

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
September 8, 2025 – 5:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

Members Present: Edward Ryan, Chair
Alice Riehl
Linda Suskie
Art Walker

Absent: Wolcott Davis

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

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

Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Suskie to approve of the minutes of the July 7, 2025 as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

Mr. Ryan explained that the August meeting had been cancelled because TAC had traditionally not held a meeting in August. He recommended that going forward TAC meet monthly, including during the month of August.

Old Business/Tabled Applications/Old Applications

Application 2025-18 – Jeanne-Marie Camac – 23 West 3rd Street – Tree removal.

Mr. Ryan explained that the application was tabled in July to have the tree inspected more carefully. Mr. Lehr stated he inspected the tree and recommended that it be removed. Mr. Ryan concurred, noting that the tree does not look healthy, it is leaning on the house, and there is damage to the upper part of the tree.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve Application 2025-18 for the removal of a Redbud tree located at 23 West 3rd Street. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to plant a replacement tree at 23 West 3rd Street and add that to the City Tree List for planting when available. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

Ms. Suskie noted her reason for not supporting removal of the tree during the July meeting was based on her inexperience in determining when a tree is or is not salvageable by trimming or treatment. She questioned if TAC should have an official advisor to TAC in a similar capacity as the City Architect is to the Historic Area Commission. It was explained that the City Architect

was appointed by City Council to advise the HAC; and Messrs. Vukelich and Lehr are not members of TAC and, therefore, would not receive a TAC packet from the City office. Mr. Lehr stated that he received a copy of the Agenda from Mr. Ryan and he needs at least two weeks to inspect the new applications. Mr. Ryan will discuss having the packets sent to Messrs. Lehr and Vukelich with the City Administrator.

New Business/New Applications

Application 2025-22 – Mary Davis – 24 East 3rd Street – Tree Treatment

An application was submitted to have an Ash tree located at 24 East 3rd Street treated. Mr. Ryan stated that Mr. Wolcott informed him that Ash trees were due for bi-annual Ash Bore Treatment next year, and Bartlett would send a cost estimate for the treatment.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to table Application 2025-22 pending receipt of an estimate from Bartlett Tree Service with the cost of treatment. The motion did not receive a second and the motion failed.

Mr. Ryan opined that the application should be approved and added to the list of trees Mr. Wolcott prepared of Ash trees in the city. Mr. Vukelich noted he had the list available.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve treating an Ash tree located at 24 East 3rd Street during the next scheduled Ash Bore Treatment. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl.

Ms. Suskie noted she did not feel she had the expertise to comment on this application, adding that this is another example of why the consultants should receive the TAC packet ahead of time.

Ms. Riehl noted this is a preventative measure. Mr. Ryan added the tree appears to be healthy. Ms. Suskie noted there was bark missing at the upper part of the tree, but otherwise the tree appeared healthy. Messrs. Lehr and Vukelich concurred that the tree should be treated.

The motion on the floor was passed unanimously.

ACTION: Add this tree to the list of Ash for bi-annual Ash Bore treatment by Bartlett Tree Service. Application 2025-22 can be closed.

Application 2025-23 – Michael Dorph – 910 Gray Street –Removal of branch

An application was submitted to have a Sycamore tree located at 9th and Gray Streets trimmed because bark is flaking off the tree.

It was noted that there is a row of very old Sycamore trees across the street from 910 Gray Street (901-933 Gray Street). Ms. Suskie opined that the application was submitted to alert the TAC of the situation and it did not request a specific action. Mr. Lehr stated there is no remedy to the bark peeling.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to deny Application 2025-23 and the Tree Advisory Commission declines to take any action on the Sycamore trees in question. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ryan and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Application 2025-23 was denied and can be closed.

Application 2025-24 – Dan Struble – 11 East 2nd Street – Pruning request

An application was submitted to have branches trimmed from trees located on Delaware Street between 3rd and 5th Streets that are at eye level.

During discussion it was opined that the sidewalks are wide enough for pedestrians to avoid the branches. Mr. Vukelich explained that they Firestarter trees and they will grow, which will alleviate the issue noted in the application. During further discussion, other trees that could cause an issue with pedestrian traffic were noted. Mr. Ryan opined that the trees are growing and they will be trimmed when appropriate.

Mr. Ryan will contact the applicant and explain the TAC decision.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to deny Application 2025-24 to trim branches from trees on Delaware Street between 3rd and 5th Streets. The motion was seconded by Ms. Suskie and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Application 2025-24 was denied and can be closed.

Application 2025-25 – ally Hatton – 168 East 3rd Street – SPruning & Replacement

An application was submitted to prune a Dogwood tree that has no shape and is growing in all directions and to remove a Redbud tree that has a lot of dead wood.

Mr. Ryan noted that the Redbud was looking shabby.

Ms. Suskie questioned whether it was appropriate to have one application covering two trees with very different issues. Mr. Lehr opined that if they are on the same property it is probably fine.

Mr. Vukelich opined that the Redbud should probably be removed. In response to a question from Ms. Riehl, Mr. Lehr stated that removing the dead part of the Redbud tree wouldn't make sense. Ms. Suskie opined that the Dogwood tree looked healthy.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to remove the Redbud tree located at 168 East 3rd Street that is more than 30% dead, and leave the Dogwood tree alone. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

After discussion, the Commissioners concurred that a replacement tree should not be planted so close to the Dogwood.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to deny the request for a replacement tree to be planted. The motion was seconded by Ms. Suskie and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add removal of a Redbud tree located at 168 East 3rd Street to the City Tree List for removal. No replacement tree will be planted. No action will be taken on the Dogwood Tree. Application 2025-25 can be closed.

Application 2025-26 – Dawn Kackley – 65 West 4th Street –Remove and replace

An application was submitted to remove a Redbud tree located at 65 West 4th Street that is dying. The central trunk threatens parked cars.

Messrs. Vukelich and Lehr recommended removal of the tree. Ms. Riehl opined that half the tree appears to be healthy. Mses. Suskie and Riehl opined that the tree should be pruned.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve removing a Redbud tree located at 65 West 4th Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

After further discussion, Mr. Ryan withdrew his motion to remove the Redbud located at 65 West 4th Street.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve pruning a dead limb from a Redbud tree located at 65 West 4th Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add pruning a dead limb from a Redbud tree located at 65 West 4th Street to the City Tree List for pruning. Application 2025-26 can be closed.

Application 2025-27 – Marygrace Kennedy – 523 Cherry Street –Planting request

An application was submitted to plant a tree in an empty tree pit at 523 Cherry Street.

Mr. Ryan noted that the existing tree pit has been cleaned up and re-bricked.

A side discussion of tree planting ensued during which the Commissioners discussed a number of matters/suggestions:

- Whether the Commission should continue approving the planting of new trees when there is no official plan for the site or if planting a tree could take a long time because there is no inventory.
- Whether the Commission should ask property owners to purchase a tree for planting and how the TAC could control that. Mr. Lehr noted that the street trees must be a certain size, age and species. He added that new trees must be pruned at an early age and questioned whether residents would know how to prune a tree correctly. Mr. Vukelich added that most of the trees purchased for the city come from Oregon and they come with a fairly good size caliper; adding that if a 5'-6' tree is planted it may have to be watered for 5-6 years. Mr. Ryan opined that it is not feasible to have property owners purchase, plant and water street trees.

- The City Tree List for planting is quite lengthy.
- Who would water trees planted by property owners. During this discussion it was noted that:
 - New trees require weekly watering from May through November for up to three (3) years.
 - Currently the city and volunteers are maxed out as to the number of trees that can be watered.
 - There are no funds available in the budget to pay for an outside vendor to water the trees (at an approximate cost of \$150/week).
 - Asking homeowners on 4th Street to water their new trees was an experiment that has gone very well, but it is a huge commitment.
 - Whether the TAC should educate residents on the care of street trees and enlist the cooperation of residents to care for street trees via the city website or in The Weekly.
 - The City Administrator would like to see 6-8 trees planted twice a year.

The Commissioners returned to reviewing Application 2025-27.

A motion was made by Mr. Ryan to approve planting a new tree by the City in a tree pit located at 523 Cherry Street when a tree is available. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and was unanimously passed.

Mr. Ryan will notify Ms. Kennedy that planting a tree in her tree pit by the City has been approved subject to availability. Ms. Suskie sked Mr. Ryan to remind Ms. Kennedy that weeding tree pits is the responsibility of the homeowner.

ACTION: Add planting a tree in a tree pit located at 523 Cherry Street to the City Tree List for planting. Application 2025-27 can be closed.

Application 2025-28 – Suzanne Swift – 16 West 4th Street –Pruning request.

An application was submitted to prune branches from a Willow Oak tree located at 16 West 4th Street that are hitting the internet cables and affecting service.

Mr. Vukelich noted that it is a very young tree.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve pruning a Willow Oak tree located at 16 West 4th Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Suskie and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add pruning a Willow Oak tree located at 16 West 4th Street to the City Tree List for pruning. Application 2025-28 can be closed.

Application 2025-29 – Alicia Marchesani – 20 West 5th Street – Removal request

An application was submitted to have a tree removed that is impacting the water line and that MSC informed her is “half dead”.

Mr. Lehr stated the tree should be removed because it has been butchered. Mr. Ryan concurred, noting it is impacting their sidewalk and it is up against the house. Ms. Riehl stated the tree does not look “half dead” and she saw no reason to have it removed. Ms. Suskie questioned the health of the tree and the sewer issues; opining that it would be helpful if the homeowner would provide documentation of sewer line issues.

A motion was made by Ms. Riehl to approve removing a tree located at 20 West 5th Street. The motion was seconded by Ms. Suskie and was unanimously passed.

ACTION: Add removal of a tree located at 20 West 5th Street to the City Tree List for removal. Application 2025-29 can be closed.

Budget Update

Ms. Riehl reported on the TAC budget:

- \$3,073 was paid to Bartlett Tree Service for Dutch Elm treatment.
- \$1,065 was paid to Brandywine Valley Services for stump grinding.
- \$145.72 was paid for security during TAC meetings.
- The remaining balance is \$35,716.28

Mr. Ryan noted that the additional funds allocated to the TAC budget are earmarked for potential tree work on 6th Street.

Commissioner Comments

Sycamore Trees on 6th Street

Ms. Riehl noted that the tree at 16 West 6th Street was removed. Mr. Ryan explained that the City contacted Delmarva regarding the tree and Delmarva contracted a vendor to remove all branches within 10’ of the wires. This left only the tree trunk standing. Subsequently, Public Works took the trunk down because it was a safety hazard. Mr. Ryan noted that Mr. Delgado opined to him that the Sycamore tree roots were not responsible for damage to the sewer lines because the sewer lines are below the level of the tree roots. A discussion of the TAC decision of the Sycamore trees on 6th Street ensued.

Agenda and Packet

Mr. Lehr stated that three Applications on the Agenda had the incorrect location of the trees for which work was requested, which resulted in the TAC members and him inspecting the wrong trees for those Applications. He stated that the Agenda needs to have the correct location of where tree work is requested; reiterating that receiving the TAC packet in advance would greatly assist him in researching the Applications in order to report an accurate assessment of the trees to the Commissioners.

Discussion of new organizational system for record keeping

Mr. Ryan reported that Mr. Draper and Ms. Levine are working on updating the record keeping system for tree work that was started by Ms. Burgmuller. Mr. Ryan suggested that a copy of the updated report be part of the TAC packet each month.

Report from Mr. Vukelich

- Nine Ash trees should be treated for Emerald Ash Borer.
- Eleven stumps were removed. It was noted that stump grinders do not remove debris.
- Mr. Vukelich installed a new tree pit at 130 East 2nd Street.
- Mr. Vukelich suggested that the “Code Enforcement Corner” in The Crier be updated.
- Six newly planted street trees on Delaware Street that were judged to be a safety hazard for blocking stop signs were “flush cut” with a chain saw. Two trees were 20’ from the stop sign, two were 40’ from the stop sign, and two were 60’ from the stop sign. “Flush cutting” is the removal of all branches on the street side of the tree down to the trunk. During discussion it was noted that the TAC was not consulted prior to the trees being flush cut. Mr. Vukelich recommended that the trees be removed. He added that he has already received a call from Delaware Forestry. A discussion of flush cutting will be added to the October TAC Agenda.

Mr. Lehr stated that the trees at Penn Farm designated for The Read House will be planted this fall. He noted that the remaining trees must be planted this spring or they will die. Mr. Lehr added that there are no trees on order for the spring at this time; however, if TAC can give him a list of trees they want by the October meeting he will try to get them ordered for the spring. Mr. Ryan will discuss trees for spring order with Mr. Vukelich.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

- Mr. Gross suggested that TAC send a letter of appreciation to Mr. Vukelich.
- Mr. Gross noted that the huge tree on Brylgon Avenue was cut down and asked if TAC had any information about it. Ms. Reign stated that if the tree was cut down it must belong to the property owner. Ms. Suskie stated that the Code states that all trees planted on public land belong to the City and are designated as “street trees”.
- Mr. Gross suggested that TAC communicates more closely with the City.

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 Ms. Riehl. The motion was unanimously passed and the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer