

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

Members Present: Edward Ryan
 Alice Riehl
 Art Walker
 Wolcott Davis
 Linda Suskie

Also Present: Milt Draper, Code Enforcement Officer
 Norman Lehr
 Ron Vukelich

Mr. Ryan 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 Ms. Riehl to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2025 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously passed. Mr. Davis and Ms. Suskie abstained from the vote.

Old Business

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

Mr. Ryan noted that the application had been tabled to get more information regarding the roots of the trees impacting their residence and the sewer lines.

Mr. Clineff explained that the application was submitted in an effort to avoid an expensive excavation of their sewer line, as two neighbors recently had to have done.

Mr. Riehl noted that 6th Street is the only street left with a true tree canopy, and the trees are very old and beautiful.

Mr. and Ms. Clineff went on to state that:

- The trees are approximately 20' from the foundation, and the root system extends approximately 60' – 90' into their yard.
- They brought in a section of one of the roots that was impacting their sewer system, which they had to have excavated at a cost of \$9,000. It took six hours to cut through the roots to get to the pipe to excavate it.
- The plumbers opined that the roots may also be impacting the County sewer system.
- The water line is wrapped up in one of the Sycamore tree stumps.
- Mr. and Mrs. Clineff presented photographs, including the root system and cracks in their floor that may be the result of root damage.

Ms. Riehl opined that if the two trees are removed, other residents on the street will request that their trees be removed as well. Mr. Vukelich opined that the trees may be the responsibility of DelDOT. Ms. Clineff noted that the trees are coming down one-by-one upon request, and suggested that the TAC take a more holistic approach to the issue and make a plan for the entire street. Ms. Riehl concurred.

Ms. Clineff reiterated that the roots seem to be growing into the County sewer system. She added that neighbors have collectively spent approximately \$60,000 already in dealing with the roots; and the roots will continue to grow for several years after the tree is removed. She also noted that the roots contribute to the water runoff issue on 6th Street.

Mr. Tom Whitehead opined that a Sycamore tree is not an appropriate street tree because they are dirty; they destroy the sidewalk; and get wrapped up in the utility wires. Mr. Whitehead further opined that the trees should be removed.

Mr. Ryan noted that Ms. Michele Jones and Mr. Paul Pavlichek submitted an application to have a Sycamore tree removed from 110 West 6th Street in April because the roots of the tree were blocking the sewer pipe for the second time in 7-1/2 years; and the plumber informed them that it would happen again in less than 3 years. Ms. Jones stated they spent approximately \$15,000 already and will need to spend approximately an additional \$10,000 for damage done to their home.

Mr. Ryan added Application 2025-07 submitted by Wayne and Gwendolyn DelCoglin for the removal of a Sycamore tree at 16 West 6th Street to the discussion.

Mr. Delcoglin stated he also has had to have the sewer line routed out every 2-3 years; the foundation has leaked since 1992; the wire are tangled up in the branches; and the sidewalk is buckled. He added that the tree limbs overhang his roof and his neighbor's porch. Mr. Delcoglin also said that they want a new tree planted after the Sycamore is removed. Mr. Delcoglin noted that the tree leans over 6th Street, and if it falls, it will land on his neighbor's house and will rip up all the roots. Mr. Delcoglin presented photographs to the Commissioners.

Ms. Delcoglin stated she had been informed that if anyone fell in front of their home as a result of the sidewalk buckling they would be liable; however, the sidewalk cannot be repaired because the roots will continue to buckle it.

Mr. Delcoglin stated that their insurance company will not open a claim for them for the last problem they had until the tree has been removed.

Mr. Visciano suggested that the University of Delaware be contacted for help in determining where the root systems are going.

Mr. Ryan concurred that it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed; noting that the Commission needs to first determine who is responsible for the trees and then to have Mr. Draper help the TAC determine how to proceed if the Commission recommends having the trees

removed and replaced. Mr. Ryan noted that Ms. Jones and Mr. Pavlichek's application did not have an assigned Application Number, and identified it as 2025-15.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to table Applications 2025-02 (37 West 6th Street), 2025-07 (16 West 6th Street), and 2025-15 (110 West 6th Street) to the June meeting pending a determination of who is responsible for the trees and how to address the matter if the City is responsible. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously carried.

Mr. Whitehead added that ownership of the trees can be found through the Right-of-Way Division of the State Department of Transportation.

Ms. Patricia O'Brien of 37 West 6th Street at Tremont Street stated that she had a limb hit her car. Ms. O'Brien stated she had previously submitted an application, but would submit her application again and asked that her application be considered along with the other applications for West 6th Street. During discussion, it was noted that her tree may be a Silver Maple.

ACTION: Add Applications 2025-02, 2025-07, and 2025-15 to the June Agenda.
Ownership of the trees will be determined and a plan of action will be discussed.

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

Mr. Ryan stated that last month the area along the Markel Trail is State property and he informed Mr. Alvini of that fact.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to deny Application 2025-05 because the trees along the Markel Trail are on State property. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Application 2025-05 can be closed.

New Business

Application 2025-06 - Tom Whitehead - 131 E 2nd St - Removal.& replacement.

An application was submitted to have a tree removed in front of the house that appears to be rotting, and replaced with a Red Maple tree.

Mr. Whitehead stated that while working on a tree across the street from him, a Public Works staff member inspected his tree and opined that it should be removed. Mr. Whitehead added that the circumference of the tree is approximately 1' 10" and it has always been a sickly tree.

Ms. Riehl stated that the tree does not look healthy. She opined that the City could take the tree down.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve Application 2025-06 for the removal of a tree in the front yard of 131 East 2nd Street by City Staff, with an appropriate replacement tree to be planted when possible.

A discussion of a replacement tree and when a new tree would be planted ensued. Mr. Whitehead offered to pay for and water the replacement tree

Ms. Riehl amended her motion to read:

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve Application 2025-06 for the removal of a tree in the front yard of 131 East 2nd Street by City Staff, with an appropriate replacement to be financed by the property owner and planted when possible.

During further discussion, it was noted that Mr. Whitehead would choose a tree from the City Tree List and then bring his request back to the TAC for approval. Mr. Vukelich stated that he would assist Mr. Whitehead in his decision.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-06 to the City Tree List for removal. Application 2025-06 can be closed.

Application 2025-08 - Vincent Visciano - 122 Harmony St - Pruning request.

An application was submitted to prune a tree located at 122 Harmony Street.

A motion to approve Application 2025-08 to have a tree located at 122 Harmony Street pruned by the City was made by Mr. Ryan. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-08 for the pruning of a tree located at 122 Harmony Street to the City List of Trees to be Pruned. Application 2025-08 can be closed.

Application 2025-09 - Tanasi Baldet - 548 4th St - Tree stump grinding request.

An application was submitted to have a tree planted. Mr. Ryan stated that this request was previously approved and is on the list of stumps to be ground.

STATUS: This request is on the List of Stumps to be Ground. Application 2025-09 can be closed.

Application 2025-10 - Daniel & Jean Norvell - 45 W 4th St - Planting request.

An application was submitted to have a Hedge Maple tree planted in front of 45 West 4th Street.

A motion to approve Application 2025-10 to have a tree planted at 45 West 4th Street was made by Ms. Riehl. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

Mr. Vukelich stated that there is a Pink Flair available.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-10 to the list of Trees to be Planted. Application 2025-10 can be closed.

(Stenographer's Note: Mr. Ryan excused Ms. Riehl from the meeting.)

Application 2025-11 - Kim Williams -922 Gray Street - Pruning request.

An application was submitted to have three trees at 922 Gray Street pruned. Mr. Ryan stated that he inspected the trees, and noted that there are four very large Oak trees planted in the front of the townhouses. Mr. Walker stated that the trees are on City property.

A motion to table Application 2025-11 to the June meeting was made by Mr. Ryan.

During discussion, it was noted that the application is not specific as to why or how the homeowner is requesting the trees be pruned. Mr. Ryan volunteered to discuss this with the homeowner. Mr. Walker explained that only the tree in the front is a City tree.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-11 to the June Agenda. Mr. Ryan will contact Ms. Williams to clarify why and how the tree should be pruned.

Application 2025-12 - Anna Burns - 6 W 5th St - Planting permit.

An application was submitted to plant a tree at 6 West 5th Street. Mr. Ryan discussed this with Ms. Burns, and she would like a tree similar to those across the street from her house.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to add Application 2025-12 to the future Tree Planting List. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-12 to the Future Tree Planting List. Application 2025-12 can be closed.

Application 2025-13 - H. Beale -26The Strand - Pruning request.

Application 2025-14 - Richard Pennell - 28 The Strand - Pruning Request.

Applications 2025-13 and 2025-14 were submitted by Mr. Beale to have a European Hornbeam tree in front of both residences pruned.

Mr. Lear inspected the trees and stated it was unsure of how the property owners wanted the trees to be pruned. Mr. Vukelich added that European Hornbeams are used to being trimmed and shaped. Mr. Ryan opined that might be more specific pruning than the City would do. Messrs. Vukelich, Davis and Lehr concurred.

Ms. Suskie noted that Mr. Beale submitted both applications and questioned whether Mr. Pennell was aware of his request. Mr. Ryan suggested the Commission clarify this with Mr. Pennell. Mr. Davis recommended that Messrs. Beale and Pennell be asked exactly how they want the trees pruned. Mr. Vukelich added that it is an unusual tree and it is quite tricky to prune. It was

noted that one application states the tree is too tall and too wide; and the other application states the tree is too tall.

Mr. Davis volunteered to speak with Mr. Beale

A motion as made by Mr. Davis to table Applications 2025-13 and 2025-14 to the June meeting pending more specific information about how the homeowners want the trees to be pruned. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Applications 2025-13 and 2025-14 to the June Agenda. Mr. Davis will discuss pruning with the homeowners.

Mr. Vukelich opined that the aesthetics of the tree should be considered. Mr. Lehr stated that European Hornbeams should be pruned when they are young; and he was told not to touch those trees. In response to a question from Mr. Davis, Mr. Lehr said he would need to inspect the trees to determine if it is too late to begin shaping them. He added that they are difficult to prune properly and they would have to be pruned by hand. Mr. Lehr also pointed out that this would be a specialty pruning job and suggested that if that is what the homeowners want they might need to pay to have an arborist do the job; opining that City Staff is not proficient enough for what is required.

In response to a question from Ms. Suskie, Mr. Vukelich noted that European Hornbeams can grow to be between 40' – 60' tall. Ms. Suskie observed that it appears they were planted under wires.

Budget Report

Mr. Ryan read Ms. Riehl's report on the Budget:

Balance at 4/31/25: \$14,836.90

Expenses Paid:

 Gateway 4,230.10

 Brandywine 500.00

 Antonio's 3,200.00

Current Balance: \$ 6,720.23

Quote:

 Brandywine \$ 590.00 (stump grinding)

Final Balance \$ 6,130.23

Mr. Ryan stated that neither he nor Ms. Riehl understood what the \$3,200 bill from Antonio's was for and why it was assigned to the TAC Budget. A discussion of the bill ensued. Mr. Ryan will ask Ms. Riehl to speak with Ms. Delgado and get a copy of Antonio's bill to see if it relates to the TAC.

Spring Planting

Mr. Lehr stated that all planting for the spring has been completed. Twenty-one trees were planted this spring, and there are 19 trees at Penn Farm that belong to the TAC. Mr. Vukelich noted that one of the spring trees appears to be dead, but he is waiting for another month to see if it is alive. The Commissioners discussed visiting Penn Farm to inspect the trees.

Extended Watering Plan

Mr. Vukelich reported that the city is currently watering 79 trees. In compliance with the TAC 5-Year Plan, approximately 40 trees have been planted on the West side of town; and approximately 16 residents are doing their own watering. The watering will continue through Thanksgiving.

Elm Tree Treatment Proposal

Mr. Ryan reported that Bartlett Tree submitted an estimate of \$3,073 for the two-year residual of disease suppression to treat Elm trees in the City to prevent Dutch Elm Disease; noting that Mr. Draper confirmed that the Elm Tree at the Jefferson House is a City tree. It was also noted that the Elm tree at the Amstel House is in good health. After discussion, it was agreed to approve the estimate.

A motion to approve the Quote from Bartlett Tree for the treatment plan for Elm trees in the amount of \$3,073.00 was made by Mr. Ryan. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

Mr. Ryan will contact the City Administrator regarding the TAC approval.

Miscellaneous

Notes from Mr. Vukelich

- Mr. Vukelich updated the Commissioners on his proposal for the City to maintain a spreadsheet of city trees and gave a copy of the spreadsheet to Mr. Draper.
- Some of the trees on the City List of trees to be removed were discussed.
- A London Plane tree was removed on Delaware Street and a stump was ground on The Strand; and those tree pits are being re-bricked.

Ash Trees

Mr. Lehr stated that the TAC recommended that the Ash trees leaf out before approving the treatment. A discussion of the healthy Ash trees in the City ensued during which Mr. Vukelich noted the Ash trees that have already been removed. It was recommended that an inventory be taken of the live Ash trees that are worth treating. After the inventory has been approved by TAC, Mr. Davis will contact Bartlett and request an updated estimate for treatment. Mr. Ryan will send a copy of the current list of Ash trees to each of the Commissioners.

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

Tree Advisory Commission
May 5, 2025

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Ryan and seconded by Mr. Walker. The motion was unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer