

**TREES AND PUBLIC GREENERY COMMITTEE**  
**City of Portsmouth**

**MINUTES**

**7:30 AM – Wednesday, March 12, 2014**  
**Portsmouth City Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, City Manger’s Conference Room**

**Members Present:** Peter Loughlin, Chairman; Richard Adams, Vice Chairman; Peter Rice, Director, Public Works; Todd Croteau, Public Works General Foreman; A. J. Dupere, Community Forester; Leslie Stevens; Dennis Souto

**Members Excused:** n/a

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

1. **Acceptance of Minutes of the February 12, 2014 Meeting** – Unanimously approved.
2. **Tree Removal Requests:**

**Langdon Park (Sugar Maple behind 55 Kent Street)** – Mr. Adams stated that a big limb fell on a neighbor’s property and the tree is badly rotten. He would encourage earlier removal because a pair of bluebirds are looking to take up residence in the tree and they usually start nesting the first of April. Mr. Souto agreed that early removal sounded good. Mr. Adams made a motion to recommend removal. Mr. Souto seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**225 Borthwick Avenue – Liberty Mutual; 17 Sugar Maples** – Attorney Loughlin stated they had received a letter from Liberty Mutual to remove 17 Sugar Maples and replace them with very significant pin oaks which will do very well in that location. Mr. Croteau confirmed they are requesting permission from the City to remove trees along the street but they are also removing others that go down between Liberty Mutual and the pond, which are on private property. Mr. Souto asked if all tree replacements will be pin oaks. Mr. Rice confirmed they were and it was all being done at the expense of Liberty Mutual. Mr. Dupere wondered why they were using those trees. Liberty Mutual has beech trees inside the property and there are pin oaks on the hospital property. Mr. Souto wasn’t enthusiastic about monoculture but didn’t have a problem if that is what they wanted to do. Mr. Dupere felt this is the toughest tree they could plant and they are looking for symmetry across the front. Ms. Stevens noted they are replacing the trees with 5 ½ caliber trees, which are very big trees. Mr. Dupere felt this is a good test for them to pay for because they will need a crane and heavy machinery. They will need a lot of water. But, they are a tough urban tree and will provide them with instant landscaping. Mr. Croteau noted they like to use salt around their property so it will be a good test for how they handle the salt. Mr. Rice made a motion to recommend removal of the existing trees. Mr. Dupere seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Adams assumed that Attorney Loughlin would be sending them a letter regarding their decision and he asked him to include a request that they water the trees systematically.

**64 Mt Vernon Street – Multiple Trees** – Bob Hassold, of 15 Mt. Vernon Street was present and stated that he has used a path along his neighbor's house to go up to City Hall and has seen many elderly people using the path to get to the Farmer's Market. He would recommend, after conversations with Steve Parkinson over the years that something was going to be done with that path and trees, to please take down the trees even though he hates to see them go.

Cyrus Beer, of 64 Mt. Vernon Street, stated the largest tree was a spruce tree which was leaning towards his house and roots are coming out of the ground. He is concerned about the tree falling on his house. There are Norway Maples which have grown up around the area and they are also hanging over his house. He would like to have all of them removed. Mr. Adams asked if DPW has any intention of building a permanent pathway. Mr. Rice responded that they have been looking at it for a number of years but it is a challenging area to work in and they would have to work on the retaining wall also. They currently have limited funds to do that work. They just recently did a boundary survey because of a retaining wall across the street. They have put money into the CIP to work on retaining walls. Based on the survey, it appears that the fence and retaining wall are on City property and the tree and the Norway maples are right on the edge. The big challenge is that a pathway would have to be ADA compliant and they have elevation and grade change issues. Mr. Rice also has concerns about taking out trees which would also take root systems that would allow for soil to wash off more readily. Mr. Dupere felt that walking over the roots is actually damaging the roots. The positive thing about the tree is that the roots on the uphill side are in really good condition and are not impacted. Ms. Stevens asked if it was possible to shut the path off until a decision is made, in light of their concern about wearing away the soil around the tree. Mr. Rice didn't think that was the solution. Tom Richter has looked at this in the past and they probably need to revisit it. If the tree was removed that would give them more options. He was not a big fan of that tree. Mr. Adams did not feel it was in an ideal location and is too close to the building. He asked what time frame are they looking at for completing a pathway and, if they cut the tree down beforehand, how much erosion would take place in that span. Mr. Croteau felt it would depend on the weather pattern. Mr. Rice felt they could stabilize it with fencing to hold it in place. Mr. Hassan was concerned that the big spruce tree could crack in half and cause physical damage to Mr. Beer's house.

Mr. Souto felt one possibility is to cut the tree down and keep the stump and roots in place. Mr. Dupere felt that placing wood chips on the path would be an option to slow down people who are wearing down the soil. However, that could compound the problem for elderly people.

Ms. Stevens felt there were two questions. There is the big spruce tree and then there are other trees. She is not interested in taking all of the trees down. The other trees seem to be doing very well and are away from the house. Attorney Loughlin asked if it would be appropriate to tag the trees and look at them next month. Mr. Rice will have Tom Richter look at this again and what options they would have if they free up that space and whether they could get an ADA slope out of it.

Mr. Souto made a motion to remove the one spruce tree with the exposed roots on the other side of the building. Mr. Adams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. **Presentation/Update on Sagamore Avenue Improvements** - Jeff Highland, Landscape Architect, Phil Corbert, of CMA Engineers and Tom Richter, Project Manager for DPW, were present. They gave a presentation in February and they have made significant progress and have identified how the project will be phrased. They changed their phasing plan, which brought up a couple of important trees between South Street and Little Harbor Road. They are looking for input on the Red Oak and other trees to better understand what their approach should be.

Mr. Highland provided a tree assessment which is still a draft. It takes into account the work the Committee members had done identifying trees in the corridor and includes additional observations to each tree as well. Each tree in the corridor is identified with a number.

Mr. Corbert gave some background on the project. He indicated that the entire design project originally looked at Sagamore Avenue from South Street to the Sagamore Bridge. They had a public input meeting and gathered information, completed a survey, did field work and developed a Conceptual Plan with the goal of providing 2 11' travel lanes, two 5' bike lanes and a new ADA 5' wide sidewalk. They tried to balance things as best they could regarding impacts to trees, properties, and the cemetery wall. They are providing stormwater improvements as most of the water from the road is now untreated. Also, the project includes replacing sewer and providing new water services to the water main. They just presented their concept plan last Wednesday to show the first round of impacts and received most input. Based on that concept they developed cost estimates and determined they do not have enough money to do the whole project so the current approach is to do the first phase from South Street to just past Little Harbor Road. Their hope today is to present their draft, give an understanding of what it will look like, get some feedback and have the trees identified for removal in April for their final tree assessment.

Mr. Highland indicated there are some trees within the corridor that are not in great shape and now might be a good time to remove them and replace them. He will look for feedback on whether that is desirable and pro active to remove and thin some trees as well.

Using the team's tree assessment for the corridor, they reviewed the individual trees:

Tree A is a nice large Oak on the cemetery side. It will not be impacted by this project as there will not be any curbing on this side of street. It is on the back side of the stonewall. Mr. Rice stated the only impacts would be limbing and it's probably not even a City tree.

Tree B is a spruce tree on the opposite side. It will have minimal impact and is in fairly good shape.

Tree C on Sheet L-2 is a 10" red norway maple. It is in relatively good shape and they don't anticipate much impact. Attorney Loughlin asked about the tree identification. They had a program to identify impacts from a storm and they talked about trees that were not necessarily in a right-of-way and he believed that was how some of these trees received ID's. Mr. Dupere felt this was part of the identification that they worked on with Mr. Croteau and they used aerial photos to identify the City right-of-way. Some information is not accurate. Mr. Highland agreed there are some inconsistencies and they will fill in the gaps with field observation.

Tree D is a fairly large oak tree with some die back on the lower branches and warrants some pre construction pruning. It is on the cemetery side of the retaining wall. There will be very little root impact but the branches are a concern.

Tree E is also a fairly large and old oak tree that is not in great condition. They are recommending removal but are looking for feedback. Mr. Corbert thought it looked like the sidewalk would impact the tree roots. They could try to bridge the structure but it is right by a driveway so it probably would not work. It also has to be ADA compliant and provide a 4' bench at 2% across the apron. This is in front of 191 Sagamore Avenue. Mr. Highland felt that, no matter how you look at it, there will be significant impacts to the root system.

Mr. Adams was not sure they need to go into great detail today. The Committee could go out and conduct an on-site survey of the trees. Ms. Stevens agreed that was typically how they had handled it. Mr. Corbert stated they could go with them. Mr. Rice wanted them to highlight the trees they are recommending to remove and explain why.

Tree F is a spruce tree with very little impact.

Tree G is a maple tree on the right-of-way line so it will probably have some impacts but probably could be left in place with the current sidewalk configuration.

Tree H will have very little impact.

Tree I is being reviewed after the last public meeting. Mr. Corbert indicated they had originally eliminated the grass strip but they are now widening it back out and providing a small grass strip between the curb and the edge of the sidewalk. Mr. Adams felt they would want relatively short trees on the west side due to the utility lines. The tree may potentially have to be removed.

Tree J is a dogwood with very little impact.

Tree K is a large spruce tree with very little impact although it might need some limbing up for sight lines.

Tree L is a maple tree on private property which will have very little impact.

Tree M is a hickory tree on private property with very little impact.

The tree of the greatest concern is the 52" red oak on the corner of Verdun. That is a big tree and probably the biggest tree in this corridor. It is not in great shape. Mr. Corbert took pictures of what is there today and what they are proposing. This is one of the narrowest areas and they can't shift the road any closer to the wall. The photos show you can't even get behind the tree well now on the sidewalk. The stone wall appears to be on the roadside of the right-of-way which also constrains things. The edge of their proposed bike lane is within the limits of the tree. All of those things would have to be compromised to save the tree and the tree still may not survive. They also have to put the sewer main in which may or may not have impacts to the roots. Most of the pavement width is 31 - 32' but it's more like 26 - 27' at this location so this would be an area they have to widen to try and provide a continuous bike lane along South Street.

Attorney Loughlin asked if it was possible to push the roadway towards the cemetery. Mr. Corbert explained they are sensitive to the impact to the cemetery wall, however, they would be more comfortable pushing the road more than 7 ½', which would more of an encroachment than they have now but the problem is that just 100' down the road they have a minimum impact so they can't do both. They are at the minimum off set of the wall now. However, even if they did accommodate that, they still wouldn't be able to fit the sidewalk in. There is only one sidewalk planned on the west side of the road. Mr. Dupere remembers that that tree has structural issues. They looked at it a few years ago and requested a pruning. Mr. Adams wondered if the homeowner was agreeable to a tree, paid for by the City, on his property to get it out from under the wires so it would have the potential of growing tall. Mr. Richter confirmed they have done that in the Heights. Mr. Corbert indicated there are a lot of large trees in the vicinity of this tree. Mr. Highland also noted there appears to be some rot to the tree.

Trees M & P will have very little impact.

Tree Q could use pruning pre-construction.

Tree R is an apple tree with very little impact.

Trees S & T are red maples. He felt it might make sense to remove one of them as they are very close together. They would grow better.

Tree U is also a large red maple that is not in great condition. They could remove it now as it is in poor condition which would allow them to put in new plantings.

Trees X & Y will have no impacts.

Trees V & W are on private property. There are some sight line issues which they will discuss with the property owners.

Attorney Loughlin stated they should have a site walk and invite the public to join them.

Mr. Dupere asked if, by changing the intersection and squaring it up, there are any plans for that section of land. Mr. Corbert confirmed the plan is to create a small pocket park with plants and benches. They are narrowing up the intersection and will gain a lot of green space. They will also be providing 3 parking spaces.

Wayne Gagnon, 171 Sagamore Avenue. He noted there was a lot of time spent on traffic calming but he hasn't heard anything yet about planting new trees along that path. Mr. Corbert responded that because of the design of the roadway and the location of the sidewalk and grass strip, they haven't gotten to that level yet and will discuss that next month. There will be some additional trees and traffic calming is still a major part of this project. Mr. Gagnon asked when they will know that the grass strip will happen. Mr. Corbert stated they can restore a good part of the grass strip but first have to finalize the South Street intersection turn lanes. It will certainly extend further down. The plan is taking place pretty quickly to get construction underway this year. He was not sure there was a plan for another public meeting. Mr. Rice confirmed there would be no additional public meeting. They have received a lot of public input. Some of that input has been contradictory and some has been very helpful. Some

sections will gain a grass strip and some will lose it. They will try to accommodate as many public concerns as they can but they need to balance all of the needs and cannot guarantee anything. They need to create a working street that provides multi-modal access for pedestrians, bicycles, and traffic calming. They have clearly heard the desire for a grass strip where possible. Mr. Gagnon asked if they meant the grass strip would be eliminated in some spots. Mr. Rice confirmed it would be but they have not fully developed the plan yet. They have a very tight time frame. They have had two public meetings and they are at a point where they will have to make challenging decisions that may not please everyone. When they are at a point where they have a more definite plan they can post it on the City website and ask for comments. Also, Mr. Richter could come out and walk any section of concern. Mr. Richter will keep people apprised of their progress but he is really stretched for time and cannot always get back to them immediately. Mr. Rice confirmed that trees will be planted and the type and location of those trees will be dictated by this Committee and that there are monies budgeted for that.

Mr. Souto noted that the grass strip is obviously a concern to this resident and asked if, once they have an idea of what the grass strip will look like, they can post it on line. Mr. Corbert confirmed they will do that. The public meeting was just last Wednesday and they are attempting to extend the grass strip as much as they can. They are very close. Mr. Rice added that they also have to beware because the unintended consequence can be impact to their driveway which creates a situation where they go up a little but and then flatten out. If they have a low suspended car, they may be very displeased with the impacts to their vehicles. He just wanted to be very clear that when they make design decisions there are consequences.

One resident was concerned that the grassy strip would go away but she was glad to hear it is going back in. She understands that there is an emphasis to make the City a walkable and bike friendly City. She wanted to make sure things are also made as green and beautiful as possible. The neighbors want the street to be walkable and safe with a buffer next to the sidewalk. The Oak tree is a concern of hers and she would hate to see it go. She indicated that the Cromptons own that house. Mr. Corbert confirmed that the City also strives for beauty and green. He also wanted to confirm that once they get to Little Harbor Road, there will not be a grass strip.

Pat Healy, of 111 Sagamore, passed a photo around. He went around to 50 houses on Sagamore and encouraged them to go to public meeting to give input. He is a biker and loves the 5' bike lane. He's concerned about some of the elderly residents not having a grass strip and asked about changing some of the road configuration. Mr. Rice confirmed they are looking at that and will try to do the best they can.

Mr. Rice confirmed they will have something on the website by the end of the week. They will require tree input sooner rather than later so they know whether they have to make any adjustments.

The Committee set up a Site Walk for Wednesday, March 19th, at 8:30 am.

4. **Spring 2014 Plantings** - "Team Adams" prepared a planting list. Mr. Adams indicated that they knocked on quite a few doors and a surprising number of people didn't want trees. He asked if they need homeowner's endorsement to plant a tree. Mr. Rice indicated that the public expects input and it should be a consideration. Ms. Stevens confirmed it was not their past practice and it creates more work for their process. Mr. Rice was more than willing to go with whatever direction the

Committee felt was more appropriate. Ms. Stevens felt they could send a letter saying that a tree is being planted and they could ask them to respond if they have any objection. Mr. Dupere indicated that “Team Dupere” did not approach homeowners because as part of his job with the State he cannot speak to homeowners. Mr. Rice would like to advertise and post the pre-planting schedule and they could do a news release about selected sites. He felt that was a decent balance.

Mr. Adams felt that time is somewhat of the essence as they want to get this out to bid. Mr. Rice felt they could get a news release in the next Community Newsletter saying that if a property owner sees a stake in front of their house it is an indication that a tree is being planted and if they have any questions, they can contact Mr. Croteau. Mr. Dupere added that the locations won’t affect the bid process as long as they have the species.

Mr. Dupere indicated that Angie had made up list of big and small tree species. It excludes some trees, i.e., ash trees, and it will be put on the Forest Service website.

Attorney Loughlin felt if a tree site is clearly in a public strip that cries for a tree, that should be taken into consideration over the property owners input. Mr. Souto felt that planting trees is a precious commodity and they should plant them where people would like them.

Ms Stevens had to leave the meeting for a School Board meeting. She asked about Arbor Day. She knew there were some Middle School students up for doing something. Mr. Rice had spoken to Chris Rose and he had 19 – 20 students plus parents who were interested in doing something. They will combine it with Arbor Day and the proclamation reading. He felt somewhere near the middle school would be best. Mr. Croteau noted they had some spots around the South Mill Pond. Mr. Rice will get some Saturday dates.

5. **Requests Concerning 353 Miller Avenue** – request from David Coakley. Mr. Croteau stated they are looking to have this tree removed. He did not post it as he felt they should have a chance to look at it first. A large limb fell off a few years ago. The power company came in and gave it a terrible “flat top”. He felt the most important question was whether the tree was healthy.

Attorney Loughlin asked the Committee members to take a look at this tree.

6. **Tree Planting Request – 1 Denise Street, Maple Haven (Request for 2 trees)** - “Team Adams” took care of this.

7. **Update on Lafayette Road/Market Street Extension Improvements** – Mr. Rice reported there was nothing new. They still need to go through the proposed plantings. They should be getting something new from the State next week for Market Street and will probably see that at next month’s meeting. Mr. Rice said it will be late spring or summertime for Lafayette Road.

8. **Tree Planting Procedures – Burlap/Bare Roots/Fertilizers, Etc.** – Ms. Stevens had provided the ANSI standards. Mr. Dupere indicated that these standards have been adopted. He brought their attention to 64.5.5, which recommends taking the top third of the root ball off and removing it from the hole prior to back filling. It is still controversial with some of the earlier procedures on 64.2.2.1, to accept the tree you have to look at everything within the health of the tree and you have to cut off roots. To do those procedures, they have to see more of the tree than the top third. Mr. Croteau noted

that the City references a different standard and wondered if they should change their RFQ to reflect the ANSI standard. Mr. Dupere felt that most groups are now trying to adopt around ANSI so there is one language. Attorney Loughlin felt, as far as a trade off, going more than 1/3 of the way down to look for girdling roots doesn't outweigh the benefit of leaving the root ball in terms of the superiority that it leaves the tree and the fact that the dirt stays put and the tree will be much more secure. Mr. Dupere felt there were tradeoffs on both ways. Contractors will do whatever is quickest. Attorney Loughlin confirmed they will talk about this next month.

9. **Old Business** – none.

10. **New Business** – none.

11. **Next Meeting – Wednesday, April 9, 2014.**

A motion to adjourn at 9:03 a.m. was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane M. Shouse  
Administrative Assistant  
Planning Department