

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
March 4, 2024 – 5:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

Members Present: Carl Benson, Chair
Art Walker
Wolcott Davis
Alice Riehl

Absent: Scot Savitch

Also Present: Furio Casale
Norman Lehr
Ron Vukelich

Mr. Benson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

The minutes of the January 8, 2024 Tree Advisory Commission meeting were not available for review, and approval of those minutes was deferred to the April meeting.

Public Comment

Jim Givens – 117 East 2nd Street

Mr. Givens stated that the large Caltapa tree on his property was designated as a Landmark Tree in 2008 by the America Beautiful Fund and a ceramic plaque was presented to Mr. Givens at that time. The tree is approximately 200-250 years old. Mr. Givens asked if there were any programs or grants that could assist him with guidance and maintenance of the tree. He added that he contacted the Delaware Forestry Service and he was told that the Department of Agriculture might be able to assist. Mr. Benson noted that Bill Seybold of the Delaware Forestry Service informed him that he would inspect the tree; however, Mr. Givens stated that Mr. Seybold had not yet been to the site to do an analysis of the tree. During discussion, Mr. Benson suggested that if the tree could be designated as one of the biggest trees in Delaware and placed on the Big Tree List, some funding might be available from various organizations. He added that support from the City is unknown at this time, but opined that at the local level there may be support from residents of New Castle. Mr. Benson will discuss the tree with the City. Mr. Casale gave background on the site and the efforts to save the tree.

Old Business:

Application 2023-35 – Alison Ellicott – Italian Memorial West 8th and South Streets

Mr. Casale stated that Red Bud trees are small and could be removed by the City. He suggested that the TAC contact Ric Delgado to discuss removal. Mr. Benson gave background on the Application. During discussion, it was noted that several Italian Cypress trees have been plated near the Memorial, and the group would like to have three Italian Cypress trees replanted when

the Red Bud trees are removed and stumps are ground. Mr. Casale noted that stump grinding would be contracted out. Mr. Benson will reach out to Ric Delgado at Public Works.

STATUS: Mr. Benson will contact Public Works for removal of the Red Bud trees and getting quotes for stump grinding.

Application 2024-01 (Original Application 2023-21) – Shannell DeBright – 912 Clayton Street

It was noted that Application 2023-21 for removal of an Elm tree was considered previously and the matter was tabled pending inspection of the tree by Mr. Lehr. Mr. Lehr reported that the tree needed trimming, but it did not need to be removed.

A motion not to remove the tree was made and seconded.

After discussion, the motion was amended to include cleanup of the jagged edge cut and trim suckers.

A motion to not remove the tree, but to clean up the jagged edge cut and trim suckers was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

STATUS: Tree will be trimmed.

New Business

Application 2024-02 – Samuel Calva Plata – 606 Frenchtown Road

An application was submitted to remove a tree, noting that branches fell down in the last storm and it is very dangerous. Mr. Benson stated that the tree does not appear to be in good shape and there are wires all through it. Mr. Casale suggested that Mr. Benson check with Public Works to see if the city can remove the tree. Mr. Benson expressed his concern with the wires that are running through the tree.

A motion to make a decision regarding the tree at the April meeting pending inspection of the tree by Public Works to determine if the city can remove it and consultation with MSC regarding wires running through the tree was made, seconded and unanimously carried.

STATUS: Have Ric Delgado inspect the tree and contact MSC regarding wires running through it. Determination to be made at the April TAC meeting.

Member Comments / Discussions

Mr. Benson gave several updates:

- Messrs. Benson and Vukelich inspected the street trees and Mr. Benson is drafting a report of each tree and whether it needs to be on the watering plan or not. Trees are watered by Public Works. Annalise waters 24 of the newest trees on Delaware Street between 5th and 6th Streets.
- Mr. Benson thanked Mr. Lehr for pruning the new trees this year. Mr. Vukelich added that of the 200 new trees planted, none have been lost. Another dozen trees at Penn Farm are ready to plant.

- Mr. Benson submitted a request to the city for access to information in the TAC budget.
- Planting will begin on the western side of the city this year.

Update from Mr. Casale

Mr. Casale gave an update on unresolved matters from 2023.

- Mr. Casale received quotes for tree removal and stump grinding:
 - 21 Holcomb Lane – Application 2023-34
 - 510 West 11th Street – Application 2023-25
 - Stump Grinding for eight trees that were removed (Application 2023-18 – 130 East 4th, Application 2023-19 – 23 East 5th, Application 2023-27 – 50 West 4th, Application 2023-29 – 520 Harmony, Application 2023-33 – 222 Chestnut, 148 East 4th, 222 Delaware, 208 Delaware)
- Application 2023-11 – Mr. Casale recommended that TAC reach out to Peter Kingshill of Bartlett Tree Service regarding a core sample and risk assessment that was requested for a large Elm tree in front of the Amstel House at 4th and Delaware Streets.

A motion to accept Brandywine Valley Services estimate for work at 21 Holcomb Lane, 510 West 11th Street, and 111 Bryglon Avenue was made by Ms. Riehl, seconded and unanimously carried.

Mr. Casale noted that trimming trees at 33 West 6th Street and 26 West 6th Street, and trimming the entire 900 block of Gray Street were included in the quotes he submitted.

Ms. Riehl made a motion to amend her previous approval to include work on Gray Street and West 6th Street. The motion was seconded and unanimously carried.

Mr. Casale stated that someone should reach out to Brandywine Valley Services, and he will contact Ms. Delgado in the City office.

Update from Mr. Vukelich

- Tree plantings will be made in front of the David Finney Inn (2 trees) and by the Bank (1 tree) in April and stump grinding of removed trees needs to be done.
- Mr. Vukelich added several trees to the City Recommended Tree List.
- Mr. Vukelich recommended that the Commission move to adopt the 5-Year Plan.

A motion to adopt the 5-Year Plan was made and seconded.

During discussion, it was recommended that the TAC request its budget be separated into a two-part budget and that a TAC Treasurer be appointed who would be able to monitor the funds allocated to the TAC in the City's annual budget. Mr. Casale suggested that the Chair meet with the City Administrator each month to discuss what has been approved, upcoming plantings, etc., as well as having his replacement attend TAC meetings be discussed.

The motion was unanimously carried.

- Mr. Vukelich recommended that the Commission move to request a two-part budget for the TAC and that the Commission move to elect a Commission Treasurer.

A motion to approve TAC preparing a two-part yearly budget for City Council, one for tree removal and pruning and one for tree planting on village sidewalks and growing trees at Penn Farm, was made, seconded, and unanimously carried.

A motion to approve that TAC elects a Commission Treasurer who will provide a monthly report on the availability of funds for tree removal and tree planting in order to be fiscally responsible was made, seconded, and unanimously carried.

Ms. Riehl volunteered to act as Commission Treasurer. The duties of the position were defined.

Mr. Benson will make the initial contact with the City regarding monthly meetings.

Miscellaneous

Mr. Vukelich thanked Mr. Casale for his work with the Tree Advisory Commission.

Regarding Commission members, Mr. Vukelich suggested that the Commission consider asking Mr. Savitch to step down if he is unable to attend meetings regularly. Mr. Benson noted that there is no rule regarding absences from Board or Commission meetings; however, Mr. Benson will reach out to Mr. Savitch to see if he would be willing to step down.

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 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer