

CHATHAM BOROUGH SHADE TREE COMMISSION
 April 22, 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	

Chrmn. Truppo read aloud the Mission Statement of the Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission.

Public Comment

There was none.

Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

Mr. Tortorella made a motion to adopt the March 25, 2021 STC meeting minutes as amended. Council Member Koronkiewicz seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. The March 25, 2021 STC minutes were approved as amended.

Discussion Items

Tree Planting Issues

Chrmn. Truppo reported that a meeting had been held on March 30th with Borough Administrator Steve Williams, DPW Director Tony Torello, Council Member Koronkiewicz, and Borough Zoning Official & Borough Engineer Vince DeNave concerning this topic.

At this meeting, it was discussed the tree plantings that had been done this past fall by the Shade Tree Commission and the DPW. Some of the homeowners were not happy with the plantings done on their Borough rights-of-way. Either they didn't like the species that had been selected for them, or they just did not like having a tree planted in the first place.

To deal with this problem, a suggestion had been made that a notice/letter be sent to homeowners reminding them of the STC planting process. Chrmn. Truppo reviewed how the Tree Service

Request Form was processed, starting with the homeowner filling out the form and the Borough then adding the request to the waiting list for tree plantings to be done in the fall.

Chrmn. Truppo read aloud the initial message send to the homeowner after they have sent in their Tree Request Form to the Borough:

“Thank you for your interest in having a Borough Shade Tree planted. Your completed Tree Request Form will be added to our 2021 Planting List. We do one planting each year in the fall. Please note that the Shade Tree Commission has full authority over planting trees on Borough property. Shade Tree Commission in conjunction with the DPW and the tree nursery company will select the appropriate street tree species and location to be planted near your home. The Shade Tree Commission cannot guarantee that a particular species request will be planted. All trees will be planted in the grassed area in the front of your property, near the curb, which is the property’s right-of-way and is considered Borough property. If you request a tree, please take care of it and water it regularly so you may enjoy it for many years to come.” Chrmn. Truppo added that there will be words to the effect, that the homeowner will be sent additional information as it gets closer to the actual planting date.

Chrmn. Truppo said hopefully this message will help avoid some of the misunderstandings from the homeowners that the Commission and the DPW encountered when planting trees this past fall. She noted that Mr. Torello, DPW Director, approved of this message and asked that the homeowner be reminded that they should water and care for the new tree.

Mrs. Klepper asked Chrmn. Truppo how does the Commission handle someone who rejects a tree planting. Sometimes people change their minds or have other reasons, like moving away.

Chrmn. Truppo answered that if there is enough time, the request will just be removed.

Mr. Sweetin brought up the situation where there is a Borough right-of-way and a tree planting will be installed. He recommended that a careful decision be made of whether to plant a shade tree or a smaller tree in the right-of-way. You should avoid planting the wrong tree in the wrong spot. The site conditions of the planting area should be taken into consideration.

Chrmn. Truppo and Mr. Sweetin discussed what wording should be done to clarify that the Shade Tree Commission cannot provide the specific tree the homeowner wants. Many times it depends on what the tree nursery has in stock at the time and what the site conditions are on the right-of-way.

Mr. Tortorella had a question on demand vs. supply for these tree plantings. He suggested if the supply is limited to just one year, just skip over the homeowner who is unhappy about a tree being planted and give the tree to a homeowner who is still patiently on the waiting list.

Chrmn. Truppo explained what happened with last fall’s planting program. Since the Public Works Department was helping with the actual plantings, and not the tree farm, the Commission was able to purchase additional trees. Another plus, was that the DPW knew of areas in town, that have lost trees and would be excellent places for new trees.

Chrmn. Truppo said she had asked Mr. Torello if the Tree Planting programs were tightened up a little more, enforcement-wise, could the DPW please help again for this coming fall's tree planting program. There's a good chance more trees could then be purchased and planted.

Mrs. Drew felt that homeowners should be made aware, by a letter, that their public trees are in a public place. They don't own this public place, the right-of-way. The tree planted in that public place is a benefit to all of Chatham Borough, not just for their own property. Mrs. Drew felt that Commissioners could come up with a pleasant, firm letter to remind residents about this fact.

Chrmn. Truppo will be emailing the draft letter to Commissioners, if they could please email her any suggestions and comments they may have. She could then offer these comments at the next meeting with Mr. DeNave, Mr. Torello, and Mr. Williams.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that Mr. DeNave will be reviewing the permit process for tree removals proposed for construction projects. Applicants going before the Zoning or Planning Boards, must complete certain packets. Mr. DeNave wants to make sure that the applicants, who are proposing projects that involve public trees, know they are required to come before the Shade Tree Commission.

Chrmn. Truppo noted that Council Member Koronkiewicz will be looking into the fees established by neighboring towns for private tree removals. Chrmn. Truppo will ask John Linson what were the best practices followed by other towns regarding these items.

Ways to increase the enforcement on Shade Tree protection & preservation

Mrs. Drew suggested two or more Commissioners be in charge of approving and denying the permits that are being submitted for private tree removal.

Mrs. Drew reviewed the research she had done regarding tree removal permits that had been submitted to the Borough to remove private trees. She reviewed some of the reasons that residents give for removing the trees.

Mrs. Drew stated that John Linson, the Borough Arborist, could handle this project with the private tree removal permits. It would only take 3 or 4 hours a week. The permit fees would take care of his salary. Mrs. Drew felt that many more Chatham trees could be saved with this process.

Mr. Tortorella brought up that at the last meeting, the Commission had made a motion to on that process for private trees. The motion was denied. He didn't feel the Commission should spend more time discussing it.

Mrs. Drew asked if someone from the Commission could at least take charge of reviewing the tree removal permits being submitted. She felt too many of these permits were being approved.

Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that Tony Torello is the Borough's tree enforcement officer.

Mr. Tortorella referred the Commission to the tree removal procedures as stated in the Borough Code. He focused on the section stating that the Tree Enforcement Officer can consult the town forester or other persons that may be necessary for advice.

Mr. Florentino had some suggestions for improving the permitting process. He referred Commissioners to the Borough Code, specifically to the compensatory re-planting of trees that is required. To Mr. Florentino, it sounded like this type of re-planting would be if a homeowner didn't have a strong reason for removing a tree. Possibly one way to put more teeth to the ordinance, would be for the Borough to require compensatory tree re-planting for ALL tree removals. Maybe there could be a requirement that a donation be made towards the planting of a new tree in town.

Mr. Tortorella agreed, saying that if there is any argument about whether a tree should be removed, the compensatory re-planting of a tree should be a priority.

Mr. Florentino pointed that residents who definitely have a sick or dangerous tree should not be discouraged from asking that the tree be removed. Perhaps the permit fee could be waived for those applicants who will definitely plant a tree replacement. Another incentive is to, if the Commission's budget allows it, is to offer to plant a new tree on the homeowner's property to replace the proposed removed tree.

Chrmn. Truppo said she would talk with Mr. Torello and see how much money is in the tree escrow fund. If money is going into that fund, it would be available at some point for planting additional shade trees.

Mr. Florentino asked if the fine for illegally removing a tree has been imposed on anyone in Chatham. Are these people actually being fined \$2,000 or significantly less?

Chrmn. Truppo said she would check on that. She believed that a fine had recently been imposed on a builder for 95 No. Summit Ave. She will find out what was the total amount of that fine.

Council Member Koronkiewicz answered that the fine is \$350 a tree. Also, a specific tree species will be required for planting.

Chrmn. Truppo thanked Mr. Florentino and Mr. Tortorella for their input.

Mr. Sweetin suggested that if a homeowner or developer is unable to put the tree on their property, they could make a donation to have a tree planted in another location.

Arbor Day – 2021

Chrmn. Truppo reported that Vice Chrmn. Chmura has now organized the rules for the Arbor Day contest. Information on the contest has been sent to the local schools.

Chrmn. Truppo also reported that two trees are being planted on Arbor Day. One by the Chatham PBA and another by the Chatham Borough Fire Department. These plantings will be done in memory of two First Responders who have passed. They have contacted Mr. Sweetin asking for his recommendations in picking out the trees. These two organizations will be paying for these memorial trees. However, the STC has some money that would be available for any overages for these tree purchases. The PBA tree will be planted at Memorial Park. The Fire Dept. tree will be planting a tree near the firehouse, outside of the Commons Room. DPW will help with the actual planting of these trees on Arbor Day. Mr. Sweetin will be prepping the planting sites the day before Arbor Day. Chrmn. Truppo thanked Mr. Sweetin for all his work helping with these memorial tree plantings.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that a memorial service will be held for Ken Chmura, a member of the Commission, at St. Patrick Church on April 6th. She had spoken to the Chmura family about the Commission's desire to plant a tree in memory of Ken. Vice Chrmn. Chmura and her family would like the memorial tree planting be done at Garden Park. Chrmn. Truppo said she had checked the site where the tree will be planted and there is still a great deal of work going on. When all the work is done, the tree will be planted. Following Mr. Torello's suggestion, Chrmn. Truppo will touch base with Janice Piccolo about the status of this park work and the future tree planting. A ceremony will be held when the tree is planted.

Mr. Tortorella asked Mr. Sweetin what would be the species of the memorial trees for the Fire Department and the PBA.

Mr. Sweetin said that he had decided on a Kousa dogwood trees, which bloom in late June. The flowering will be purplish, like the bunding put up on the firehouse when a firefighter passes away.

Before adjourning Mr. Tortorella referred the Board to Section 314-3 of the Borough Code. He questioned whether the STC had granted any blanket permits to utility companies to allow them to prune trees for line clearance. If these permits were granted, for what terms? Mr. Tortorella suggested Commissioners look over this section and consider how they want to deal with the utilities in the future.

Mr. Sweetin explained why the public utilities have rights-of-way around certain trees. It's usually for safety reasons. If the utility has too many demands/regulations on them regarding these trees, and a power outage occurs, it will take that much longer to get the power back up and running again.

Mr. Tortorella stated he understood Mr. Sweetin's point. He just wanted to know why the STC was given this authority for blanket permits, and was curious whether this authority had been implemented.

Mr. Sweetin explained that the public utilities have a four year maintenance cycle that they have to follow. The public utilities are exempt from certain ordinance standards. They try very hard not to remove any trees. They just trim a certain percentage. Mr. Sweetin named the 5 municipal entities who must sign off on a public utilities tree trimming project. Many of these entities

know how difficult life becomes when a power failure kicks in due to fallen trees and/or branches.

Chrmn. Truppo suggested that Mr. Tortorella's topic of concern be listed on next month's agenda.

On other matters, Mr. Tortorella brought up the planting project that had been done a while back, south of Shepard Kollock Park. Some of the plastic protector stakes still remain for the trees that failed to come up. Hopefully, some help could be found to remove these stakes, which will eventually become litter.

Chrmn. Truppo said she would reach out to Bob Weber, one of the local Scout leaders, to see if some Scouts would help with these removals. The Scouts had expressed an interest in this project last fall. Chrmn. Truppo said she could probably tag the stakes ahead of time to indicate which ones need to be removed.

At 8:52 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, May 27, 2021, 7:30 p.m. It will be a virtual meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler
Recording Secretary