

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
June 12, 2024**

Members Present: Chair Peter Loughlin; Vice-Chair Patricia Bagley; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; Members Dennis Souto, Michael Griffin and Deborah Chag.

Members Excused: A. J. Dupere

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

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the May 8, 2024 meeting.

*The May 8 minutes were unanimously **approved** as submitted.*

Note: The following tree removal requests were not reviewed in order.

2. Tree Removal Requests

45 Colonial Dr: 1 London planetree, good condition, homeowner request. The homeowner is requesting that this tree be removed due to issues related to roots entering the underground utility lines.

The resident Joan Cohen was present and said the tree's roots were growing into her service pipe, which she thought caused the basement to flood a few years ago. Before the flood, she said a plumber dropped a camera down the pipe to see if the roots were growing in the pipe and said they were not. After the flood, she said a plumber reamed the pipe and did other work. She said she was concerned about her basement flooding again. Mr. Griffin asked if the nearby trees could have an impact. Mr. Wiater said there is the possibility the London planetree was not the offending tree. Mr. Rice asked what the second plumber did and if he saw signs of roots. Ms. Cohen said the second plumber did see roots. Mr. Rice said the sewer service could be compromised by roots getting into it and would need repair or replacement. Ms. Cohen said she had it done before. Mr. Rice said the newer pipes were gasketed and tight, so the sewer service might not be pitched in the right direction. It was further discussed. Mr. Rice said that, in the past, root damage and intrusion into sewer lines had not been a justification for removing a healthy tree. He said if the new lines were installed correctly, they should be root resistant. He asked if the lines went all the way into the street or just 10 feet or so in the yard. Ms. Cohen said she didn't know. Mr. Rice said he would have his staff video the line to confirm that it was in good shape. Ms. Cohen agreed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin recommended that the tree not be removed, and Ms. Chag seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

Note: the following two Community Campus items were grouped and voted on together.

Community Campus Zen Garden: 5 pine, 2 black cherry, and 1 hemlock, poor to good condition, volunteer request, removals recommended by City. These trees will be removed to enhance and facilitate the cleanup of the Zen Garden.

Laurie Kelleher, a master gardener volunteering at the Community Campus Zen Garden (Wilder Garden), was present. She said a lot of overgrown shrubs had been cleared and the gardeners wanted to re-establish the garden with shrubs and perennials and bring it back to community use. She noted that a trail across from the garden was also being reestablished. Ms. Chag said some of the requests were in the front of the garden and that she favored the small Japanese-like pine tree in the center that welcomes you to the garden. She asked if that had to be removed. Mr. Wiater said the tree was fine, but asked what the plan was and if it included other tree planting. Ms. Kelleher said other trees had grown quite tall and they wanted smaller plantings to re-establish more of the ground area. She said the large pine in the center was decayed and inhibited light to the area. Vice-Chair Bagley said the hemlock in the group seemed overpowered by the pine trees around it and that most of it seemed overgrown; however, she struggled with removing the trees for just doing what they were supposed to do. Mr. Wiater said the hemlock was not the healthiest tree of the lot and that it was enveloped by all the other dominating trees. He said he did not see signs of pest infestation and thought it was just a declining older tree among healthier ones. He said if the declined branches were pruned, the tree would be a sad-looking one, but otherwise the pines in the front were good. He noted that the pine tree in the center was declining and said the two cherry trees in poor condition should be removed. He said he saw the value of removing the trees because of what the community garden was trying to do. The ash tree removal request was also discussed, and it was decided that it should be removed due to the EAB infestation.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto recommended removing the trees, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

Community Campus: 1 ash, poor condition, removal recommended by City. This tree is showing signs of EAB infestation. (Near the Zen Garden, next to the building.)

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

63 Clinton St: 1 Norway maple, poor condition, removal recommended by City. This tree is significantly declined.

There was no discussion. Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Ms. Chag recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

89 Clinton St: 1 Norway maple, fair condition, homeowner request. This tree has been pruned for deadwood and end weight within the last several years. The tree is stressed

and is sending suckers along most branches and leaders. Some cavities exist from old pruning cuts.

The residents Frances and Floyd Buck were present. Mr. Buck said they had the sewer line replaced when they bought the house because the tree destroyed it, and since then the tree had dropped several branches. He said the tree was mossing up the roof, had buckled up the sidewalk, and would block the solar panels they wanted to install. He said he thought the tree's lifespan was over and that it should be replaced with a smaller tree. Mrs. Buck said no one used the sidewalk because it was buckled so badly. Mr. Wiater said his staff pulled some of the tree's weight away from the house and there had been a few tear-outs since then. He said he thought the tree was stressed and sending suckers along branches and leaders and there were cavities from old pruning cuts. He said nothing stood out structurally that would cause a significant risk of failure but noted that Norway maples were weaker than most trees and that a limb could come off in a storm. Mr. Buck said the branches were hanging over the roof and causing the moss issue. Mr. Souto said he didn't like the fact that the base of the tree was pressed between the sidewalk and road, and the sidewalk was lifting. He also said a limb close to the house had a horizontal crack in it. Ms. Chag said it was a valued tree with a big canopy and that she was hesitant to remove it. Mr. Wiater said no amount of pruning or clearing the tree from the house for solar would work. He said the tree was stressed but was still redeemable. Mr. Buck asked whether there were more plans to improve Clinton Street. Mr. Rice said improvements would continue and that the tree could be reassessed then. Mr. Buck asked why the tree could not be removed right away instead of waiting a few years. Ms. Kelley said the tree could be mitigated until then by pruning it back from the roofline. Mr. Griffin asked if the tree was the healthiest of the three trees at 63, 81 and 89 Clinton Street. Mr. Wiater agreed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto recommended removal of the tree. There was no second.*

*Mr. Rice then moved to **table** the request to further evaluate the schedule for the Clinton Street reconstruction project and to further evaluate the health of the tree. Mr. Griffin seconded. The motion **passed** 6-1, with Mr. Souto voting in opposition.*

There was more discussion. Mr. Wiater said the tree may become too stressed and decline on its own, or it could stay in its present state. He said there would be another opportunity to discuss its removal when there was more clarification on the Clinton Street project. He said he would prune the tree and examine the canopy's upper and central portions to verify that there were not any other significant structural issues.

71 Sheffield Rd: 1 red maple, fair condition, homeowner request, removal recommended by City. The central leader is declining, there is a large basal area of decay and carpenter ant galleries, and each significant union is hosting shrubs, meaning there is moisture and decomposing material in these spaces.

Mr. Wiater said the homeowner and a few neighbors requested that the tree be removed due to the large basal area of decay and the carpenter ants. He said they removed more than half of the central leader in the spring and raised up the half of the tree that was decent. He said the best parts of the tree were growing toward someone's house and yard and the tree would be heavier and taller on that one side and the decay at the base would spread, so he thought the tree should be removed. The neighbor Jim Prendergast was present and said he had watched the tree for 11 years and it was getting worse. He showed a photo of the tree's rotted spots and the carpenter ants and said he was concerned that the tree would eventually fall across the street into the power lines.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Vice-Chair Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

Old Business

250 Clinton St: revisiting this tree after it was voted to postpone removal from last month. Original description of tree: 1 Norway maple, fair condition, homeowner request. The tree is on the paper-road next to the house. The homeowner is worried the tree will fall onto the house and would prefer it removed. All major leaders are included and attached to the trunk.

Mr. Wiater said the tree's removal was postponed to see if its removal would impact the other two maples on the property. He said he investigated the nearby trees and put white flags where he thought the property line was, and he did not think that the maple was on City property. Mr. Rice said if the tree was not a City one, then there was no issue. Ms. Chag asked if it was a wetlands situation. Mr. Wiater agreed and said the owner's tree contractor would have to apply for a permit to remove the tree.

3. Update of Ongoing Tree Planting for the City's 401st Anniversary

Mr. Wiater said his staff was in watering mode and had a few watering trucks and trailers. He said they planted 200 trees last year and planted around 154 or so trees this year. He said they were maintaining the tree rings and always had to reapply more mulch. It was further discussed. He said a summer intern would apply compost to the recent plantings, downtown trees, and a few trees in rough spots. Ms. Kelley mentioned the small tree in front of 55 Congress Street that looked like it was just a vine growing up. She noted that it was a popular Facebook subject. Mr. Wiater said they tried to put urban-tolerant trees in those sites. He said they planted an Osage orange tree there last year but contractors doing work on the building broke the tree's central leader. He said the ordinance stated that a monetary fine was associated with that type of action. Ms. Kelley suggested placing small signage in front of similar trees so that people would leave them alone. Mr. Wiater said it could be done, and it was further discussed.

4. Old Business

There was no old business.

5. New Business

Chair Loughlin said the landscaping on the Market Street Extension was spectacular and made him proud to be a resident of Portsmouth. He said all the new plantings on Middle Street were also amazing. He commended Mr. Wiater on how well he interacted with citizens who came before the committee and said he was like an ambassador for the City.

Next meeting: Wednesday, July 10, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:03 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Secretary

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