

**Minutes of the
City of Portsmouth's
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
April 8, 2026**

Present: Chair Patricia Bagley; Vice-Chair Michael Griffin; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley-Adams (via Zoom); City Tree Supervisor/Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Dennis Souto, A. J. Dupere, Scott McDermott and Ian Hanley

Members Excused: Deborah Chag

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

1. Acceptance of the March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes

The March 11, 2026 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

2. Landscape Plan Review

Portsmouth Middle School Food Forest: Meghan Rice is requesting that the Committee review and approve tree and shrub planting. This installation will allow for outdoor education opportunities and environmental learning.

Meghan Rice explained that she was part of an agroforestry cohort of teachers in New England and they were trying to help establish small pocket forests similar to the Middle School one but also on a bigger level. She said her participation made her think of her school's garden in the back corner behind the library. She said it was mostly unattended all summer and she thought it could be cleaned out and that a selection of the following trees could be planted: 2 maple trees, 2 fruit trees, 5 highbush blueberry shrubs, 5 edible shrubs such as elderberry, groundcover, and a pollinator mix. She said they would plant them and maintain them for 2-3 years and then keep it as a natural habitat for the children. She said it would also be a shared space and a place for children and the community to relax. She said she secured a \$15,000 grant from the Clipper Foundation. Mr. Wiater said there was an attempt to do an outdoor classroom on the site but it fell through, so the City was creating a permaculture installation and removing a lot of the barriers to keep the site. He said the maintenance would be minor once the site was established. Ms. Rice described the irrigation system that they would have in the summer. Mr. Wiater said DPW would also do summer watering and compost tea application.

There was no motion for formal acceptance, but Mr. Rice said a vote should be taken to encourage the project to be endorsed.

Mr. Rice moved that the Committee endorse the exercise, understanding that it is an evolving thing and will be a good learning experience for everyone. Mr. Souto seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Note: At this point in the meeting, the Committee addressed Item 4, New Business.

3. Tree Removal Requests

- **10 Decatur Rd:** 1 Norway maple, poor condition, tree removal requested and recommended by the City. The central leaders of the tree are declining or dead, and there is decayed wood in the trunk at a leader union. The remainder of the tree is sparse and not vigorous.

Mr. Wiater said the Norway maple was in poor condition and he was surprised that it was not flagged for removal when the neighborhood was being redone.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the tree. Mr. Hanley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **678 Middle St:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, tree removal requested and recommended by the City. The central leader of this tree has been irrecoverably reduced for utility line clearance. Pruning is possible, but due to the tree's location it will require regular, improper pruning. Replacing this tree with a more appropriate selection can occur in 2027.

Mr. Wiater said the Norway maple was under the power lines and that it could be pruned but that it would be pruned down to half its height. He suggested removing it and planting a more appropriate tree in 2027. He noted that if an ornamental tree could be planted in that location this year, the stump would be ground then.

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

- **726 Middle St:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, tree removal requested and recommended by the City. The central leader of this tree has been irrecoverably reduced for utility line clearance. Future pruning and clearance for the road and crosswalk signage will result in a heavily pruned tree. Replacing this tree with a more appropriate selection can occur in 2027.

Mr. Wiater said the tree was heavily pruned. He said a crosswalk was installed near there, so he thought the tree would be pruned very often in the future. He said it made sense to remove it and replace it with a more appropriate tree.

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

- **95 Mechanic St:** 1 Norway spruce, poor condition, removal requested by Portsmouth resident, removal recommended by the City. This tree has been declining for several years, likely caused by environmental stressors.

Mr. Wiater said it was a site environmental stressor issue. Mr. Rice said the tree would likely be removed in the next few years because the Mechanic Street Pump Station would

be relocated in that lot. He said the tree was directly in the way and that the existing house and pump station would also be removed. He said it was all part of a larger vision and that it would come before the Committee in the future.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to recommended removal of the tree but wants a section of it to study why the tree has failed. Mr. Souto seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

• **1003 Woodbury Ave:** 1 apple tree, fair condition, removal requested by Portsmouth resident, removal not recommended by the City. The risk associated with this tree is primarily in the dead leader and branches throughout the canopy. It is estimated that the total amount of dead represents 2/5 of the canopy. There are no significant observable defects that would suggest whole tree failure at this time. All deadwood will be removed, and the tree will be structurally pruned.

Mr. Wiater said the apple tree was in the intersection that was recently reworked and that it was saved through that process, but the tree had some decline due to the project. He suggested pruning the deadwood out to see if the tree would improve. He said the riskiest elements of the tree were associated with the deadwood over the green space and walking space and that it would be pruned back. He said the living branches that were dangling would be pulled back. He said if the pruning did not help, then he would probably suggest removing the tree.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend that the tree be pruned. Mr. Dupere seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

4. New Business

Library northwest corner: This site used to be where a large willow and spruce stood, but a storm resulted in the removal both, and resident Allen Nelson feels this site is not providing an adequate buffer between the library and residents. Mr. Nelson hopes the City will consider replacing the buffer with trees to more appropriately buffer the two properties. This site has most recently been used as a wildflower and shrub.

Mr. Wiater said a resident asked about the status of that site and that they met with the library to come up with a planting schedule. He said they could plant a bare root tree and 4-5 arborvitae. He said there were already some arborvitae and a Norway maple tree on the non-City side of the fence to create a buffer. He said it was a meadow that the City maintained annually that included wildflowers and shrubs. He said the resident wanted the City to do more in terms of the buffer between her home and the library site. He said the proposed bare root tree would be set back farther away from the fence and that arborvitae would be planted on the City's side of the fence to create a more contiguous row of arborvitae.

Karen Bouffard and Allen Nelson of 87 Richards Avenue were present. Ms. Bouffard said a storm in 2019 resulted in the removal of both the willow tree and the evergreen coverage and that she and her husband had been waiting since then for the City to create

a buffer. She said a bare root tree would take years to grow. Ms. Wiater said the City planted two bare root trees in this site but they did not get established. He recommended planting arborvitae on the City's side of the fence. He said a tree would be planted more central to the lot and not so close to the buildings, and that it would not be planted next to the Norway maple. The location of property line and the wildflower garden were discussed. Mr. Nelson said part of the package sold to the residents when the library was built was to have a buffer on the boundary line. He said the buffer had been cut back through the years. The number of proposed trees and the wildflower garden were further discussed. Mr. Wiater said the wildflower garden would probably shrink because it would be problematic for establishing new tree plantings. Mr. Rice said it was the City's responsibility for maintaining the property. He said things changed and that the City could not go to the neighbors every time they had to make changes.

Library Director Christine Freese was present and said she and Mr. Nelson spoke with DPW. She said the meadow, pollinator garden, and raised beds were mostly for educational purposes but her team also worked on sustainability projects. She said the library would be happy if the meadow could be extended and could be maintained but that the library was fine with the proposed plan. Mr. Rice said there were challenges with the homeless using that area, so the City trimmed it back aggressively. He said there was a balance and that the City understood the desire to maintain the buffer. Ms. Bouffard said she would not like to see the wildflower garden shrunk. Mr. Rice said the priority was re-establishing the buffer and that the City could scatter as many wildflower seeds as possible. Mr. Nelson and Ms. Bouffard said that was fine. Mr. Wiater said the City would make any necessary adjustments to the flower bed. He said the arborvitae would be planted mid-May. Species of arborvitae were discussed. Mr. Dupere said the Norway maple impacted other growth around it, and he suggested building a raised bed or an artificial mound of a raised bed to make the trees look taller.

Arbor Day

Chair Bagley asked if there would be any notice of Arbor Day in the City newsletter. Mr. Wiater said Ms. Seacord had written a press release that was distributed through the City channels, so it would soon be available for public distribution.

Canadian Geese

Mr. Souto said Canadian geese were a problem in some of Portsmouth's green spaces and he suggested using vegetation management on some of the sites. He noted that the green area near the gundalow in Prescott Park was a popular place for the geese because they liked access to water so that they had an escape from predators. He said placing vegetation between the water and the green areas might help get the geese away from there. Mr. Dupere said there were often traffic jams in the Portsmouth traffic circle near I-95 because of the geese. Mr. Rice said it had been an ongoing challenge for 5-10 years and that the City put fences up, used dogs, shot Roman candles at the geese, and so on. He said the City was looking at euthanizing the geese by coating their eggs in oil. He said there wasn't a simple solution and that planting vegetation would not resolve the issue.

He said the geese were local and not migratory. He said the City considered robotic chasing systems but they were expensive. He said currently the City was contracting with a professional who would incorporate a combination of dogs and nesting control. It was further discussed. Mr. Rice said the City would do what was legally acceptable.

Sustainability Fair

Mr. Wiater said the fair was on Friday. He said the original intent was to distribute wetland shrubs and trees but they were not ready, so they would be given away Saturday at the recycling center instead. He said the trees for planting were also delayed until next Monday, so the planting season would begin Tuesday.

Earth Day

Mr. Dupere said they would be celebrating Earth Day for the first time at their facility on April 22 and that it would be a way for people to volunteer on the property. Vice-Chair Griffin asked if the site improvement for the proposed new Portsmouth Housing Authority would impact the property. Mr. Dupere said it would impact it long term but that they had not finalized access to the property, fencing, and so on.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next meeting: Wednesday, May 13, 2026

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault

Trees and Greenery Committee Meeting Minutes Taker