

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

MINUTES

**7:30 AM – Wednesday, May13, 2015
Portsmouth City Hall**

Members Present: Richard Adams, Vice-Chairman; Leslie Stevens, Peter Rice, Director of Public Works, Todd Croteau, Public Works General Foreman; and Dennis Souto

Members Excused: Peter Loughlin, Chairman and A. J. Dupere;

Vice-Chair Adams, filling in for Chairman Loughlin, called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

1. Minutes of the April 8, 2015 meeting.

Vice-Chair Adams stated that a correction was needed on page 1, Section 3, Status of Bids for the Spring 2015 Tree Planting List, because the planting deadline was June 1 and not July 1. The corrected sentence would read: “He asked how soon the Committee could get the planting done, and Mr. Rice said they had quotes and could meet the June 1 deadline.”

2. Tree Removal Requests:

- 523 Dennett Street – Resident request noting roots in sewer line

Mr. Croteau stated that one of the resident’s trees had its roots in the sewer line. Someone asked whether there was an established policy for that situation, and Ms. Stevens replied that the Committee did not have a policy but typically did not have those trees removed. Vice-Chair Adams noted that the resident had asked in a separate communication to Mr. Croteau that all the arborvitaes be removed as hazard trees, this being a separate matter from the sewer problem. After more discussion, Mr. Croteau concluded that it was really a pipe issue because the pipe allowed the roots to penetrate its joints. Vice-Chair Adams asked if it was a hazard issue, and Mr. Croteau said he didn’t perceive it to be.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. Ms. Stevens recommended that the trees not be removed. However, *Mr. Croteau asked that the issue be **tabled** until the June meeting*, and Ms. Stevens suggested that the Committee also look at the dead tree on the property.

- 31 Willow Avenue, 2 trees – Resident request to give their house more sun

The resident Mr. Chad Luce stated that his two front trees were getting bigger. One intruded on his crab apple tree, and the crab apple tree intruded on the power lines. He was concerned about what would happen as they got bigger. Mr. Rice suggested trimming the lower section of the tree and bringing the canopy up more. He noted that he didn’t see any power lines. Ms. Stevens asked whether the homeowner or the City planted the trees, and Mr. Croteau replied that they were City trees but wasn’t sure if the City had actually planted them. He thought that the crab apple tree was in good

shape and could be pruned. Mr. Rice recommended pruning and shaping the trees and then revisiting the issue if it became a safety concern. Ms. Stevens noted that the Commission typically did not remove healthy trees. Mr. Croteau told Mr. Luce that the City would look at the trees and work with him. Vice-Chair Adams said that he liked to accommodate reasonable requests for tree removals, but he felt that reviewing the crab apple tree and perhaps pruning it was a good start. Ms. Stevens said she felt that it was a good compromise to look at the tree and then prune it. Mr. Rice concluded that if the tree presented a safety issue in the future, the City would address it.

Vice-Chair Adams stated that there was no need for a vote.

- 93 Colonial Drive – Resident request, tree has significant decay in trunk

Mr. Croteau stated that the tree was a linden and had an opening on the street side and was hollow down to the ground. Vice-Chair Adams felt that the tree looked healthy and leafed out, and he asked Mr. Croteau if he thought it had too much rot in the center. Mr. Croteau agreed, saying the City had nursed the tree and was concerned about the rot.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. *Mr. Croteau moved that the tree be removed, and Ms. Stevens seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

Mr. Rice mentioned that he'd like to see the base section of the tree after it was cut down, and it was also noted that the tree would be removed in late August.

- 139 Essex Avenue – Lewis Tree Service, working for Eversource, states it's a hazard tree

It was noted that the address should be 161 Essex Avenue and not 139 Essex Avenue. It was stated that a portion of the tree had significant loss.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. *Ms. Stevens moved that the tree be removed, and Mr. Souto seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

- 105 Melbourne Street – Lewis Tree Service, working for Eversource, states it's a hazard tree

*Mr. Souto moved that the tree be removed, and Vice-Chair Adams seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

- 123 Clinton Street – Resident request, tree roots are buckling the sidewalk

The owner Mr. Alan Brady had photos of the Chinese Elm that he distributed to the Committee. He said that he was concerned because he had two young children and the tree seemed to be leaning more and more. The neighbors refused to walk on the sidewalk because it was so buckled. Vice-Chair Adams thought the City had put a tree to the right of the Chinese elm, and Mr. Brady agreed, saying it was a Japanese lilac. Ms. Stevens asked whether the City could cut a root, and Mr. Croteau said he would be concerned due to the tree's weight. Mr. Rice advised removing the tree because of its size and the direction that the tree was leaning in and also because of the buckling sidewalk, and he didn't feel that its removal would impact the other large trees in the area. He emphasized that he normally

preferred to accommodate a tree whenever possible and didn't want to set a precedent that just because the sidewalk was buckled, the tree needed to be removed. However, he was concerned that the tree would fall over.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved that the tree be removed, and Mr. Rice seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

Vice-Chair Adams asked Mr. Brady whether he would like another tree eventually, and Mr. Brady agreed that he would.

- 50 Willard Avenue – City request for sewer construction

Vice-Chair asked the reason for the tree in Picture #4 being removed and not the other trees. Mr. Croteau said Mr. Dan Rochette would explain it. Mr. Rice also introduced Mr. Terry Desmarais and Mr. Ray Pezzullo, who were also present to discuss the sewer separation project.

Mr. Rochette distributed packets to the Committee. He stated that he had looked at potential root impacts to come up with a list of trees and had found that most of the trees were affected. The tree in Picture #4 looked like it had a bigger root structure and could be significantly impacted. Vice-Chair Adams asked if it was a cherry tree, and Mr. Rochette replied that it was and that there seemed to be room for the sidewalk to be adjusted to deal with the tree's roots. Vice-Chair Adams asked Mr. Rochette if he would consider removing the tree from the removal request, and Mr. Rochette agreed. Ms. Pezzullo explained the sidewalk issue and said he could not guarantee that the tree could be saved but felt that it could. Mr. Rochette stated that the sidewalk could go over the root. Mr. Rice asked how the residents felt, and Ms. Stevens replied that they wanted to keep the tree. Vice-Chair Adams said he thought the tree was worth saving because it was exceptional. Mr. Rice asked whether it was on concrete or asphalt and was told that it was asphalt.

- 55 Willard Avenue – City request for sewer construction

Ms. Stevens stated that Tree #6 was extremely stressed. Mr. Pezzullo added that it would impact the sidewalk and curbing, so he strongly recommended taking it down.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. *Ms. Stevens moved that the tree be removed, and Mr. Souto seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

Ms. Stevens noted that some of the newer dogwood trees that the City planted on Willard Avenue had not survived and suggested that the Committee visit the street to identify locations for new trees, especially if certain trees were removed. The Committee and Mr. Rochette further discussed mature trees that were not removed on surrounding streets like Richards and Lincoln Avenues, and Ms. Stevens suggested that the Committee visit those streets as well.

- 38 Willard Avenue – City request for sewer construction

The Committee concluded that the tree was in significant distress.

Vice-Chair Adams asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved that the tree be removed, and Mr. Rice seconded the motion. The motion was **approved** by unanimous vote.*

3. Request of 3S Art Center for planting of a tree on City Property near their venue

Vice-Chair Adams asked whether anyone had information on the request, and no one did. He advised that the Committee ask the 3S Art Center personnel about the species they wanted to plant because it was the City's property. Mr. Rice said he wasn't aware that there was room to plant in that particular location. Mr. Croteau suggested tabling the request until the June meeting. Mr. Rice showed a photo of the site to Vice-Chair Adams, who asked Mr. Souto if he would discuss the issue with the 3S Art Center personnel. Mr. Souto agreed that he would.

Vice-Chair Adams stated the request would be **tabled** to the June meeting when Mr. Souto would have a report to present to the Committee.

4. Willard Avenue Sewer Separation Contract – Presentation by Assistant City Engineer Ray Pezzullo

The presentation was combined with the Willard Avenue requests.

5. Update of Spring 2015 Spring Planting

Mr. Croteau stated that the spring planting would take place the following week. Vice-Chair Adams asked whether the planting would be monitored, and Mr. Croteau replied that it would. He stated that Corin would try an injection water method to get water to the roots. Mr. Croteau said that he preferred doing 50% of the trees with Treegater bags and 50% with root injection. Ms. Stevens noted that the City had passed out a brochure on how not to kill a tree when the Willard Avenue section was done. Mr. Rice agreed that it was a good idea. Ms. Stevens asked whether Mr. Croteau had a copy of the letter that had gone out, and Mr. Croteau replied that he did not but that he would distribute the brochures.

6. Update on Langdon Park and Work Done by Pruning Subcommittee (Leslie, Dick & Dennis)

Ms. Stevens stated that she, Vice-Chair Adams and Mr. Souto had walked around the area and that Mr. Souto had written down what they discussed. Corin had said that he would remove anything dead that was an inch or bigger. The group had discussed what the Committee needed to look at, like clumps of trees, and had also agreed that the Committee should consider what the City parks should look, i.e. whether they should be more groomed, or whether they should have overgrown mass like a section of Langdon Park. Mr. Souto noted that bunches of growth would attract critters and asked the Committee to consider spacing the growth patches or doing more grooming. The Committee further discussed a section with overgrown forsythia-type shrubs and bittersweet that Vice-Chair Adams thought should be removed because it was unsightly, but Ms. Stevens said that birds would like it. The question was whether to remove the wild growth and groom the area or to leave it wild, and Ms. Stevens thought the Committee should have some guidance regarding the issue. She also noted issues with the cherry trees on Lincoln Avenue that had cankers as well as issues with some Norways, a locust and a sycamore that didn't look good. Vice-Chair Adams remarked that a number of trees that the City planted didn't make

it and thought it would be a good thing for the Committee to look at them. They also discussed pitch pines in the field adjoining the Lister Academy owing to the very sandy soil there. Ms. Stevens agreed that the Committee should look at the areas in question and determine whether the clumpy areas should be groomed or left alone.

7. Miscellaneous Requests:

- A. Resident of 199 Clinton Street would like to repave driveway and would like City To cut roots which have heaved current driveway.

Mr. Croteau stated that the owner wanted to repave her driveway but felt there was no sense in doing so if the two big oaks had root damage, so she was asking the City for help in pruning the roots before the driveway was paved. He felt that it wasn't a big issue if the City helped pull out the roots and that it would not impact the trees because the roots were surface roots.

- B. Resident of 136 Wibird Street would like three trees moved away from the newly-constructed sidewalk.

Mr. Croteau stated that the small trees, which he thought were crab apples, were only a few years old and he felt that they should have been moved when the sidewalk was constructed. Ms. Stevens asked whether the trees were small enough to move, and he agreed. Vice-Chair Adams asked whether the trees really should be moved. Mr. Rice asked how they would be moved without being killed. Mr. Croteau said that the sidewalk would have to be torn up to move the trees. Ms. Stevens suggested that the Committee look at the trees. Vice-Chair Adams agreed and said the request would be **tabled** until after the Committee examined the trees.

- C. Request that ornamental grass around Elm Trees in front of Rockingham on State Street be removed.

Mr. Rice stated that the Rockingham Condominium Association made the request and said that he didn't know the history of the ornamental grass. Mr. Croteau explained that the planting boxes had gone in without trees and then the grass was planted, and when the trees were planted the grass was not removed. He said that the Association wanted to use it as part of the adoptive spot process. Ms. Stevens asked if the Association would adopt the spot, and Mr. Croteau agreed. Mr. Rice said he had no issues with it. Ms. Stevens felt that it would be fine only if the grass was replaced with something nice. Mr. Croteau stated that he would follow up with the Association.

8. Old Business

Mr. Croteau stated that the red cedar on Rockland Street was moved to Haven Park. There was also a tree request on Dennett Street from a resident claiming that the tree obstructed his view and he was fearful of getting into an accident if it was not removed. Mr. Croteau said that the issue should be addressed as soon as possible, and Mr. Souto agreed that it should be done in May.

Vice-Chair Adams told the Committee that he had just returned from Germany and had seen enormous trees in Berlin and Munich that looked like they were planted in concrete, which seemed to counter the

frequently-heard assertion that downtown city streets can generally be expected to have a life span of about seven years. He intended to pursue the matter to find out how it was done so that Portsmouth could do the same thing. Mr. Rice noted that the Vaughn Mall trees were doing great. Someone remarked that watering the trees really helped. Ms. Stevens said a lot of trees recently planted in the City were not doing well and that the second year was important, and she suggested putting a blurb in the newspaper about watering the trees. Mr. Rice said that citizens felt that water was expensive, but if the trees were theirs, he felt that they should take care of them. Mr. Croteau said it was a new process and would take time, and Mr. Rice said the City could contract it out. They further discussed the issue.

9. New Business

Vice-Chair Adams said that Attorney Sullivan told Mr. Rice that the Ordinance the Committee had labored over for a decade was not the one that the City Council passed. He also noted that the number of Committee members was increased by two and said that Mr. Dan Rawling from the Historic District Commission and Ms. Catherine Bachman had asked to be on the Committee.

Ms. Stevens noted that five of the huge maple trees that Liberty Mutual planted along Borthwick Avenue were dead. Mr. Croteau said it was due to the salt that was over-applied to the sidewalks. Vice-Chair Adams said that the perceived wisdom was that smaller trees did better. He remarked that the area of cherry trees near Junkins Avenue would benefit by having some spading done. Ms. Stevens mentioned a dead red maple by the dog park. Mr. Souto asked about a tree on the corner of Deer Street and Maplewood Avenue that wasn't leafing out and asked if it was a City tree or Portwalk's, and Mr. Rice said he thought they were City trees.

Vice-Chair Adams asked Ms. Stevens whether she wanted to inventory the previous year's planting in a few weeks, and she agreed. Mr. Souto asked whether the Committee could start a list of newly-planted trees that didn't survive and give it to Ms. Stevens, and she agreed. Mr. Rice suggested that the trees in the wells on State Street be looked at to see how they were doing after the rough winter.

10 Next Meeting – Wednesday, June 10, 2015

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Recording Secretary