

Town of Exeter  
EXETER TREE COMMITTEE  
DRAFT MINUTES (9/12/2023)

**I. PRELIMINARIES:**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Eileen Flockhart (Chairwoman), Kevin Breen, Steve Jones, Sally Ward, Gwen English (Clerk)

STAFF PRESENT: Greg Bisson, Kristen Murphy, Jay Perkins, Kirk Scamman

**II. CALL TO ORDER:**

Meeting was called to order at 8:35 by Chair Flockhart

**III. OLD BUSINESS:**

Minutes from July 11, 2023, were approved as written. Motion to approve by Steve Jones, seconded by Sally Ward. All voted in favor.

**IV. NEW BUSINESS: Planting of the Liberty Elms**

Steve Jones informed the committee that the future of the Liberty Tree Society in Keene is uncertain, and it would be wise for us to pick up our Liberty elms sooner rather than later. The trees that have been chosen for us are in pots, most are roughly 6' tall and measure 1" caliper.

Kevin Breen has volunteered to drive to Keene to get them and suggested that a picture be taken of these 13 trees so he knows that they are indeed in the 6' range of height and can easily be loaded and tarped in his vehicle/trailer.

Dave Short can store them at the Stratham Circle Nursery until planting time if necessary.

Kirk reminded the group that Dig Safe will have to come and check all thirteen places where trees will be planted, and that it can take several days for this to happen.

We need to go out to the sites beforehand, put a stake in the ground where each tree is to be located, and spray paint a circle around the stake indicating the digging area.

Planting locations were discussed, and the following suggestions were made:

1. Brickyard Park (possibly four trees)
2. Park Street Common (possibly two trees)
3. Exeter Public Library (possibly two trees)
4. Swasey Park (possibly two trees)
5. 4 Hampton Road, at the entrance to the Rec Park (possibly 2-3 trees)

Sally suggested that trees be planted in the zone where more are needed. (Based on the Tree Equity Score map from the American Forest Organization) Kevin advised us to be cautious about where we plant these trees, as they are small and will be delicate. Sally offered that they should be wrapped to keep them safe from mowers, trimmers, and rodents who like to eat the bark of the tree trunks.

Greg and Kirk will look at the locations for the Library, Park Street Common, Hampton Road, Brickyard Park, and Swasey Parkway. Kirk will make the call to Dig Safe. Kristen will meet with Dave Short to discuss the possibility of putting an elm there (at Swasey Parkway).

The time frame for picking up the trees and getting them planted was discussed, and Kirk indicated that the next two weeks are very busy due to DPW work on Epping Road, so perhaps the tree work can be done on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> of this month. IF the trees can be planted soon after they get to Exeter, they can be safely delivered to and stored at DPW.

Steve interjected that although 13 elm trees will be planted, we can't forget that diversity is important!

#### **V. NEW BUSINESS: Status of the Tree Committee**

A discussion ensued about the pros and cons of being a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission, vs. being a stand-alone committee. If we became an independent committee, we could do things on our own without going through the Conservation Commission. We could ask to have more visibility on Exeter's website. But the cons outweighed the advantages. There would be additional formalities that we don't have to deal with now. Members would have to be appointed by the Selectboard. We'd be operating with much higher standards. There would be new responsibilities such as going through the budgeting process. Struggling to get new line items is complicated, and we want to be in a position of advocacy, not in a position of having to be defensive.

Currently we can have most everything happen that we want/need. We have a great relationship with Parks and Recreation and DPW, and continuing those relationships is a benefit to us all. We need to continue to work together! Jay has been going through the budgeting process for years and knows the threshold. They (DPW) can use information from us to state their case for dollar amounts in their budget. He adds that having volunteers (such as those of us on the Tree Committee) appealing our case adds strength to arguments.

Kristen noted that in the future we could model the city of Dover's program, such as the mapping program used to identify trees that have been planted or cut, and the health of those trees etc.

Steve asked about the cost of tree planting and questioned whether \$600 is high or low. Kevin Breen says that the \$600.00 figure is actually low in his estimation. \$600 covers materials such as mulch, tree diapers, and labor and equipment costs go to the DPW or Parks and Recreation budget. Kirk thinks that, for example, \$400.00 goes to the tree purchase, \$400 to putting the tree into the ground.

Jay says that we do have a FEMA line item to help with costs of disasters, so that those costs don't wipe out the DPW budget when they happen. Kirk mentioned the 60' bucket truck height limit, and indicated that anything needing to be done that is over 60' needs to be hired out.

Kristen was asked if the Tree Committee has a budget within the Conservation Commission budget for things like tree diapers, tags etc., and she replied, "not really". Unlike other committees, the Conservation Commission must vote before any checks are written. Greg has landscape supplies in his budget.

After these discussions, Eileen has the sense that we don't need to go the route of a stand-alone committee.

Steve says that we can and should address the visibility issue, and whatever we can do to increase our visibility would be great. We need to communicate to the Town all that we are doing.

Gwen asked what we can do as a group to assist the DPW, Parks and Recreation and the Conservation Commission during the budget approval process. Can we be helpful at budget meetings? Selectboard meetings? Kristen suggested that the committee write a letter to support/endorse the Department of Public Work's expanded budget that would include additional tree planting and inventory money. A letter stating this can go straight to Niko Papakonstantis.

Kristen suggested that the committee members vote on writing a memo. She can draft a memo for us and we can present it together at the next Selectboard meeting. Steve Jones made the motion reflecting this, Sally Ward seconded. All voted in favor of this motion and the motion carried.

It is felt that there seems to be strong support for our efforts. This is a great investment for our community to make!

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS: Final thoughts**

Eileen reminded the committee that she will be working on the Tree City/Arbor Day application which is due in December. We will include Steve's generous donation, events that we have held during the year, and volunteer hours.

Sally suggested that we consider drafting a Master Plan that would outline what we'd like to accomplish in the future.

Kristen will put together a Google Doc for us where we can post our ideas for possible tree planting sites. This might be helpful if any of our current choices have to be eliminated for unforeseen reasons.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:40AM

**NEXT MEETING: October 10<sup>th</sup> 8:30AM in the Wheelwright Room**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Gwen English on 9/12/2023