

**MINUTES of the  
City of Portsmouth  
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting  
March 13, 2024**

**Members Present:** Chair Peter Loughlin; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; Members Patricia Bagley, A. J. Dupere, Dennis Souto, Michael Griffin, and Deborah Chag (via Zoom).

**Members Excused:** None.

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Chair Loughlin called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

**1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the February 14, 2024 meeting.**

*The February 14 minutes were unanimously **approved** as submitted.*

**2. Tree Removal Requests**

**Note:** the tree removal requests were not reviewed in sequence.

- **323 Islington St:** 2 black walnut trees, good condition, removal requested by neighboring resident.

Karyn Denicola of 281 Cabot Street was present. She asked why the trees were to be removed. Mr. Wiater said the trees were requested to be removed by the neighbor, a dentist's office, because they are growing over the property line and are messy. It was further discussed. Ms. Bagley asked if the black walnut closest to the windows and roof line could be pruned instead because it had a beautiful form. Mr. Wiater agreed and said he didn't see anything outstanding in both trees that would make him consider removing them. Other committee members agreed and it was further discussed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend that the two black walnut trees remain and that they be pruned, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **373 Cutts Ave (across from):** 1 box elder, 1 black walnut, 2 crabapples, fair-to-good condition. This site will become an Adopt-a-Spot sponsored by the homeowner at 373 Cutts Ave.

Mr. Wiater said the homeowner at 373 Cutts Ave wants to turn the dead-end section of Cutts Avenue into an Adopt-A-Spot. He said the first phase would be to cut down the trees, followed by excavation and then shrubs and ornamental tree planting. Mr. Souto asked if it would be possible to have a small area where people could turn around. Mr.

Wiater said he would talk to the person heading up the Adopt-a-Spot program, who would speak to the homeowner. It was further discussed. Assistant Mayor Kelley asked how the City managed an Adopt-A-Spot and whether it should be under the Committee's purview. Mr. Rice said there was a list of all the Adopt-A-Spot locations and that it had always been an extracurricular activity but depended on the interest of the residents. He said the City tried to reach out to everyone annually to tell them that the City would provide materials and help coordinate it. He said if the Committee was interested in participating, they could put together a presentation.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the trees, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **790 McGee Dr:** 1 Norway spruce, good condition, removal requested by homeowner. A nearby Norway spruce's roots failed in a recent storm, which is prompting this removal request.

Will Bland of 790 McGee Drive phoned in via Zoom and said he had gone through a similar process a few years before when several nearby trees failed due to their root balls, and he was concerned that the Norway spruce would fall on his house. He explained that the trees further up the road on McGee Drive were different because they didn't have the wind exposure that the trees at his end of the street did. Mr. Wiater said he was familiar with the trees that failed and asked if there had been any significant soil disturbances in the area in the past 10 years. Mr. Bland said the City extended the water line and placed a hydrant near the tree a few years ago. Mr. Dupere said this tree was backfilled and the soil grades were changed significantly. He asked what was injected into the trees. Mr. Bland said Urban Tree Service did the injections for years and that the trees had looked healthy but kept falling over. It was further discussed. Mr. Dupere said he wanted to inspect the trees at 800 McGee Drive if they are similarly backfilled like the tree at 790 McGee Drive. He said the tree at Mr. Bland's property was at the bottom of the hill and collected all the water and that he understood the concern.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the tree at 790 McGee Drive and follow up on investigating the three trees at 800 McGee Drive and bringing back the request if appropriate. Mr. Griffin seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **800 McGee Dr:** 3 Norway spruce trees, fair-to-good condition, removals requested by homeowner.

See 790 McGee Drive above.

- **199 Clinton Street:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, removal requested by homeowner. Recent mechanical root damage caused by underground utility work is prompting this removal request. (Photo included).

Owner Katherine Cook was present and explained that she had a permit to demolish her

house and build a new one. She said the maple was in front of the house and the water and sewer lines mixed with the tree's root system. She said the lines would be removed for the demolition and the water and sewer lines would be replaced, and she was concerned about the impact on the tree's root system. She said she would have liked to save the tree but thought the best thing was to remove it. Mr. Wiater said there were concerns about whether the tree was structurally sound because a lot of the roots to support the continued health and growth of the tree had been severed. Mr. Rice asked Ms. Cook if she would consider planting a replacement tree. Ms. Cook agreed and said it would be part of the landscaping and grading process in a few years.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend the removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **Vaughan Mall:** 2 red oaks, poor condition, removal recommended by City. Both trees are showing signs of stress in the form of significant crown dieback and water sprouts. Pruning will only remove immediate hazards but not reverse the decline.

Mr. Wiater said he had intended to prune the trees but thought it didn't make much sense to proceed, considering their current state. Mr. Rice said the sewer and stormwater drainage and all the utilities in that section had to be replaced, and any trees in that area would be impacted. Ms. Kelley noted the lights in the trees and asked what could be done so that the side and main corridors of the Vaughan Mall were brightened up at night. Ms. Bagley asked if the lights harmed the trees, and Mr. Dupere said they did over time. He said they were experimenting with suspending the lights with plastic and rubber straps. Ms. Chag said the trees were a cooling station for the mall and asked if the removals could wait until after summer. Mr. Wiater said the trees had significant dieback and was worried that something could fall on someone.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend the removal of the two trees, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **Alumni Field:** 1 red maple, fair condition, removal recommended by City. This site is being cleaned up for future use as a picnic area. On the backside of the tree there is a significant wound and decayed wood in the trunk. There are other instances of decayed wood attached to significant limbs.

Mr. Wiater said the tree had significant structural issues. He said the site would be turned into a picnic area and he wouldn't feel comfortable eating under the tree. He said major limbs had sections of decayed wood and he recommended removing the tree.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend the removal of the red maple, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion passed unanimously.*

### **3. Trees Along the Walkway to the Dog Park**

Mr. Dupere referenced information provided by Zelita Morgan about damage to trees from dog urine. He said a white fir at the edge of the arboretum was failing because of dog urine, which was very acidic and changed the structure of the bark. He said they discussed leaving the stump. Ms. Kelley referenced the Portland ME study and asked if Portland was leaving stumps or putting up something fake to attract dogs. Mr. Dupere said it was mainly due to a congregation of dogs and that Portland had talked about putting fencing around the bottom of the trees. Ms. Kelley asked if the porous paving material helped protect the tree. Mr. Wiater said it did but there were limitations. The Committee further discussed what kind of material would protect the tree. Ms. Bagley said she understood Ms. Morgan's issue because she saw the trees by Parrott Avenue. She noted that there were beautiful trees in Haven Park that a lot of people took their dogs to, and there was no protection at all. Mr. Wiater said there was protective snow fencing around newly planted trees for a few years but then removed. He said snow fencing was also used near the dog park to protect establishing trees. He said this is not a long-term solution due to issues of maintenance and resources. He said they were thinking of planting living mulch around the tree's base to discourage animals. Mr. Rice said they should do some research and figure out alternatives, with education being the first step. It was further discussed. Mr. Wiater said he remembered when Haven Park started allowing off-leash dogs, which increased animal waste and foot traffic that affects soil composition and mature trees. He said the dog park didn't get impacted as much because it had sand. He suggested monitoring Goodwin Park as well because it was also an off-leash park, like Haven Park. Ms. Kelley said she thought the topic should be brought up at a City Council meeting. She said people had to be reminded to be mindful. Ms. Bagley said education was the only thing the Committee had and suggested a newsletter. It was further discussed and there was no decision made.

- 4. Memorial Tree** – The Portsmouth Public Library is requesting a tree to be memorialized for a former librarian, Joan Christie. DPW is planting trees in front of the library to replace ash tree removals from last spring.

Stephanie Campbell of 1001 Islington Street was present to speak to the request and said she was in support of memorializing a tree for Joan Christie, who had been a good friend of hers and a member of her book group. She said Ms. Christie had worked for the library a long time and had been a member of the Athenaeum and a gardener who supported the preservation of open spaces and planting trees and greenery. She said the book group wanted to place a plaque at the foot of the tree. Mr. Rice said it would have to go before the City Council for approval because there were many requests for plaques and memorials that became a maintenance issue. He recommended that the Committee vote to support the request for the plaque, as outlined in the motion below.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend that Ms. Campbell submit a letter to the City Manager's office outlining why Ms. Christie is a worthy candidate, noting her contributions to the City and why it is a laudable thing to do, and to also note that the Committee is in support of it. Ms. Bagley seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

- 5. Committee Member Update** – Begin to consider selecting a new Assistant Chairperson and filling the vacant Committee member opportunity in light of Dick Adams' departure from the Committee.

*Mr. Rice moved to nominate Ms. Bagley as Assistant Chairperson, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion passed unanimously.*

The vacant spot on the Committee was discussed. Mr. Rice encouraged citizens to get involved. Assistant Mayor Kelley said she would ensure that the City Clerk posted the vacant spot under City volunteer openings on the City's website.

## **6. Arbor Day 2024 Update**

Mr. Wiater said it was suggested that a hackberry tree be planted on Arbor Day in honor of former Vice-Chair Dick Adams. He said it could be planted at Langdon Park or another location that Mr. Adams was interested in.

## **7. Update of Tree Planting for the City's 401<sup>st</sup> Anniversary**

Mr. Wiater said he was getting the trees on March 25, of which 40 were going to Pannaway Manor, which was ten more trees than what was removed previously.

## **8. Old Business**

Ms. Chag asked about the tree for Dr. Geoffrey Clark. Mr. Wiater said there was a meeting scheduled to discuss tree species and that the planned location was still in front of the house. Ms. Chag asked about the April 14 Sustainability Fair. Mr. Wiater said they would talk about tree planting and might have trees to hand out. Assistant Mayor Kelley suggested a sign-up for Community Clean-up Day. Mr. Wiater said there could also be a sign-up for an Adopt-a-Spot. Ms. Chag asked if any schools were participating in the School Canopy Program. Mr. Dupere said the applications were going out.

## **9. New Business**

There was no new business.

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, April 10, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:09 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault  
Trees and Greenery Committee Recording Secretary