

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
May 1, 2023 – 4:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

Members Present: Carl Benson, Chair
Sheila Shannon
Scot Savitch
Wolcott Davis

Also Present: Furio Casale, Code Enforcement Officer
Ron Vukelich
Norman Lehr

Mr. Benson convened the meeting at 4:00 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

Review and motion on the April 3, 2023, Minutes was postponed to the June meeting.

Public Comment

Sue Campbell – 47 West 4th Street

Ms. Campbell stated she is interested in having a tree planted by her house. Mr. Benson stated that with Ms. Campbell's permission the Tree Advisory Commission would initiate a Tree Work Permit and add it to the June Agenda.

ACTION: Initiate a Tree work Permit for new tree planting at 47 West 4th Street and add it to the June TAC Agenda.

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

Mr. Gross congratulated the Commission members for the work being done in the City, opining that the fruits of their labor will be appreciated by the residents. Mr. Benson thanked Mr. Gross for his acknowledgement.

Old Business

Application 2023-08 – Mary Cannon – 704 Tremont Street

An application was submitted by Ms. Cannon to trim a large tree overhanging her property. Mr. Benson noted that the TAC discussed this application at the April meeting and described the location of the subject tree. He noted that the tree is not on City property and opined that Ms. Cannon will have to work with the Railroad on this matter.

STATUS: No action. Application to be closed.

New Business

Application 2023-09 – Joanna Smith, 124 East 4th Street

An application was submitted to remove and replace a dead tree. Ms. Smith noted that she resides at 126 East 4th Street and submitted a photo for TAC review and explained the status of the tree. In response to a question from Mr. Vukelich Ms. Smith noted that tree work had been done at 128 East 4th Street. Mr. Casale stated that he will have the tree inspected. Ms. Smith noted that wires are going through the branches of the tree at 124 East 4th Street. During discussion Ms. Smith requested that a smaller flowering tree be replanted. Mr. Benson noted that if it is determined the tree is to be removed it would be easier if the City could do the work. Ms. Smith will be notified of the decision of the Commission.

ACTION: The tree will be inspected by the City and Ms. Smith will be notified of the decision of the Commission.

Honey Locust – Mr. Benson noted that an application regarding a Honey Locust was reviewed by the TAC in April; however, it was not added to the May Agenda. He stated that the TAC needs to review that application at the June meeting. Mr. Benson noted that the reason for removing the tree is that it is uplifting the bricks, and the plan was to replace it with a more suitable tree to be consistent with the vision for the Gateway Project.

ACTION: Add this application to the June Agenda.

Member Comments/Discussion:

DFS Grant – Mr. Benson stated that the grant application was approved.

Arbor Day – The 150th Anniversary of Arbor Day was celebrated on April 28th by the Courthouse. In addition to TAC members, the Mayor, City Council President Platt, and City Administrator Barthel were in attendance. Mr. Benson noted that the Gateway Project is almost complete and that was also celebrated. Mr. Benson explained the Gateway Project for the benefit of Commission members and the public. Mr. Vukelich noted that from Ferry Cut-Off to the Battery 80 new trees have been planted.

Tree Watering Plan – Mr. Benson met with Mr. Delgado from the City and the watering plan has been finalized; noting that the City has a good watering plan. Mr. Benson added that volunteer is willing to water 25 of the trees to relieve some pressure from the City.

Tree City Inventory – This project has not yet begun and Mr. Benson noted that he would be pushing forward on that. Mr. Vukelich noted that he has charted out where the 170 new trees that were planted in the last seven years are. He suggested that the TAC use this data as a starting point. Mr. Lehr suggested getting a University of Delaware student to work on this project. Mr. Benson noted that he met with the City Administrator and discussed the possibility of hiring summer help; however, nothing firm has been decided. Mr. Lehr noted that a student from the University of Delaware would be a volunteer and would get credit for the work. Mr. Benson will contact Sue Barton at the University of Delaware.

ACTION: Mr. Benson will contact Sue Barton at the University of Delaware.

Miscellaneous

In response to a question from Mr. Vukelich, Ms. Shannon stated that she does not have the volunteer hours necessary for the DSF Grant. She added that hours will be collected once the grant has been approved. Mr. Vukelich noted that the grant has been approved, the trees have been put in, and Gateway submitted a bill. Mr. Vukelich noted that he has the names of the volunteers and their hours and asked how he should provide that information. Ms. Shannon stated that she was unsure if she would be working on that project again this year. Mr. Vukelich opined that volunteer hours exceed the required 5,000 hours.

Budget Items – Mr. Benson noted that Mr. Vukelich sent out an email with suggestions for next year and he asked that the Commissioners review his email and also think about other projects for next year that can be added to the upcoming City budget. Ms. Shannon thought that the budget deadline is May 5th and noted that there is a specific form that should be obtained from the City.

Tree Planting Plan – Mr. Lehr noted that Delaware Street is largely planted and asked what the TAC has in mind for the future. Mr. Benson noted that the TAC will be drafting a new 5-year Plan, but opined that the informal plan is to plant trees throughout the City. Mr. Lehr opined that it would be easier if the Commission concentrated on a major street to alleviate the pressure on the City's watering plan. Mr. Benson concurred that watering is a major operation, but noted that there are trees in the City that will be aging out of the watering program next year.

Mr. Vukelich expressed his concern that the TAC has completed the Gateway Plan and does not currently have a cogent plan in place; opining that presenting the City with a formal plan is important when asking the for funding. Mr. Benson will discuss a plan with Mr. Vukelich. Ms. Shannon suggested working on another thoroughfare in the City, and Mr. Lehr suggested concentrating on one whole block that has no trees. Mr. Benson noted that the west side of the City is in dire need of trees.

Mr. Savitch opined that this would be a perfect time to consider getting a small vehicle/truck to help with watering.

Mr. Gross noted that City Council did not seem to know about the Beautification Committee. Ms. Shannon stated that the Beautification Committee was a volunteer program. Mr. Gross noted that the Kalmar Nyckel will be docking in New Castle and asked the Commission to consider planting in the planters at the wharf. Mr. Casale stated that the City Administrator took the initiative to have flowers planted in the concrete containers that Mr. Gross referenced. Mr. Vukelich stated that he will not be managing the concrete containers in the middle of town from the Courthouse to the Opera House any longer; noting that many of the containers are quite old and have cracks and leaks.

Complaints – Mr. Vukelich noted that Council President Platt spoke to him about complaints and suggested that Mr. Platt be invited to a future meeting to talk about the complaints the City has

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received and to discuss if the TAC can do anything to improve the situation. Mr. Savitch noted that an issue is that residents do not realize the breadth of the work the TAC is doing throughout the City, and opined that articles should be published in The Weekly and other publications to inform the public of the work being done by TAC. Ms. Campbell noted that having the Agenda published in The Weekly is very helpful. Mr. Gross added that the TAC is one of the most accessible and responsive Committees in the City. Mr. Gross suggested that a representative from TAC make a presentation at an upcoming City Council meeting. Mr. Benson noted that Matt Alexander attended the Arbor Day celebration and will be publishing an article of all the interesting things going on in New Castle. Mr. Benson also forwarded information from Arbor Day to The Weekly. Mr. Benson added that the TAC has discussed how best to promote the Commission. Mr. Vukelich noted that 170 trees have been planted in the last few years.

ACTION: Mr. Benson will follow-up with Council President Platt.

Mr. Casale noted that he spoke to Ms. Smith on Booker Circle about a tree on her property that needs to come down. During discussion Mr. Casale noted that he offered to provide the names of some arborists that might be able to help her.

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Benson called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion was unanimously carried and the meeting ended at 4:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer