Mr. Strauss said he will draft the letter and send it to the Committee members for their signature.

## **10. ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd