

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
September 11, 2024**

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

Members Excused: None.

Also Present: City Councilor Kate Cook; Dave Desfosses and Zach Cronin of the Department of Public Works; Andrew King, Regional Arborist for Eversource; and Kris Martel of Northern Tree Service

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

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the August 14, 2024 meeting.

*The August 14 minutes were **approved** as submitted.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **Sagamore Rd: Note:** the decision was made at the last T&G meeting on August 14, 2024 to postpone the decision about tree removals on Sagamore Avenue until the September 11, 2024 meeting. Below is the original post description of the trees: 18 trees total, all for Eversource, all trees are recommended for removal by City, including:
 - **635 Sagamore Ave:** 1 red oak, good condition
 - **749 Sagamore Ave:** 5 red oak, 1 white pine, 1 black cherry, fair-good condition
 - **City ROW opposite Cliff Rd:** 7 white pine, 2 red oak, 1 black birch, fair-good condition

Mr. Wiater stated that the 18 trees were requested to be removed by the City due to updated utilities.

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

Mr. Wiater said Trees No. 2 and 3 were the oaks near the driveway and the No. 6 tree was near a utility pole and that they would all be pruned, which left trees No. 1, 4, and 5. It was further discussed, and Mr. Wiater said Tree No. 4 would be removed.

There was no public comment. Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to approve Mr. Wiater's recommendations, and Ms. Kelley seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

Mr. Wiater said Tree No. 5 was a small tree that he recommended to be removed, and Tree No. 1 at 635 Sagamore Rd was a large red oak that the committee previously determined would be okay to remove.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Vice-Chair Bagley moved to recommend removal of Tree No. 5, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion passed unanimously.*

There was further discussion on Tree No. 1. Chair Loughlin said a limb went over the wires and he thought it could be pruned instead of removed. He said the removal of the three trees behind it would leave a big gap. He said he preferred to wait and see what was proposed for the site. Kris Martel of Northern Tree Service was present and said the canopy was a concern because they wanted to keep it raised 15 feet above the new line. Eversource arborist Andrew King said another concern was that they did not want to just skin a tree up to be able to satisfy the needs and the spec for the new line and then be left with a third of the tree. He said it would look horrible and that the tree could decline and die and would have to be removed later. It was further discussed. Assistant Mayor Kelley said she was concerned that if the other trees behind it were lost, the tree would be a "solo sail in the wind". Mr. Rice asked if the roots would be affected by the project. Zach Cronin, Assistant City Engineer and Sagamore Avenue Project Engineer, said the sidewalk is located 1-1/2 feet closer to the tree's roots. Mr. Rice said the intent was to not have the issue return, so he supported the tree's removal.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Griffin.*

Chair Loughlin said he opposed the tree's removal because he thought a limb could be trimmed off instead.

The motion passed by a vote of 6-1, with Chair Loughlin voting in opposition.

Chair Loughlin noted that the flagger on the site, Cliff West, was very friendly and welcoming to the committee when they did the site walk.

At this time, citizen Kevin Szmyd (via Zoom) said he was a candidate for the State House for Rockingham 24 and thought the trees should remain if possible.

- **22 Greenleaf Ave:** 3 red maples, fair-to-good condition. These trees are being considered for removal to facilitate a sidewalk project from Hillside Dr to Lafayette Rd. Trees are numbered 1 to 3 on removal notices. Listed below are the individual notes for the three trees:

- 1: good condition; some crown dieback exists, but is overall a vigorous tree.
- 2: fair condition; in general, there is a thin canopy with dieback, some unions have pockets of moisture and decay, and small cavities from old pruning cuts exist.

- 3: good condition; a large basal necrotic area exists, but the wood is solid; above that is a cavity with moisture and decay, probing the hole with a rod suggests decent compartmentalization of decay; in general, a vigorous tree.

Chair Loughlin said the committee addressed the request before and that they did not want to remove the trees but the options had narrowed. He opened the public hearing.

Phoebe Hebert of Hillside Drive said the area was not safe to walk in.

Greg Hebert of 183 Hillside Drive said removing the trees on 22 Greenleaf Avenue would help keep the neighborhood safe and preserve its quality of life.

Joni Lane of Hillside Drive said removing a healthy tree was not good but in this situation it was about keeping the Hillside Dr residents safe. She said the neighborhood wanted to be connected to the rest of Portsmouth in a safe way without having to use their cars, so she supported the removal of the trees to facilitate the sidewalk project.

Mark Batchelder, DPW engineer and project designer, said the project was in the concept phase when it was presented at the public meeting, and since then, he discovered that there was another large tree that had to be removed because it was near a utility pole. He asked Mr. Wiater to look into whether the sidewalk would impact the tree's root system.

Assistant Mayor Kelley said she supported removing the trees and the overall project in general. She said she had walked in that area many times and had not felt comfortable, and she thought filling in the striped area with more green space and improving the walk and roadway would be great. It was further discussed.

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

Mr. Rice noted that other things may occur in the future relative to the roadway configuration and the hope was that more green space and trees would be planted. He said the residents would be asked if they wanted to participate in an Adopt-a-Tree program. He said several alternatives were looked into but the issue was a safety one.

Note: At this point in the meeting, the committee addressed 123 McKinley Road out of order because the owner was present at the meeting.

- **Vaughan Mall at Congress St:** 4 red oaks, good condition, removal recommended by City. The Vaughan Mall will be undergoing significant utility replacement, which necessitates the removal of these oaks to potentially save the remaining trees in Vaughan Mall.

City Councilor Kate Cook was present to discuss the removals. She said there wasn't a lot of shade downtown anymore, so she wanted the four oaks to remain. She said another planted tree would take 25 years or more to recreate the current shade canopy. She asked if there were any alternatives. Assistant Major Kelley asked what the utility update

timeline was. Mr. Rice said they intended to bid by the end of the year. DPW Project Manager Dave Desfosses was present and said they were in emergency design mode and hoped that the design would be completed in the next six weeks. He said Vaughan Mall would be done in the spring and they were looking at options to address Councilor Cook's comments. He said sewer and water mains were not replaced when the Vaughan Mall was built and the drainage plan wasn't big enough to handle current storms. He said they had to replace all three main utilities and there was no viable alternative, but he thought one of the trees may be able to stay and that they might be able to come up with shade alternatives. He said they would work with landscape architect Terrence Parker.

Note: At this point in the meeting, Cliff Brown of Cass Street was present to discuss the 239 Cass Street removal and said he wanted to learn more about the process of how trees got selected for removal and the resident's role in the process. It was further discussed.

Mr. Wiater said a lot of the utilities could be localized if the oaks were removed. He said one of the three locust trees is the largest tree left on public property downtown and should be preserved. He said the removal of the four oaks would allow for the best opportunity to preserve all the other trees. He recommended removing them. Mr. Desfosses requested permission to remove the trees now while the plans are still being designed and said the final version of the plans will determine what ultimately is removed. He said the trees will only be removed once the designs are confirmed. He said not having giant trees on top of a utility structure was crucial when looking toward the future of Vaughan Mall. Mr. Wiater said an urban forester would do a site visit with him to discuss tree preservation techniques and maintenance on the remaining trees while the Vaughan Mall project is underway. Mr. Rice said the process would be part of the pre-bid and pre-construction meetings.

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

Ms. Chag asked if there were mechanisms to share the issue with the public, like a newsletter or a newspaper article. Mr. Rice said there would be public meetings as part of the design effort as well as a pre-construction meeting to discuss how the process went forward. He said the removal was necessary due to the fear of utilities collapsing.

- **364 Thornton St:** 1 pear, good condition, resident request, removal recommended by City. The homeowner's underground utility line needs to be replaced, which is located directly beneath this pear tree.

Mr. Wiater said a home water service line was below the pear tree near the resident's doorstep. He said the City would have to maintain and monitor the other tree in the front. He said he would contact the homeowner and tell him the tree was not recommended to be removed until DPW could figure out if it could be saved or not.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved that Mr. Wiater work with the homeowner to see if there was an alternative way to preserve the tree, otherwise it could be removed. Mr. Rice seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **234 Aldrich Rd:** 1 sugar maple, poor condition, resident request, removal recommended by City. The tree is declining and there is no other treatment option available.

Mr. Wiater said the tree was in the right-of-way and had declined over the years.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Vice-Chair Bagley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

123 McKinley Rd: 4 ash trees, poor condition, resident request, removal recommended by City. Trees are infested with EAB.

Elaine Healy of 123 McKinley Rd was present and said the trees in the front of the property were dead, and she did not know the condition of the three trees on the far side of the property. Mr. Wiater said they had signs of EAB infestation and that the City would not do any other treatments for ash trees.

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

- **South Mill Playground:** 2 ash trees, poor condition, removal recommended by City. Trees are infested with EAB.

Mr. Wiater said the two trees are located near one previously-removed ash tree from last fall that was also declining from the EAB infestation.

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

- **212 Miller Ave:** 1 ash, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree is infested with EAB.

Mr. Wiater said the tree was declining from the EAB infestation.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Vice-Chair Bagley moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **120 Hillcrest Dr:** 1 Norway spruce, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree has been declining for several years.

Mr. Wiater said the area was repaved within the last five years, so the water was draining into the swale. He said the tree was pruned but was still declining.

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

- **57 Hillside Dr:** 1 red maple, fair condition, resident request, removal recommended by City. A large necrotic area is present at the base of this tree.

Mr. Wiater said he inspected the tree and the base seemed to have carpenter ant issues. He said the tree was pruned by Eversource but the problem was being absorbed into the canopies of the tree next to the maple. He said more canopy reduction could be done but there wasn't much else to do to save the tree.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend that Mr. Wiater monitor the maple for now, seconded by Ms. Chag. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **239 Cass St:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, resident request, removal recommended by City. The tree is in a general state of decline, and there is carpenter ant activity suggesting wet or decayed wood.

Mr. Wiater said the top was taken out but there was a lot of carpenter ant activity at the base. He recommended removal of the tree, and Mr. Rice agreed.

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

3. Update on City's Ongoing Tree Maintenance and Planting Plans

Mr. Wiater said he would bring the information about the trees on order at the October meeting, and that he was also doing a mock-up a door hanger with information for homeowners. Mr. Rice asked if there would be another opportunity to give away trees at the next Sustainability Fair, and Mr. Wiater agreed.

4. Old Business

Mr. Souto said he was disappointed to see the photos of the dead ginkgo trees on Union Street. Mr. Rice said he was taken aback by the curbing on the back side of it. Mr. Wiater said he was starting to take tree preservation more seriously and that the urban forestry contractor will be a great help. Mr. Rice said Mr. Wiater would be involved at the beginning of projects so that city contractors could understand the importance of the issue. Mr. Griffin asked if the contractor responsible for the ginkgo trees could be held accountable. Mr. Rice said he would look at the contract to understand what happened.

Mr. Souto asked if the striped maple on Hawthorne Street was the only one in town. Mr. Griffin said he thought so. Mr. Wiater said it was a great tree but a bad location for it. He said his crew pruned the tree and that the owner did not want the tree removed.

5. New Business

There was no new business discussed.

Next meeting: Wednesday, October 9, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Secretary