

**Trees and Public Greenery Committee
City of Portsmouth**

MINUTES

**8:00 a.m. – Wednesday, August 12, 2020
Remote Meeting via Zoom Conference Call**

Members Present: Peter J. Loughlin, Chairman; Richard Adams, Vice-Chairman; Peter Rice, Director of Public Works; City Arborist Chuck Baxter; A. J. Dupere, Patricia Bagley, Michael Griffin, Dennis Souto, and Dan Umbro

Members Excused: None.

Also Present: City residents Dave Underhill, Sam Witherspoon, and Donna Acox

Chairman Loughlin called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Vice-Chairman Richard Adams was present later on in the meeting.

1. Acceptance of Minutes of the July 15, 2020 Meeting

*The July 15, 2020 minutes were **approved** as presented by unanimous roll call vote.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **1 Norway spruce, City Hall lower parking lot, behind the fence between 299 South Street and the parking lot - resident request**

Mr. Baxter said the tree was in close proximity to the resident's home. He said it had a slight lean to it but was structurally sound and had no decay in the base.

The resident Donna Acox was present and said she was requesting that the tree be removed because a lot of branches had already been taken down from one side of the tree and it was in danger of falling during a windstorm. She said her property was also endangered by a large silver maple owned by her neighbor and that the spruce would be knocked down by the maple if it fell. Mr. Griffin asked if the spruce could be pruned, and Mr. Baxter said it wouldn't do much good because it didn't have a large canopy. Mr. Rice asked why the tree to the right of the spruce was removed, and Mr. Baxter said it had died due to significant decay at its base. He said he didn't see any signs of stress or dieback on the spruce except for some backfill that would be taken care of.

Chairman Loughlin said the committee was reluctant to remove any healthy trees and thought the tree wasn't a critical one for shade and should remain. Ms. Acox said she was more worried about the height and the domino effect that would happen if her neighbor's tree fell. She suggested replacing the spruce.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the tree, with a stipulation that it be replaced with a tree that was appropriate for the location. Mr. Umbro seconded it for discussion.*

Mr. Rice said he had to balance the potential risk associated with a tree's failure and the value that it provided to the area. He said the tree's canopy wasn't as broad as some of the other nearby trees but was concerned that it could cause significant damage if it fell.

Vice-Chairman Adams joined the meeting at this point and abstained from the vote.

*The motion **failed** by a vote of 5-2, with only Chairman Loughlin and Mr. Rice voting in favor of removing the tree.*

- **One sugar maple, City Hall lower parking lot - DPW request**

Mr. Baxter said the tree was in decline due to defoliation. Mr. Rice asked if there were issues with the soil in that location. Mr. Baxter said he would have to do a soil test but noted that a white ash in that area was removed a few years before due to decline.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the tree, and Mr. Griffin seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote.*

- **Two sycamore maples on Mechanic Street across from Point of Graves Cemetery - resident request**

Mr. Baxter said the two trees had gotten anthracnose in the past several years, which led to the foliage falling from the tree in the spring and eventually caused the tree to lose a lot of time to photosynthesize. He said the maple in the back was completely dead and the one in the front on Mechanic Street was almost dead. He noted that there was an area to replant some large shade trees in the future.

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

Mr. Rice pointed out that the area was part of Prescott Park and the current Master Planning effort and suggested that future planting be postponed until direction was received from the Master Plan committee.

- **One Norway maple, 112 Lincoln Avenue on the Elwyn Avenue side of the house - resident request**

Mr. Baxter said he noticed a substantial leader on the tree and that there wouldn't be much of the tree left if it was pruned. He recommended removing the tree and replacing it in the future. Chairman Loughlin said a box elder was removed from the South Street end of Elwyn Avenue several years before and now the area was devoid of trees, which

showed the importance of replacing trees. He suggested that Mr. Baxter consider planting more trees at that end of Elwyn Avenue as well.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the tree, and Ms. Bagley seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.*

Mr. Griffin noted that a developer who built a house on Elwyn Avenue donated \$2,000 toward planting trees and that the area could have some wonderful trees. Mr. Rice said it would be appropriate to invest that money in improving the Elwyn Avenue streetscape.

- **Two Norway maples, 115 Pinehurst Road – DPW request**

Mr. Baxter said the two maples were in severe decline and recommended removing them and replanting. He noted that the nearby five Japanese snowbells had died because that species didn't take to the soil well. He said replacement trees could not be added until the following year because there was no more space available on the 2020 Tree Planting List.

The resident of 115 Pinehurst Road Dave Underhill was present and said one of the maples was in front of his home and the other maple was on the lot line between his house and his neighbor San Witherspoon's home at 125 Pinehurst Road. He said he had no objection to removing the one on the lot line because it had failed more severely, but he wasn't sure about removing the other maple. He said he was also concerned how long the gaping holes had to remain on his property and how long he would have to wait for replacement trees. Sam Witherspoon was also present and said he had a tree that was replanted a year and a half before that was dead to begin with and there had been no maintenance of the hole that was dug, so he had an open spot in the middle of his front yard. He asked why there was such a delay in replacing trees and why the new tree that was planted before was dead on arrival. Mr. Baxter apologized for the hole in the yard and said it was a miscommunication with his crew. He said the tree was not dead upon arrival but could have defoliated at first. He said the pandemic postponed current plantings and maintenance on the trees, and if they replaced the corner maple on the lot line, they might not be able to maintain it. Mr. Baxter said the corner tree replacement would have to wait unless an exception could be made. Mr. Rice said the budget was cut substantially so his department didn't have as many resources and staffing to replant and maintain trees, but he thought the tree replacement request could be added to the list and that he would try to accelerate it.

Mr. Underhill suggested replacing the two trees with one tree and placing it between the existing two trees after they were removed. Mr. Souto noted that five trees were planted a bit too deeply on that side of the street and was afraid they would continue to decline over time. Mr. Baxter said it might make sense to have multiple plantings on that street in the future. Chairman Loughlin said it was disappointing that the spring planting couldn't be done but that it might have been a good thing because of the drought.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the two trees, and Mr. Griffin seconded. The motion passed by unanimous vote.*

- **One red maple, 105 Melbourne Street, resident request**

Mr. Baxter said the back side of the tree had a lot of decay, and if its huge limb failed, it would probably go into the road. Chairman Loughlin said that corner of the street would be very bare without a tree. Mr. Baxter said they could do a heavy amount of end weight reduction on the leader but wasn't sure if it would help. Mr. Rice suggested getting a replanted tree away from the overhead lines if the current tree was removed. Mr. Griffin said pruning could save the tree, although it wouldn't get it away from the utility lines. Mr. Souto said he thought the tree should be removed because of the amount of decay. Mr. Baxter said it was a matter of time before the limb failed and fell down but that he could do a formal tree risk assessment. Ms. Bagley said it was a safety hazard and not worth risking and thought the tree should be removed.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the tree, and Mr. Souto seconded. The motion **passed** by a vote of 7-1, with Mr. Griffin voting in opposition.*

3. Old Business

There was no old business.

4. New Business

Two silver maples on Lincoln Street

Vice-Chair Adams said there were two giant silver maples across his house on Lincoln Avenue that were impacted by a house was being rebuilt at that site and by the City's mandate of replacing the water line that ran from the street to the house with copper. He said an excavator dug a large trench and cut two very large roots from each tree with a chainsaw, ensuring the death of those trees within a few years. He asked if the City could be involved in assessing as a matter of policy other ways of dealing with that type of issue. Mr. Rice said he and Mr. Baxter would meet with the Water Division to make them aware of that type of situation and come up with an alternative approach. Mr. Souto asked if it could be added to the Tree Protection Guidelines. Mr. Baxter said the Tree Protection Plan already addressed it and that he was working with the Planning Director to find other ways to incorporate it. He said it should be listed in more places other than the City website and that the policy would be available to contractors soon. He also said an option was to dig a trench with an air spade that would not damage any roots.

Removal of Trees on Portsmouth Housing Authority (PSA) Lot

Mr. Griffin said that several trees on the PSA property that was part of the Feaster Building lot would be cut down for a new building. Mr. Rice said the City didn't have jurisdiction over it and that the Fire Department needed the access.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 9, 2020

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Committee Recording Secretary