

DRAFT

**TOWN OF EXETER
TREE COMMITTEE**
August 27, 2020
Virtual Meeting Minutes

Board Members Present by Roll Call: Eileen Flockhart (chair), Sally Ward, Deborah Twombly, Greg Jordan (Rockingham County Forester with UNH), Kevin Breen (arborist), Gwen English

Staff Present: Kristen Murphy (Natural Resource Planner), Greg Bisson (Parks and Recreation), Bob Glowacky (Exeter TV)

Call to Order: Chair Flockhart called the meeting to order at 8:30AM and read out loud the meeting preamble which indicated that an emergency exists and the provisions of RSA 91-A:2 III(b) are being invoked. As federal, state and local officials have determined that gatherings of ten or more people pose a substantial risk to the community and the meeting imperative to the continued operation of Town and government and services which are vital to public, health, safety and confidence. This meeting will be conducted without a quorum physically present in the same location and welcome members of the public accessing the meeting remotely.

OLD BUSINESS:

Minutes from July 30, 2020 were approved as amended with two minor changes.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Updates and follow-up from previous meeting:

- a. Discussed the original Tree Committee facebook page which was set up by Jen Martel and needs to be taken down (to comply with Town policy). The Town's Conservation Commission facebook page is monitored by Kristen Murphy, and it includes Exeter's Tree Committee page.
- b. Eileen Flockhart updated the Committee on Park Street Common activities, including the removal of the Unitil trees which have died, the planting of memorial trees for neighbors in the area who had recently died, and a fundraising campaign. They are close to the \$200 to \$250 needed to do trees and engraved stones. The stones have been selected and will be dropped off to be engraved. Jay Perkins is checking with dig safe to get approval for the locations. Jay and Greg have looked at tree planting sites. Families have picked out, and tagged, the trees at Stratham Circle Nursery, and Parks and Rec has donated three diapers for these trees. Planting will hopefully be the last few days of September. Eileen will contact the newspaper, and perhaps another video can be made. Proper Covid-19 procedures will need to be in place for any public activities.

2. Discussion on creating a Tree Ordinance

- a. Eileen would like to limit our tree ordinance to street and park trees.

- b. Consider two separate documents: An ordinance with a vision for what the tree effort will be, and another with standards and specifications....with some flexibility
- c. Kristen Murphy confirming that this is a Town ordinance, not a Zoning ordinance. Reminds committee that we do have staff to make some judgment calls. Some decisions may need to be made by the full committee. Goals should be clearly defined and staff needs to understand the expectations and goals and be able to work within that without bringing every decision back to the full committee.
- d. Community involvement and 'buy-in' is important to make this successful. (Also the involvement of Town staff, including Selectboard etc.) We also need to be sure we/the Town have the finances to support aspects of the ordinance. (Such as buying tree diapers, or treating diseased trees.) We should work on goals first. Goals *could* include tree planting and maintenance, beautification of the Town, cooling and purification, noise abatement, property value enhancement, wildlife habitat, public health and safety benefits.
- e. Sally feels that the planting and maintenance of trees should be goals we want to specify in the tree ordinance. Another good place start should be the updating of our tree inventory, particularly trees on public land and in parks. Maybe one goal would be to annually have an intern work on a tree inventory.
The issue of education may not belong in the ordinance, but we should have a document to help inform property owners about the importance/value of trees.
- f. Jay says that right now the Town is in a reactionary mode due to all the wind storms we've had. Property owners get anxious and want trees cut down.
This is a time to engage in conversation with landowners, and try to save the trees by pruning them etc. If trees come down, it's important to try to replace them as fast as possible....again, by engaging the owner. It also involves time and funding.
- g. Eileen would be interested to know how many trees we normally lose in a year, through storm damage or other issues so we have a sense of scope. Knowing this would help us maintain and improve the tree canopy.
- h. Discussion followed about the Lincoln Street trees and concerns about losing a good portion of those that were planted last year. What can we learn from that, and prevent it from happening with future projects. Jay would like to be more proactive in that process and not rely so much on consultants. That could be a correctable action, just requiring that initially in the contract. Having community outreach would also be helpful, for example, getting residents to water the trees.
- i. Eileen suggests that we need to have guidelines when it comes to planting street trees. Those would be spelled out in a contract.
- j. Kristen reminds the committee that Exeter was approved as a Tree City based on what we have currently in our regulations, so we really don't need to rush to get something new in place. It is worth taking time to get it right. Good to hear some of the needs that Jay has, and it would be good to hear Greg's as well to see how this board can support staff.

- k. Greg Jordan will look into the availability of an intern to do a tree survey next summer. Perhaps a little job description would be helpful. Eileen indicates we could draft something similar to the one that was done in 2017. (Jay believes that was a 7 week effort) Jay indicates that because of Covid there is a hiring freeze and he doesn't believe there are any funds available for next year to do anything. Greg Jordan will look into some grant funds for interns, and see if that is one of the projects that the intern works on, even if it is a partial inventory, or not a seven week commitment.
- l. Jay thinks that the most important thing is not so much the intern that we need, what he could use is **support**. He could use support when looking at and signing off on these projects. If he could get somebody like Greg or AJ to help when these projects are being done, and even on the planning side, to get Kristen or somebody to sign off on them. It is time consuming to make sure nothing was missed in the plans. Greg Jordan responded that he and AJ would be happy to offer opinions, technical assistance and advice, and that the ultimate decision falls on Jay, the selectmen or DPW etc.
- m. Eileen asks who approves the contractors for projects that involve street trees, and Jay indicates that the Town engineering staff approve the general contractor. The consultant does the background check. They approve the general contractor/low bidder and they're supposed to add the time – supply a list of subs. They approve the contract that's written by the consultants. The consultants do have landscape architects, either on staff or subs.
- n. Kevin Breen indicates that he would be happy to help Jay with some of this, as it is what he does every day - he manages landscape construction crews and has done so for the last 10 years.
- o. Kristen suggested that perhaps Kevin and Jay work together and draft some standards, so this ordinance could then tier to some standards. Once there are standardized details that work well, it just becomes a part of the contract in the early process, or part of the site plans. She goes on to tell Jay that if it is something that involves Planning, she would encourage Jay to include Dave Sharples and her and they can help make sure that it makes the plans....at least those that are going through the Planning department. Jay responds that we have standard specifications for construction, but it doesn't include anything for tree planting.
- p. Kevin says that specifications call for proper planting techniques and they are usually spelled out on the documents, but a majority of the time they're not followed. So there is a lot of information that can hold contractors liable.
- q. Eileen suggests that an example of what could be in standards and specifications is in a document that could be made available to the general public (i.e. on a website), so it's there and not just the contractors know what's expected when a tree is being planted, trimmed, or taken down! It's a better system of communication and education. She stated that AJ had mentioned the Portsmouth Tree Committee meetings, and they may be able to give us a little more guidance as we go forward.

HOMEWORK:

Before the next meeting, we could individually come up with some sort of a vision statement for a goal. If we could start with a vision of what we hope this ordinance can do, we can work our way from there. We can communicate some of our drafts via email to Eileen Flockhart. Perhaps a few sentences or a paragraph sent to Eileen by September 11th.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30AM

Next meeting: Wednesday September 23rd at 8:30AM

Respectfully prepared and submitted by Gwen English 8/29/2020