

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
April 7, 2025 – 5:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

Members Present: Edward Ryan
 Alice Riehl
 Art Walker

Absent: Wolcott Davis

Also Present: Norman Lehr
 Ron Vukelich

Ms. Riehl called the meeting to order as Acting Chair at 5:00 p.m. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve the minutes of the March 3, 2025 meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously passed.

Ms. Riehl opened the floor for Public Comment.

Public Comment

Phil Gross

- Mr. Gross stated that according to the Code he is not required to state his name.
- Mr. Gross stated he is in favor of City Council appointing Linda Suskie to the Tree Advisory Commission and commended the Commissioners for the work they do.

Old Business

2025-02 – Kevin & Robin Clineff – 37 West 6th Street – Remove two (2) trees.

Ms. Riehl noted that the application states the two trees may be affecting their basement. She added that after inspection, she felt the two trees were closer to the house than they appeared in the photograph that accompanied the application.

Mr. Ryan noted that the City received a request from the owner of 110 West 6th Street to remove a Sycamore tree. The property owner asserted that the tree roots were growing into the pipes, and it would be very costly to repair.

It was suggested that removal of the Sycamore trees could generate additional requests for tree removal; and the cost to have the trees removed may not be in the TAC budget. Mr. Ryan recommended that the trees and the properties be inspected by an arborist. Various ways to test if roots are impacting the foundations ensued, during which Mr. Lehr opined that the tree is not likely to send roots into the basement because there is nothing there for it. Mr. Lehr recommended that the Commission request proof from the homeowners that the roots are impacting the foundation of their homes.

During discussion Mr. Ryan noted that the Commission has received several requests regarding the Sycamore trees on West 6th Street, including Application 2024-13 (104 West 6th Street); adding that he did not see any evidence that branches had been trimmed around the wires. A further discussion of other tree work for Sycamore trees ensued.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to table Application 2025-02 and to request that the property owner provide pictures of the basement and/or the roots. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-02 to the May Agenda as Old Business. The homeowner will be asked to provide photographs for the Commission to review before a determination is made.

Mr. Ryan will contact the homeowners.

110 West 6th Street – Michelle Jones

At Mr. Ryan's request, the Commissioners discussed Ms. Jones' request to have a Sycamore tree removed. Ms. Riehl stated that she requested City staff to ask Ms. Jones to submit a Tree Work Application. Mr. Vukelich suggested that the Commission check to see if they have the right to inspect the homeowner's basement.

ACTION: City staff will request that Ms. Jones submit a Tree Work Application. Mr. Ryan will request that Ms. Jones include photographs with the application. Ms. Riehl will speak with Ms. Delgado and check if professionals can be brought in to inspect the foundation.

New Business / New Applications

Application 2025-04 – Omar Soliman – 900 Clayton Street

An application was submitted to remove two trees at 800 Clayton Street. The application states the trees are causing a potential hazard by being intertwined with cable lines and that the roots are interfering with the sidewalk.

Mr. Ryan stated that both trees have already been removed and the stumps have been ground without approval from the Commission. Mr. Ryan added that pursuant to the Code, "No person shall, without a valid tree permit, remove, destroy, break, cut or deface any street tree." It was further noted that fines can be levied against property owners for Code violations. Mr. Lehr added that the property owner can also be made to pay for the cost of the tree in addition to fines. Mr. Ryan referenced §210-6 that states "Any damage to or removal of street trees resulting from the violation of this section shall be a violation of this chapter subject to fine and enforcement action under §210-17..."

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to refer Application 2025-04 to the City Code Enforcement Officer for action pursuant to the City Code. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Application 2025-04 will be referred to the City Code Enforcement Officer for action pursuant to the City Code.

Application 2025-05 – Dominick Alvini – Removal of trees along the Markel Trail

An application was submitted to have large and damaged trees with branches growing into private property and leaning trees that pose a hazard to private property and people using the Markel Trail pruned, and to have multiple large trees that have the potential to fall due to high winds removed.

Mr. Ryan inspected the trees and reported that the subject trees appear to be healthy and do not have many dead limbs. He added that the limbs do not impact the wall or overhang Mr. Alvini's property. During discussion, Mr. Lehr opined that the trees are on State property. Mr. Walker will research the parcel to determine ownership of the trees.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to table Application 2025-05 pending a determination of ownership of the trees. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-05 to the May Agenda as Old Business. Mr. Walker will research and report ownership of the parcel to the Commission at the May meeting.

Member Comments / Discussion:

Budget Report

Ms. Riehl reported that the planting budget has a balance of \$3,580 and the removal/maintenance budget has a balance of \$11,390. Mr. Lehr submitted an invoice to the Commissioners from Gateway Garden Center in the amount of \$4,200.00.

Ms. Riehl suggested that the Commission approve moving funds from the removal/maintenance budget to the planting budget. After discussion, the consensus of the Commissioners was to approve the movement of \$5,000 from the removal/maintenance budget to the planting budget.

During further discussion Mr. Ryan noted that there are seven (7) stumps to be ground. Brandywine Valley is under contract to grind some of those stumps. Mr. Ryan added that there are a number of trees on the list to be pruned or removed by the City; and pruning of a Sycamore tree (Application 2024-13) is out for bid. Ms. Riehl will follow-up with Mr. Delgado regarding tree work to be done by the City. Ms. Riehl will also speak with the City office regarding having the City Code Enforcement Officer attend TAC meetings.

Spring Planting

- Mr. Vukelich reported that Gabriel Vasquez and his nephew recently weeded and mulched new trees.
- Trees that were recently planted:
 - Eight (8) trees on 5th Street by the Library
 - Four (4) trees on West 4th Street

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- Three (3) trees on East 2nd Street
 - One (1) tree on East 3rd Street
 - Six (6) trees were planted at Penn Farm to replace trees planted in town.
- There are approximately 12-15 trees at Penn Farm.

Mr. Vukelich noted that members of TAC assisted with spring planting.

Notes from Mr. Vukelich

- Mr. Vukelich distributed pages from a binder that Ms. Burgmuller had maintained in the City Office detailing Tree Work Applications and their disposition; suggesting that TAC request that City Staff continue to maintain and update the data on all Tree Work Applications. The Commissioners concurred and Ms. Riehl will discuss this with the City.
- Mr. Vukelich distributed a handout regarding a stump that needs to be ground at 55 The Strand (Application 2024-15). Ms. Seitz explained that there had been several attempts to grind the stump, but the work has not yet been completed. Ms. Riehl explained the reason for the delay in having some of the stumps ground. Ms. Riehl will follow-up regarding the stump grinding.

Watering Schedule

Mr. Vukelich recommended TAC purchase three (3) watering bag 8-packs from Amazon. Mr. Ryan will research the cost of the watering bag 8-pack.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve the purchase of 24 watering bags when the price is acceptable. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

Mr. Ryan will monitor the price and purchase the watering bags at the appropriate time.

Elm Tree Treatment Proposal

Mr. Vukelich reported that there are two Elm trees: One (1) in front of the Amstel House and one (1) in front of the Jefferson House. During discussion, ownership of the Elm tree in front of the Jefferson House was questioned. Mr. Walker will research the parcel and report ownership of that tree at the May meeting. A discussion of the proposal for treatment of the Elm trees, and how many trees are being treated, ensued.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to determine ownership of the Elm Tree at the Jefferson House. If the Elm tree is on City property, the Commission will accept the proposal as submitted; and if the Elm tree is not on City property, the Commission will request a new proposal for consideration. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

Miscellaneous

Mr. Vukelich wanted to thank Mr. Benson for his work on the Tree Advisory Commission and gave a shovel to the Commission to be presented to Mr. Benson at the next meeting he attends.

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There being no further business to discuss, Ms. Riehl called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Ryan and seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion was unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer