

CHATHAM BOROUGH SHADE TREE COMMISSION
 March 25, 2021 7:30 p.m.

Chairman Colleen Truppo called this Regular meeting of the Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. This was a virtual meeting. All Commissioners and the Recording Secretary were present by way of Zoom.

Names	Present	Absent
Colleen Truppo, Chrmn.	X	
Kristy Chmura, Vice Chrmn.	X	
Fran Drew	X	
George Sweetin	X	
Dean Wilson	X	
John Tortorella	X	
Patrick Florentino	X	
Beverly Klepper		X
Council Member Karen Koronkiewicz	X	
Liz Holler, Recording Secretary	X	

Public Comments

There were none.

Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

Mr. Sweetin made a motion to adopt the February 25, 2021 Shade Tree Commission minutes. Vice Chrmn. Chmura seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. The minutes of February 25, 2021 were approved as submitted.

Annual Report & Community Forestry Management Plan

Chrmn. Truppo reminded Commissioners that the STC has to do an annual report each year with the State of New Jersey. She is working on that project. As part of this report, every five years the Commission has to do a Community Forestry Management Plan. A waiver was given last year for this Management Plan because of Covid. Chrmn. Truppo has reached out to the State to see if the waiver was still in place. She has also reached out to John Linson, the Borough Arborist, to see if that Management Plan could be done. Chrmn. Truppo noted that Borough Administrator and DPW Director Tony Torello will be providing information for this report.

Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that the Community Forestry Management Plan, when completed and submitted, will help the Borough to obtain grants, like the Jersey Sustainability Grant.

Arbor Day – April 30, 2021

Chrmn. Truppo noted that the Commission should make sure that there is a Proclamation and a Resolution for Arbor Day organized in time for the April 26th Borough Council meeting. She has put in a request to the Borough Clerk’s office for these documents.

Chrmn. Truppo put up on the Zoom screen a proposed flyer that would give local students information on the Arbor Day contest. Vice Chrmn. Chmura has designed this lovely flyer. Chrmn. Truppo noted that Vice Chrmn. Chmura had come up with the idea for a video contest for students.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura explained her flyer for the contest. It will eventually be a digital flyer. Vice Chrmn. Chmura and her sister came up with the rules for the contest.

Vice Chrmn. brought up whether she should create a Gmail account to receive submissions for the contest. She had some suggestions on how the judgements could be made on the submissions, and the levels of prizes. The winners could be notified by email. Perhaps local business could be asked to donate gift certificates to the winners.

Mrs. Drew asked how would the contest information be sent to local students.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura was not sure, possibly the Board of Education members could help. She asked Commissioners what grade levels should be invited to participate in this competition.

Mrs. Drew felt the contest should be for the older students, grades 6 through 12.

Chrmn. Truppo and Mr. Sweetin suggested that the contest be open to the general public. Mr. Sweetin suggested the general public could then vote on the submissions.

Commissioners discussed ways to alert the public about this contest. The Community Forum was mentioned as one method of getting the word out.

Council Member Koronkiewicz suggested the contest be announced on the Chatham Borough website. She offered to mention the contest at the next Borough Council meeting. Tap into Chatham could also be contacted.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura and Chrmn. Truppo decided to open up the contest to the general public. Commissioners decided to open the contest to both Chatham Borough and Township. Vice Chrmn. Chmura offered to establish an email for this contest: arbortree@gmail.

Commissioners discussed the prize situation. The stores downtown could be approached to donate prizes. Commissioners also discussed the length of the contest. Vice Chrmn. Chmura would like the contest to go live on Arbor Day. Commissioners felt that the contest should not be held for a great length of time. Vice Chrmn. Chmura decided that the final submission date should be two weeks from Arbor Day. Commissioners made some minor tweaks to the contest flyer. They suggested the invitation should be extended to "All Chatham Students".

Chrmn. Truppo made a motion that the Commission approve Vice Chrmn. Chmura's Arbor Day contest and flyer. Mr. Sweetin seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. All Commissioners present voted aye.

Ken's Glen

Mrs. Drew noted that a while back the Mayor and Borough Council had rejected Topography's plans for Post Office Plaza. She and Vice Chrmn. Chmura have now created what they felt would be a better plan for the plaza. It was shown on the Zoom screen. A landscape architect has designed these new plans under the direction of Mrs. Drew and Vice Chrmn. Chmura.

Mrs. Drew explained that these plans would increase the amount of parking in the plaza area, thereby helping the Main Street businesses. The new green space will be created where the old post office building now stands. The existing permit parking spaces will remain; however, more will be added.

Mrs. Drew reported that copies of these plans were given to the Mayor and Borough Council about three months ago. They seemed to really like these plans.

Mrs. Drew also reported that members of the public have asked to look at these new plans up close. Unfortunately, members of the public cannot physically attend the Council meetings still because of the pandemic. So far the response from the public has been enthusiastic.

Mrs. Drew stated if the Commissioners approved of these plans, they could write a letter or email to the Mayor and Council giving a thumbs-up on these plans.

Chrmn. Truppo asked if anyone had contacted the property owner of the post office plaza.

Mrs. Drew answered no, no contact has been made to the property owner at the moment. She answered that she has heard "hearsay" that this plaza property is worth \$2 million. Mrs. Drew didn't believe that was true.

Mr. Tortorella asked if this area was covered by the Post Office Plaza Redevelopment Plan.

Mrs. Drew answered yes.

After further discussion, Vice Chrmn. Chmura clarified that these plans are really an idea to present to the Mayor and Council when the times comes, when redevelopment discussions begin again. She pointed out that she and Mrs. Drew just wanted to share these ideas to the rest of the Commission. An effort has been made to keep the small-town appeal of Chatham, create green space, and increase the parking situation.

Mrs. Drew noted that she had sent copies of the plans to the Chatham Historical Society.

Mrs. Drew explained these plans would create a really nice park that would express gratitude to people who have given their time to Chatham; without holding a public position.

Mrs. Drew reported that members of the Chatham Historical Society has seen these plans. They seemed happy with the plans. Mrs. Drew has then urged them to contact the Mayor and Borough Council of their approval.

Chrmn. Truppo asked Council Member Koronkiewicz what, if anything was happening, with the Post Office plaza redevelopment plan.

Council Member Koronkiewicz answered that the Post Office Redevelopment Plan has been put on hold since Covid began. She noted that the original plans submitted by the developer had not been well received. Council Member Koronkiewicz did not think the Borough will buy the plaza property. She didn't feel the Borough could afford it.

Mrs. Drew felt the money could be raised if everyone likes these latest plans. There are organizations on the State and national level that could probably contribute.

Chrmn. Truppo urged Commissioners, if they feel so inclined, to please write the Mayor and Borough Council Members that they approve of these latest plans. There is a lot of lovely green space in these plans. Chrmn. Truppo thanked Mrs. Drew and Vice Chrmn. Chmura for sharing these plans with Commissioners.

Borough Tree Ordinance discussion

Chrmn. Truppo noted that Mrs. Drew had sent Commissioners a copy of the Jackson Twp. Tree ordinance recently.

Chrmn. Truppo put the Borough Code up on the Zoom screen, specifically the section focusing on Borough Shade trees protection and preservation. This code language includes the section regarding the removal of trees on private property.

Mrs. Drew felt that the Shade Tree Commission should be in charge of both public and private trees. She pointed out that the Shade Tree Commissions in Summit, Millburn, Maplewood and Montclair are in charge of both public and private trees. She felt Chatham Borough should also be in charge of private trees.

Mrs. Drew reported that in her research of tree removal permits, for over a period of four years, 1,000 trees had been removed on private property. She noted that in the last six months, two magnificent trees were removed on Inwood Road. One of the trees, an evergreen, was removed by the property owner because he was afraid it would damage his garage. Mrs. Drew said the evergreen was nowhere near his garage.

Mrs. Drew felt that the Shade Commission should be looking at these permits being submitted for private tree removals and decide which ones to approve.

Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that the Shade Tree Commission does not have a full-time forester. Also, she felt it was not appropriate for volunteers, like the Shade Tree Commissioners to tell residents not to remove trees on their private property.

Mr. Tortorella agreed with Chrmn. Truppo's point. In reviewing the Jackson Twp. tree ordinance, that type of power or discretion is vested in a tree specialist who is appointed by the Mayor and was paid a salary. The tree specialist decides whether or not a tree can be removed. Mr. Tortorella wasn't sure if the Commission was in the position to hire and pay a qualified person, or does the Borough already have someone who is making these calls on private trees.

Council Member Koronkiewicz said that would be Tony Torello, Director of Public Works. She suggested a task force could be formed to go through review the tree removal permits.

Mrs. Drew pointed out that the Borough had John Linson.

Chrmn. Truppo answered that the Borough still had Mr. Linson, the arborist. He is the escalation point when a homeowner disputes a tree inspection done by Mr. Torello. Mr. Linson will do a written report on his own inspection, in order to give documentation to the Borough.

Mrs. Drew still would like to see someone from the Shade Tree Commission review the tree removal permits that are submitted to Borough Hall.

Mr. Sweetin emphasized that the Shade Tree Commission has responsibility and authority over trees planted in the public rights-of-way. He drew a line at the Commission having control over trees on private property. Mr. Sweetin related his experiences in Millburn regarding shade trees.

Council Member Koronkiewicz suggested that the current permit process be stricter about the replacement of trees that are removed, rather than hiring another Borough employee. Mr. Sweetin pointed out that the Commission should enforce what already exists.

Mr. Sweetin noted that the Commission should also make sure that when construction is going on in town, the root systems of the trees are not disturbed. That situation should be included in the Borough Code.

Council Member Koronkiewicz and Chrmn. Truppo discussed a much stronger enforcement be followed for tree protection, for instance the replacement of trees that were removed. Perhaps the tree escrow matter could be made stronger.

Mr. Sweetin commented that Mr. Torello did an outstanding job when it came to trees and additional Public Works responsibilities.

Council Member Koronkiewicz brought up the possibility of increasing the tree permit fee. She also recommended a task force or subcommittee be formed to consider ways to make this tree permit process/requirements more robust.

Regarding the ordinances from the neighboring towns, Vice Chrmn. Chmura felt that it was really the city forester who has the control over private trees. If it's an historic or specieman tree, the city forester brings the matter to the Shade Tree Commission, which serves as an advisory board. However, most of the time it's the forester who enforces the private tree matters.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura agreed with the earlier points made, that a better effort be made about preserving the local tree canopy. She agreed that there are times when trees are taken down arbitrarily; however, some trees are really sick, and it is hard to tell. In order to follow what the other neighboring town ordinances require, Chatham Borough would have to hire a forester.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura clarified that John Linson has never been a full-time employee of Chatham Borough.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura agreed with Council Member Koronkiewicz’s recommendation to tighten up the enforcement of the tree removal permits. If a matter arises concerning an historic tree or specimen tree on a private property, Mr. Torello could bring the situation to a Shade Tree Commission meeting.

Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that much of the Shade Tree Commission’s budget is devoted to the annual tree plantings, as much as possible. Some money was saved this year because DPW helped with the actual planting. There is the option of cutting back on the tree planting program in order to pay for a tree certified person.

Regarding appearances of trees to be inspected, Mr. Sweetin pointed out that a tree make look great on the outside; however, trees have been known to die from the inside out. Sometimes there is a lack of good quality wood exists.

Mrs. Drew discussed a publication called “Laws for New Jersey Trees” and she gave their views on what a Borough tree would be considered. Mrs. Drew felt that thousand more trees will be lost in the years to come in the Borough. She strongly urged that the Commission consider controlling trees on private property as five towns to the east of Chatham Borough do.

Commissioners discussed what motion(s) could be made on this matter. Several suggestions were made. Most Commissioners agreed that the STC does not have control over private trees, and that it should remain so. Mr. Tortorella pointed out that it would be up to the Borough itself to give the Commission authority over private trees. That STC on its own cannot make that happen.

Mrs. Drew made a motion that the Shade Tree Commission ask the Mayor and Borough Council to give the Commission authority over private trees.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura seconded the motion.

A Roll Call vote was taken:

Mr. Sweetin	-	no
Mr. Tortorella	-	no
Mrs. Drew	-	yes
Vice Chrmn. Chmura	-	no
Mr. Florentino	-	no
Chrmn. Truppo	-	no

The motion did not pass.

Chrmn. Truppo brought up an earlier motion made by Vice Chrmn. Chmura that the Shade Tree Commission should work with the Borough on improving enforcement on shade tree protection and preservation.

After further discussion, a motion was made that the Shade Tree Commission will come up with recommendations to improve enforcement for shade tree protection and preservation. Chrmn. Truppo seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Sweetin	-	yes
Mr. Tortorella	-	yes
Mrs. Drew	-	yes
Vice Chrmn. Chmura	-	yes
Chrmn. Truppo	-	yes
Patrick Florentino	-	yes

The motion passed.

Chrmn. Truppo suggested this matter be re-visited at next month's Commission meeting. She suggested that in the meantime, Commissioners could study the section on Tree Protection and Preservation in the Borough Code. They should bring any questions to the next meeting. If Commissioners came up with recommendations, Council Member Koronkiewicz could forward them on to Borough Administrator Steve Williams and Mr. Torello, the DPW Director and Shade Tree Enforcement Officer.

At 8:35 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission Meeting will be held on Thursday, April 22, 2021, 7:30 p.m. It will be a virtual meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler
Recording Secretary