MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
June 14, 2023

Members Present: Chairman Peter Loughlin; Vice-Chair Richard Adams; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Members Michael Griffin, A. J. Dupere, Dennis Souto, Patricia Bagley, and Deborah Chag.

Members Excused: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley

Chairman Loughlin called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the May 10 meeting.

*Ms. Bagley moved to **approve** the May 10 minutes as amended, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 8-0.*

(**Note**: the amendments were to change South Cemetery to Hall Cemetery and to change the date of the next scheduled meeting).

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **Hall Cemetery Removals –** 24 Norway maples, 3 apples, 2 box elders, 2 cherries, 2 elms, 1 red oak.

Ms. Bagley said she walked the property with Sue Sterry of the Cemetery Committee and that a neighbor of the cemetery asked if the apple tree leaning over her property could stay. Mr. Wiater said he was fine with it. He said the trail might be in that area for access to the cemetery. Mr. Rice said flexibility was necessary to manage that space. Chairman Loughlin said he preferred that the tree come before the committee as a request for removal. It was further discussed. Ms. Sterry was present and said she got three estimates and that the RFP process would begin but that the Department of Public Works would make sure things were clear. Mr. Rice agreed. He said Mr. Wiater would be managing the property and would coordinate with the abutters to ensure that there would be proper access.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Ms. Bagley moved to **amend** the prior motion and recommend removal of the trees, except for the apple tree by the neighbor's fence. Mr. Souto seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 8-0.*

Note: a city resident (Lauren Wolf) was present to discuss the last tree removal item, Hislop Park, and it was moved, seconded, and approved to address that item next. (See page 3).

DRAFT

- **10 Merrimac Street (on Miller Ave)** – 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

The Committee discussed why several ash trees were being removed in the city. Mr. Dupere said when ash trees are infected, something chemical happens to the wood that makes it very weak. He said if the ash tree was full of insects, it should be removed. Mr. Rice said there was a reference to pest sites on the City website but that it needed to be updated.

Chairman Loughlin suggested at this point in the meeting that all the tree removal items relating to ash trees that had signs of EAB infestation be addressed as a group.

- **Miller Avenue** (across from United Methodist Church) – 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **87 Edmond Avenue** - 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **55 Edmond Avenue/Ruby** Street – 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **Haven Park** – 3 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **81 Cottage Street** – 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **195 Cass Street –** 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

- **649 State Street** – 1 ash, removal recommended by City. Tree is showing signs of EAB infestation.

Ms. Bagley moved to recommend removal of the 10 ash trees listed in the above addresses, ranging from 10 Merrimac Street to 649 State Street. Mr. Dupere seconded. The motion ***passed*** *by unanimous vote, 8-0.*

The topic of how to handle EAB infested trees was further discussed. Mr. Rice noted that there were many private ash trees and was concerned that citizens didn't understand how dangerous the situation could be. He said an outreach was planned that would be an opportunity to explain it to the community. Ms. Chag said the Garden Club might be able to educate citizens on ash trees and that she would look into it. She suggested that it would also be a good opportunity to post a sign on affected ash trees about why they were being removed.

- **245 Middle Street** – 1 zelkova, Portsmouth Housing Authority request, removal recommended by City. Tree has significant dieback and seam in the trunk on the backside. Pruning is an option, but suspect that the tree will continue to decline.

Mr. Wiater said the tree could be either pruned ore removed but that it would take as long to remove it as it would to prune it. He noted that the other half of the tree was still alive. Ms. Chag said she preferred that the tree be pruned, and it was further discussed. Mr. Wiater said the tree was big for the island space it was in.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to prune the zelkova and then leave it at Mr. Wiater's discretion as to whether it needed to be taken down. The motion was seconded and **passed** by a vote of 5-3.*

- **Hislop Park** (near the playground/third base line) – 2 Norway maples, 1 red pine, 1 white pine, City request. Removals recommended by City. Due to the recent oak failure at Hislop Park, would like you to consider four more removals. These trees, like the oak, had their grades backfilled on top of their root systems, presenting a hazard for individuals frequenting the playground and ballfield.

Mr. Wiater said the request for the removal of the four trees was in response to a recent oak failure, the cause of which was that the area was backfilled after a construction phase. He said it was better to get ahead of the situation before another tree failure occurred, especially given the park's vicinity to the field and playground. The resident Lauren Wolf was present and said there was a split tree on the path and asked if trees that looked like they would fall would be removed. Mr. Wiater said he would go to the site and check the trees. She asked if the wood chips from the removed trees could be spread on the trail. Mr. Rice asked if she wanted the residents or the City to spread the chips. Ms. Wolf said she was a member of the Garden Club and could also reach out to the neighbors. It was further discussed. Ms. Wolf asked if any of this year's 400 trees would be planted in Hislop Park. Mr. Wiater said those trees had already been planted but that the city planted trees every year and could plant some in Hislop Park next year. Ms. Wolf asked about the part of the park that was under the bridge. Mr. Rice said it was State property. He explained that there was debris that dropped into the middle of the park under the bridge and that the current design didn't provide a managed approach to stormwater. He said the State would address it and that the City didn't recommend putting a park into that space until some issues were resolved, like debris that occasionally dropped off the bridge. He said he might reach out to the Department of Transportation to ask them to address the drainage issues.

Another red pine and the split tree were added to the request for removal.

Chairman Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the trees, with an added red pine and the split tree that was requested for removal by the citizen Ms. Wolf. Ms. Bagley seconded. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 8-0.*

3. Update of Tree Planting for the City's 400th Anniversary

Mr. Wiater said all the trees were still being watered and monitored. He noted that out of the "400" trees, a few zelcovas failed and a few other trees were dead on arrival. Citizen Lisa Hagerty was present and asked if the City should be more careful about taking out established growth in a certain park near her. Mr. Rice said there was ponding in that area due to a recent construction project and that the developer agreed to run a drainage line to an existing drainage line, but the existing line collapsed. He said the best location for the new drainage line was far enough from the oak trees. He also noted that the City did not intentionally damage trees. It was further discussed.

4. Update on Commercial Alley and Other City Improvements

Chairman Loughlin discussed how the Commercial Alley improvements project had been in the planning stage for ten years, with significant work, coordination with utility companies, and input from three different City Councils and two different City administrations. He said a newspaper article seemed to dismiss all that work, and it was further discussed.

5. Update on Beech Leaf Disease and Other Threats

The item was tabled to the July meeting.

6. Old Business

Mr. Griffin said chemical treatment of four ash trees in the South Street Cemetery was being done and that other trees could be treated.

7. New Business

Mr. Dupere said there was an interest in planting a tree at the Coolidge Mansion.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, July 12, 2023

The meeting was **adjourned** at 9:03 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Recording Secretary