MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
October 11, 2023

Members Present: Chair Peter Loughlin; Vice-Chair Richard Adams; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Members Patricia Bagley, Michael Griffin, A. J. Dupere, Dennis Souto, and Deborah Chag (via Zoom).

Members Excused: None.

Also Present: Dave Desfosses, City of Portsmouth Construction Project Manager; Eric Eby, City of Portsmouth Traffic Engineer; Zach Cronin, Assistant City Engineer; Mark Batchelder, Panaway Manor Sidewalk Phase 2 Project Manager; and Phil Corbett of CMA Civil Engineers, engineer for the Willard Avenue Sewer Separation Project.

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

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the September 13 meeting.

*The minutes were unanimously **approved** as presented.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

***Note**: the Tree Request Removal items were not done in order of the agenda.*

337 Richards Ave: Swamp white oak that the homeowner is requesting to remove as it will allow for construction of a driveway on Richards Avenue. *(**Note**: this item was added to the original agenda).*

Shawn Creeley of 337 Richards Avenue was present and said he wanted to save a few trees including the swamp white oak, but because he had to get a variance from the Board of Adjustment to do an addition on his house, he had to put in a request to remove the swamp white oak. Mr. Rice recommended tabling the request until he could talk to the Planning Department to see why the decision to remove the tree was made. Assistant Mayor Kelley agreed, and it was further discussed. Chair Loughlin said he didn't see any justification for removing the trees at that point.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. Mr. Rice abstained from the vote.

*A Committee member (name of whom was not clear) moved to **deny** removal of the two trees, seconded by Ms. Bagley, because there was no justification for removing the trees. The motion **passed** by a unanimous vote of 9-0, with Mr. Rice abstaining from the vote.*

DRAFT

Greenleaf Ave at Peverly Hill Rd: 3 ash, poor condition, in various stages of decline. There are clear signs of EAB present. The healthiest looking tree has a severe lean and a basal cavity.

City resident Betsy Zender of 305 Peverly Hill Road said she was concerned that removing the three ash trees would remove the line of protection and shade for her horses. Mr. Wiater said two trees had dead tops and the other tree had a significant lean and some basal issues. He said there would also be road construction for a project on that side of the street and that the trees were under power lines. Mr. Rice said the City was working with the Department of Transportation to complete the final design and that it would take about two years to start construction. He said the City could replace the trees.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend **removal of** the three trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

Hillside Dr at Greenleaf Ave: 1 Silver maple, fair condition. This tree is causing a line-of-site issue, and no pruning is advisable as the main stems of the tree are what's causing the issue. Residents are concerned as the vehicles that use the road come off Lafayette and the bypass very quickly. Some structural defects exist.

Alice Carey of 236 Hillside Drive said the tree was recommended for removal for a better pedestrian environment and better visibility. She said she was against it because there were other solutions that could be employed without killing a healthy mature tree.

Eric Eby, City of Portsmouth Traffic Engineer, said the issue came before the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee and that the City had placed a speed feedback sign on Greenleaf Avenue and a pedestrian warning sign and would also put in flashing lights on the crosswalk at Lafayette Road. He said the tree's trunk blocked sightlines of cars coming from Lafayette Road. He said removing the tree would help the problem but probably not fix it because most of the cars sped. Ms. Carey asked if the project could be phased so that alternative solutions could be tried. Mr. Rice said there was a significant outcry in the neighborhood relative to safety. He said the ABC Buildings put up a fence to prohibit access as a cut-thru path and it pushed more pedestrian traffic to the intersection. He said the tree was healthy but it was a safety issue and he was in support of removing it. Pruning was discussed. Mr. Wiater said it might buy the City more time to prune the tree and might also allow more sightline clearance. Vice-Chair Adams said he owned property on Hillside Drive and that it was like playing Russian Roulette because exiting the north leg of Hillside Drive onto Greenleaf Avenue allowed for almost no sightline. He said it was lamentable that the ABVC Building closed off access for the children to get to school, forcing them to walk on Greenleaf Avenue. He recommended removing the tree because this is a real safety issue.

Resident Tracy Gibson (via Zoom, no address given) said she agreed with Ms. Carey that the tree should not be removed while the City was working on traffic calming measures.

Jeff Brody of 3 Hillside Drive (via Zoom) said he advocated getting the tree removed ten years ago because the tree's roots ruined his front property, affected his sewer system, and caused a sightline problem.

Jane Mitchell-Pate of 175 Hillside Drive (via Zoom) said she agreed with Mr. Brody.

The Committee moved and seconded to take the item out of order. The motion passed by unanimous vote, 10-0.

*Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to **postpone** the tree's removal for 90 days and prune it instead. Ms. Bagley seconded. The motion **passed** by a vote of 7-3, with Vice-Chair Adams, Mr. Rice, and Mr. Souto voting in opposition to the motion.*

88 Lincoln Ave: 1 Silver maple, fair condition. Recent storm damage has prompted this removal request. This large tree has some structural issues, such as fruiting bodies from a burl and large areas of included bark. The presence of water sprouts suggests stress, and there is a history of root damage as well as reduction pruning.

The owner Alex Greiner said his biggest concern was safety, noting that several of the tree's branches came down including a very large limb that damaged his fence. Mr. Wiater said a large root going toward the property was removed and a lot of pruning had been done. He said they could do more pruning, and it was further discussed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Ms. Bagley moved to recommend **removal** the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by a vote of 8-2, with Mr. Wiater and Vice-Chair Adams voting in opposition to the motion.*

33 Miller Ave: 1 ash, poor condition, in decline. There are clear signs of EAB present.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin moved to recommend **removal of** the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

41 Wibird St: 1 ash, poor condition, in decline. There are clear signs of EAB present.

George Haskell of 41 Wibird Street was present and asked what the selection process was for removing trees, which Mr. Wiater explained.

*Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. Mr. Rice moved to recommend **removal** the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

99 Willard St: 1 apple tree, poor condition.

Mr. Wiater said the tree had been in decline for a long time and recommended removal.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend **removal** of the tree, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

Wibird St at Orchard St: 1 chestnut, poor condition. This tree has a large cavity on one side of the trunk, and a large fruiting body out of an old wound on the other.

Mr. Wiater said the tree had a high potential for decay, and he recommended removing it.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin recommended **removal** of the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

99 Broad St: 1 pear, poor condition. A major limb recently failed out of this tree and should be removed given the species and current condition.

Mr. Wiater said a recent storm knocked out a significant portion of the tree and he recommended removal and replanting.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to **recommend** removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

Police Department (behind City Hall from Mt Vernon St): 1 crabapple, 2 arborvitae, fair condition. These trees are posing safety concerns as they have blocked, and will continue to block, security camera clearance unless removed. This is critical as the cameras are used to monitor vehicles and evidence storage areas; 1 Norway maple, poor condition, near parking on right hand side (pink ribbon).

Mr. Wiater said the request to remove the three trees was to keep the area open for the security cameras and because the Norway maple was failing.

*Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. Assistant Mayor Kelley moved to recommend **removal** of the four trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

PANAWAY MANOR SIDEWALK PHASE 2

- 26 Decatur Rd: 1 Norway maple, poor condition.
- 107 Colonial Dr: Norway maple
- 12 Whipple Ct: Norway maple
- 9 Whipple Ct: Norway maple
- 283 Decatur Rd: Norway maple
- 15 Mason Ave: Red maple
- 10 Mason Ave: Norway maple

David Desfosses introduced Mark Batchelder, project manager for the Panaway Manor Sidewalk Phase 2 project. Mr. Desfosses said positive feedback was received from the neighborhood for the sidewalks and the removal of six trees was necessary to complete the project. Mr. Batchelder said notices were sent to the affected homeowners with ideas for locations to plant new trees and with names of 5-6 tree species to choose from.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin moved to recommend **removal** of the trees, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

WILLARD AVE SEWER SEPARATION PROJECT

- 228 Willard Ave: 1 Norway maple
- 111 Willard Ave: 1 Norway maple
- 176 Willard Ave: 1 lilac
- 179 Willard Ave: 6 Norway maples, portion of rhododendron (pink flagging)
- 91 Orchard St: 1 zelkova
- 62 Orchard St: 2 Red maple

Resident Marcella Spruce of 228 Willard Avenue was present and asked what the timeline for the Norway Maple removal was. Zach Cronin, Assistant City Engineer, and he was also the project manager for the Willard Avenue sewer separation project. He explained that the contractor would remove the tree around the time the sidewalk excavation happened, sometime in 2024. Mr. Rice noted that there would be a pre-construction meeting that the residents could attend. Mr. Cronin said the City would try to replace all the trees. Project engineer Phil Corbett further explained the project.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend **removal** of the trees, seconded by Ms. Bagley. The motion **passed** by unanimous vote, 10-0.*

3. Update of Tree Planting for the City's 400th and 401st

The item was not discussed.

4. Old Business

There was no old business.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

Next meeting: Wednesday, November 8, 2023

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:21 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Minute Taker