

Morristown Shade Tree Commission (STC13) Meeting Minutes

Monthly Meeting

November 12, 2013

7:00 pm meeting, Room 201

Morristown Town Hall

Members present:

Tina Wahlstrom, Chair

Chantal Diedrich, Secretary

Karl Roettger

Louise Witt

Members absent:

Joe Torres

Kristin Ace

Michael Rockland

Anne Bertucci

Guest: Rich Wolowitz

- I. Roll call**
- II. Minutes**-none ready for approval tonight
- III. Statement of Compliance with NJ Open Public Meetings Act (Sunshine Law)** made by Tina at 7:05.
- IV. Meeting with DPW:** Tina briefed us about the Nov 4 meeting with Troy, George, Kathleen Margiotta, Jeff Hartke, and Rich Fernicola (from DPW). Michael Rockland, Kristin Ace, Ann Bertucci, and Tina (from STC) attended also. Troy asked about the STC and what it was for. Tina explained. All acknowledged that tensions had been building between STC and the DPW, and that it was counter-productive to our town and the trees. Tina explained that the spreadsheet is to be the blueprint tree work; it tracks requests made by residents or observations made by the STC, DPW or the arborist. Once Rich W. has assessed the tree's condition (Friday each week) he will send the spreadsheet out and then it is up to DPW to do that work based on their internal processes. Only emergencies can be addressed without notifying Rich W./STC first. The STC would like to capture when the work has been completed. Rich F. stated he would add this information to the spreadsheet. Troy and George invited anyone from STC to spend a day or part of a day with them. Tina noted that there may be an issue with the understanding of some commonly used terms such as "topping off a tree" and "pruning". To avoid misunderstandings these terms should be defined so all involved are using the same language. The activities at Tracey Park were also discussed. Jeff Hartke was upset about the emails he has been getting. Kathleen was also upset since her choice of shrubs had been approved by Rich W. Tina explained that STC

never got any final plans for review and approval despite frequent requests. When residents and members observed work being done we were surprised. TW explained that it is important that the process be followed; that is that all plantings and removals be approved by the STC prior to execution of the plan. Rich W. should be asked for input but that is not the same as having the plan approved by the STC.

It was evident that everyone has the best intentions for the community forest. All felt this meeting was long overdue and productive.

V. arcGIS: Louise reported that she learned at the NJ Shade Tree Federation Conference (October 26) during a discussion with a NJ State Forester, that we should not expect our Tree Crew (2 full time employees) to use the arcGIS system to update the tree inventory. It is a bigger job than we realize, and they would need support to get this done while at the same time being responsible for maintaining the public trees.

VI. Report from Rich W. (arborist): Rich is caught up on the spreadsheet, and wants to work on planning the spring planting, such as getting some trees ordered. He wants to divide his time allowing half of his time to do a “windshield survey” for hazard trees and learning the area’s trees. TW reminded him that we have a tree inventory completed in 2011 that has identified hazard trees. Rich has looked at the arcGIS system, and feels it is difficult to work with. Rich will also create a systematic approach for the pruning etc., such as starting with an area, and doing maintenance tree work for area. The goal is that every town tree gets attention every 3-5 years. This could be implemented once the hazards have been dealt with. The spreadsheet system is working well. When Troy and George are traveling around Morristown, and notice a tree that needs attention, they should put it on the spreadsheet. Rich can take a look at it, and put his recommendation down. The work they do should be based on the spreadsheet.

Tree Wells: Karl asked is it possible to enlarge tree wells for existing trees in town? How could this be done? Tina replied that we may make recommendations to the DPW to enlarge tree wells but we can’t ‘dictate’ that they be enlarged. Also, they have been enlarged as the sidewalks have been redone. Karl asked if the existing smaller wells could be opened up. TW responded that it is probably a bigger job than we expect, and may be very expensive. We all agreed this is an important matter to follow up on.

ACTION: TW to ask Jeff Hartke about expanding existing small tree wells.

Core Soil Samples: Rich W. took 2 soil samples in town from empty tree wells and sent them to Rutgers for testing. The South Street sample (where trees have died), showed the pH is below 6. The optimum is 6.5 and it never should be higher. Rich wants to take an additional sampling to make sure the pH reading was accurate. The pH in the soil can be adjusted before replanting the wells if necessary.

Watering: Karl: How can we be sure the newly planted trees will get the care they need to survive? Rich talked about watering specs for the new trees and how the follow-up should take place.

Speedwell Ave tree planting update: Rich was at a tree planting at 2AM last night, to check on the Speedwell Ave. planting. He stated that they did a good job and will ask Jeff Hartke how the watering will take place.

South Street Pear trees: TW mentioned that George (Tree Crew) wants to prune trees on South Street again. This came up at the Nov 4 meeting. TW would like Rich W to follow up since it was unclear about which Pear trees he intended to trim, and many of them have been significantly trimmed in the recent past. Rich W. will ask him about this on Friday.

Gmail account: Rich W. agreed that the STC could use his gmail account for resident requests. The town can attach his gmail account: morristowntrees@gmail.com to the town website. Rich will respond to the emails and phone calls, but if it gets to be too much we will revisit the process. Joe is working on a form to attach to the Town website so that residents can request tree work.

4 Tiffany: A public tree root is protruding up out of the ground on private property; the homeowner is upset because he said it damaged his mower. Rich wants to cut the root out with an ax, because it will not be harmful to the tree, and will keep it from growing up more. Right now it is only slightly raised but as it grows it could become a more significant problem.

VII. Spring Planting: Jeff H. is anxious to get the specs to order trees for the spring planting (South Street, Morris Ave., Washington Street and the beginning of Speedwell Ave). Rich had originally recommended a mixture of shade trees and ornamentals based on location but is now is looking for flowering trees based on the request from the STC. The STC would like to take aesthetics into account as well since many residents enjoy the spring blossoms. TW expressed concern that planting one type of tree would not be good for the overall vigor of the community forest. Rich W. pointed out that it is a very small number of trees (40) relative to the size of the overall forest (3,000) and therefore would not be an issue. Members of the STC expressed a desire to walk the streets with Rich while he considered various options. A field trip with Rich will be planned soon so that we can get the specs, approve them, and send them to Jeff.

VIII. Budget: Michael Rogers needs the STC budget (2014) by November 22. Louise provided some recommendations based on the recent budget exercise completed by the Environmental Commission. Louise suggested: Outreach and Education \$500, Arbor Day \$1000, training \$900. Professional dues \$100. Louise made a motion for a vote on this budget, Chantal seconded it, and all approved.

Action: TW will write up the budget and submit it to MR immediately

IX. Meeting adjourned: 8:40pm.