

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
June 2, 2025 – 5:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

Members Present: Edward Ryan
Alice Riehl
Wolcott Davis

Absent: Art Walker
Linda Suskie

Also Present: Milt Draper, Code Enforcement Officer
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 Ms. Riehl to approve the minutes of the May 5, 2025 meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and unanimously passed.

Old Business

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

Application 2025-07 – Wayne & Gwedolyn Delcoglin – 16 West 6th Street – Removal and replacement.

Application 2025-15 – Michele Jones & Paul Pavlichek – Removal request.

Ms. Riehl noted that all three applications are to have Sycamore trees removed on 6th Street due to roots growing into the sewer system.

Mr. Ryan stated that at the May TAC meeting a significant effort was made to document the detrimental effects of the root systems from Sycamore trees on West 6th Street. The applications were tabled to provide time for the Commissioners to determine who is responsible for the trees (the City, New Castle County, or DelDOT). It was determined that Rt. 9 is a DelDOT thoroughfare. Ms. Riehl stated her understanding that the City and DelDOT executed an agreement that stated the City would maintain those trees; however, because the Commissioners have not had an opportunity to review the agreement, it is not certain that the City is responsible for removal of the trees. Ms. Riehl opined that before TAC makes any decisions regarding these applications the party that would be responsible for removal of the trees needs to be determined.

A general discussion of the Sycamore trees ensued between the Commissioners and members of the assembly.

Messrs. Jago Plant and Anthony Parker stated that they and other residents on West 6th Street do not want the Sycamore trees removed because of the tree canopy. Ms. Riehl noted that the applicants' reason for having the Sycamore trees removed is because of the root system growing into the sewer pipes and house foundations. Mr. Parker stated that the Sycamore trees are Legacy Trees and stated his opposition to having all or some of the Sycamore trees removed; adding that even removing some of the trees would leave huge gaps in the canopy. Mr. Parker suggested that the City could offer residents who are affected by the roots a tax exemption to offset the cost of repairs.

Mr. Clineff stated that none of the applicants have asked that all the Sycamore trees be removed; and opined that the notion that if the applicants' trees are removed all the residents of 6th Street will ask to have their Sycamore trees removed is only an assumption.

Ms. Delcoglin added that they cannot repair the sidewalk until something is done with the tree.

In response to a question from Ms. Riehl, Mr. Lehr noted that the Sycamore trees were planted in the 1940's and he considered them Legacy Trees. Ms. Riehl added that 6th Street is the only street in the City that has a tree canopy.

Mr. Plant concurred with Mr. Parker's suggestion that the City help minimize the impact of the root system growing into the sewer pipes, and opined that the very last option should be to remove a healthy tree.

A discussion of trees that have been removed and trees that have been replanted throughout the city ensued.

Ms. Riehl suggested that the TAC review the contract between the City and DelDOT, and have an arborist inspect the trees on 6th Street and submit a report of which trees are healthy and which are not. Mr. Ryan stated that the issue is the roots and how they impact the sewer system and the property owner; and opined that how the trees affect the property owner should be referred to the City Administrator.

Ms. Riehl noted that TAC does not authorize removal of healthy trees.

Mr. Ryan suggested that the applications be tabled until who is responsible for maintaining the trees has been determined.

Ms. Delcoglin stated that her original application was to "trim and remove" and asked if the pruning could be approved. Ms. Riehl stated that TAC could address pruning the tree separately from the request for removal.

A motion to approve trimming of a Sycamore tree at 16 West 6th Street was made by Ms. Riehl. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add pruning a tree at 16 West 6th Street to the City Tree List for pruning.

In response to a question from Mr. Vukelich, Mr. Draper stated that Public Works will not trim branches that are interfering with wires.

Mr. Lehr stated that the Sycamore trees have been butcher-pruned because of the wires, but they are healthy. He added that there is a Maple tree on 6th Street that has been butcher-pruned that should be removed; however, no application has been submitted for removal of that tree. Mr. Lehr did not make an assumption as to whether the Sycamore trees should be removed or not. He added that Sycamore trees are not on the Recommended Tree List, and trees from the approved list that are replanted will never meet in the middle of the street.

Ms. Riehl suggested that TAC refer the trees on 6th Street to City Council. Mr. Davis stated that he would like to see the trees stay; adding that the City should address what can be done to take some of the burden off the homeowners. Mr. Plant suggested that as a community options to ease the burden on homeowners should be considered. Mr. Ryan noted that there are other residents who have incurred significant bills to address roots in the sewer system.

Ms. Riehl suggested that the applications be tabled so the Commissioners can review the agreement between the City and DelDOT; and thereafter make a recommendation to the City Administrator and City Council. In response to a question from Ms. Delcoglin it was noted that all members of City Council cannot attend a TAC meeting together. Mr. Plant opined that it is unfair for the homeowners to bear the entire burden of the cost of repairs.

The consensus of the Commissioners was not to have the Sycamore trees removed because they are healthy. Mr. Davis stated that TAC wants to keep the Legacy Trees, and would like the City to see what can be done to assist the homeowners that are being affected by the Legacy Trees so the whole community can benefit from them.

Mr. Plant questioned whether the Trustees could assist in any way; reiterating that it is unfair to place the entire burden on the homeowners.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl that the Tree Advisory Commission (TAC) recognizes its responsibility is the health of the City Trees, and that the Sycamore trees referenced in Applications 2025-02, 2025-07 and 2025-15 are healthy, and further, the TAC requests that the City addresses the question of the damage the trees are doing to property owners, with the idea that the consensus of the TAC is to maintain the trees if at all possible. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Refer Applications 2025-02, 2025-07, and 2025-15 to the City.

Ms. Riehl stated that TAC will keep the applicants informed of the status of their applications.

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

Mr. Ryan stated that he inspected the tree and recommended that it be pruned.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve Application 2025-11 to approve pruning a tree in front of 922 Gray Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add Application 2025-11 to the City Tree List for pruning.

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

Mr. Davis stated that Ms. Beale informed him that she wanted to withdraw her application and that she will hire a professional to have the tree trimmed. During discussion, it was noted that it was unclear if Ms. Beale intended to have the tree in front of 28 The Strand (Application 2025-15) as well. Mr. Davis will speak with Ms. Beale to clarify her intent. Mr. Vukelich opined that the tree at 28 The Strand does not require much work.

ACTION: Close Application 2025-13.

Application 2025-14 – Richard Pennell – 28 The Strand – Pruning request.

It was noted that Mr. Pennell has moved and Application 2025-14 can be closed.

ACTION: Close Application 2025-14.

Application 2024-19

Application 2024-19 will be added to the July Agenda as Old Business.

Budget Report

Ms. Riehl reported that she spoke with Ms. Delgado regarding the invoice from Antonio's for \$3,200 for landscaping at the entrances and playgrounds in the City. Ms. Delgado informed her that cost has always been taken from the TAC budget. It was noted that landscaping work at Dewey Park is also included on the statement; and Dewey Park is Trust property. Ms. Riehl wrote to the City Administrator and Council President Souder regarding this matter and will report back to the Commission when she has more information.

Spring Planting Plan

The spring planting plan was discussed at the May meeting.

Extended Watering Plan

The extended watering plan was discussed at the May meeting.

Elm Tree Treatment Proposal

The Elm tree treatment proposal was discussed and approved at the May meeting.

Mr. Davis stated that he spoke with a representative of Bartlett Tree regarding the Ash Trees that are being treated. Bartlett will inspect the trees based on the TAC list of live Ash trees and will submit a new estimate. Bartlett will also submit a new estimate for the Elm tree treatment plan.

Report from Mr. Vukelich

Mr. Vukelich explained a number of photos that he distributed to TAC members and the assembly.

- Two pictures of extremely large trees that are apparently not impacting the sidewalk or foundation of the homes where they are planted.
- A brick water course was installed in the sidewalk on the Strand to direct water being pumped from the basement to the gutter.
- A Silver Maple tree that was planted in the 1940's has been removed.

Comments from Commissioners

- Mr. Ryan distributed a Draft Tree Removal and Pruning Worksheet for use by TAC members when inspecting trees in connection with submitted applications. He suggested that TAC members review the Worksheet for discussion at the July meeting.
- Mr. Ryan proposed that TAC establish a Planting Subcommittee that would be responsible for deciding where new trees will be planted, what new tree will be planted, and ordering new trees. Mr. Ryan volunteered to be on the subcommittee. Further discussion of a Planting Subcommittee will be added to the July Agenda.
- Mr. Lehr recommended that an inventory of existing (old) trees in the city be made and that they are evaluated to determine if the trees are healthy, or need pruning. Mr. Plant suggested that if an inventory is done annually, the health of trees could be tracked. Mr. Davis and Ms. Riehl volunteered to walk the city with Mr. Lehr. Mr. Vukelich noted that a tree inventory is in the TAC 5-year plan.

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Ryan 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 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer