

MINUTES
City of New Castle Tree Advisory Commission
May 6, 2024 – 5:00 p.m.
1 Municipal Boulevard

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

Also Present: 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

A motion to approve the April 8, 2024, minutes as presented was made, seconded and unanimously passed.

Public Comment

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

Mr. Gross asked if the TAC could make a request to City Council that the Beautification Committee be reinstated in order to put seasonal plantings in the cement planters. Mr. Benson stated that the seasonal plantings were done with donations and volunteer labor. Mr. Benson added that the idea of adding a sub-committee is part of the discussion TAC will have in connection with its budget request.

Old Business

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

Mr. Benson stated that with the help of Mr. Lehr's professional opinion, the TAC voted to have this tree trimmed. However, the property owner made a request to the City Administrator to have the tree removed, after discussing the matter with Mr. Delgado it was decided to remove the tree. The Public Works staff will do the work.

A motion was made by Mr. Savitch to approve the removal and replacement of a tree located at 912 Clayton Street, as per the decision from the City. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

Mr. Vukelich opined that if the decision of the TAC is changed by the City, it would be reasonable that a representative from the City should present its case to the Commission at the next scheduled meeting. Mr. Vukelich also noted that there did not seem to be a plan for the replacement of the tree in the City's decision. During discussion Mr. Lehr noted that there are no trees available to replace the removed tree; and the Commission members concurred that the motion should be for removal of the tree only. Mr. Savitch amended his motion.

A motion was made by Mr. Savitch to approve the removal of a tree located at 912 Clayton Street, as per the decision from the City. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

STATUS: A motion to approve removal of the tree by Public Works was passed.

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

Mr. Benson stated that Public Works began the removal of the subject tree on May 6th.

STATUS: Work is being completed. The application can be closed.

2024-03 – Mr. Cuenca – 1011 Washington Street

Mr. Walker stated that after researching the application, he learned that the Crepe Myrtles are actually located on State property.

Mr. Vukelich noted that he spoke with Mr. Bergstrom, who informed him that the State owns the property 35 feet from the center line of the road toward properties on either side. Mr. Vukelich also noted that he may have misspoken at the last meeting when he stated the Crepe Myrtles were planted by the City.

Mr. Benson stated that no motion was needed, and that the minutes reflect that the property is State property. Mr. Savitch will measure the road from the center line 35' toward Mr. Cuenca's property to verify that the Crepe Myrtles are on State property, and inform Mr. Cuenca of his findings.

STATUS: Mr. Savitch will verify ownership of the Crepe Myrtles and if it is found that they are on State property, he will notify Mr. Cuenca.

2024-05 – Ron Vukelich – 605 Delaware Street

Mr. Delgado informed Mr. Benson that Public Works staff can remove the tree as soon as approval from TAC is received.

A motion to approve removal of a London Plane tree that is pushing up the sidewalk and is growing into the wires and the sewer located at 605 Delaware Street was made by Mr. Savitch. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

STATUS: Mr. Benson will notify Mr. Delgado that the TAC approved removal of the subject tree. The application can be closed.

Brandywine Valley Services

Mr. Benson stated that the work approved to be done has not yet been done; and he is not certain that Brandywine Valley Services has been contacted to do the work. Mr. Benson opined that the following tree work should be tabled until the budget issue is resolved.

Tree work at:

- 21 Holcomb Lane – Application 2023-34
- 111 Brylgon Avenue
- 510 West 11th Street – Application 2023-25
- 907 block of Gray Street
- 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)

A motion to table work to be done by Brandywine Valley Services was made by Mr. Savitch. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

STATUS: The motion was tabled to the June meeting pending resolution of the budget issue.

New Business

Application 2024-06 – Crystal and David Walker – 219 East 2nd Street

An application was submitted to prune a Cherry tree at 219 East 2nd Street that is damaging the property owner's house.

Mr. Savitch stated that he will inspect the tree. Mr. Benson stated that the tree is in need of pruning.

A motion to have the City evaluate a Cherry tree at 219 East 2nd Street for pruning was made by Ms. Riehl. The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and unanimously carried.

STATUS: The tree will be evaluated by the City for pruning.

Application 2024-07 – Trustees of the New Castle Common – 5th Street side of 424 Delaware Street

An application was submitted for the removal and replacement of a large tree at the 5th Street Library. The roots are breaking out through the curb and breaking up and raising the street asphalt, and the leaf canopy is overhanging the Library roof drains, clogging the drains and causing rain water runoff to back up into the building.

Mr. Baldini, representing the Trustees, explained the problem. Mr. Benson concurred that the tree should be removed and replaced.

A motion was made to have Public Works staff remove a large tree at the 5th Street Library, 424 Delaware Street, by Mr. Benson. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

STATUS: TAC approved the removal of a large tree at 424 Delaware Street by Public Works. The application can be closed.

Application 2024-08 – Ron Vukelich – 5th Street Library

The application submitted by Mr. Vukelich is a duplicate of Application 2024-07.

STATUS: Duplicate of Application 2024-07. Application 2024-08 can be closed.

Application 2024-09 – Patty O'Brien – 6th Street and Tremont

An application was submitted to have a tree at 6th and Tremont Streets removed and replaced.

Mr. Benson provided background on the request. Mr. Benson recommended that the application be tabled to the June meeting to give TAC members an opportunity to inspect and evaluate the tree.

A motion to table Application 2024-09 to provide time for TAC members to inspect and evaluate the tree was made by Mr. Benson. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

STATUS: Application 2024-09 was tabled to the June meeting.

Member Comments/Discussion

Grant Funding – Mr. Walker reported that he researched Federal funding for the TAC. The USDA Forrester Service has a program called Urban Community Forrester Program that is dedicated to enhancing the urban canopy. The Federal grant period closed in March, and the grants are offered every three years. The TAC is eligible for the grant and can apply in 2027. Mr. Savitch noted that he sent an email to Senator Coons and is waiting for a response. Mr. Benson noted that Taryn Davidson is also a contact for funding. During discussion Mr. Benson noted that the TAC received State funding last year and must wait one year before they can apply again.

Caltapa Tree – Mr. Benson stated that the State inspected and measured the Caltapa tree at 117 East 2nd Street and unofficially assured the TAC that it is the biggest Caltapa Tree in the State of Delaware. They recommended that a core sample be made on the tree, which will cost approximately \$1,600.00. During discussion Mr. Benson recommended that TAC petition the City for funds to pay for the core sample. It is likely that the Caltapa tree will be included in the Big Trees of Delaware book.

A motion was made to propose that the City pay for a core sample of the historic Catalpa Tree at 117 East 2nd Street by Mr. Benson. The motion was seconded by Ms. Riehl and unanimously carried.

Tree Inventory – Ms. Riehl asked for an explanation of the purpose of the Tree Inventory. Mr. Benson noted that it is primarily to identify trees that need to be watered. He added that the goal is to have a map of all trees in the city. Mr. Benson addressed several discrepancies in the Inventory that Ms. Riehl found.

Tree Advisory Commission
May 6, 2024

Proposed TAC Budget – Mr. Benson distributed and reviewed the TAC Annual Budget Request. Mr. Benson asked the members to review the proposed request and inform him of any edits and/or additions. Mr. Lehr noted that the cost of the trees was missing from the request. Mr. Benson noted that based on feedback from several garden professionals, the cost to refresh the 22 cement planters three times during the season is approximately \$2,000.00.

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

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Benson and seconded by Mr. Savitch. The motion was unanimously carried and the meeting adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich
City Stenographer