

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
January 8, 2025**

Members Present: Chair Patricia Bagley; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Tree Supervisor/Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Members A. J. Dupere, Deborah Chag, and Scott McDermott

Members Excused: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley-Adams, Dennis Souto, and Michael Griffin

Chair Bagley called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the December 11 Meeting

The December 11 meeting minutes were **approved** as submitted.

2. Update on City's Ongoing Tree Maintenance and Planting Plans

Mr. Wiater said there were some projects that his staff had not gotten to because the weather was cold, but they had been doing stump grinding. He said they would also prune and remove as many trees as they could, weather permitting. He said he identified over 150 tree planting sites and would assign tree species selection for them. He said he would submit all the Dig Safe requests and put out door hangers in April before planting.

At this point in the meeting, Chair Bagley welcomed new member Scott McDermott. Mr. McDermott said he was a landscape designer and had a small landscape design business. He said he was impressed by Portsmouth's commitment to its trees and had seen the amazing things the City did in terms of the tree planting program and the follow-up care.

3. Tree Removal Requests

Note: 212 Miller Avenue and 186 Miller Avenue were addressed together.

- **212 Miller Avenue on Highland Street:** 1 white ash, fair condition, removal recommended by City. The tree is showing signs of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) infestation.
- **186 Miller Avenue on Highland Street:** 2 white ash, fair condition, removal recommended by City. The tree is showing signs of Emerald Ash Borer infestation.

Mr. Wiater said one ash tree was removed a month ago and that he saw three more ash trees with EAB infestations when he was in the area, one at 212 Miller Ave and two at 186 Miller Ave. He said the three trees were small and would be easy removals and that

other trees would be planted there. He said the trees were about 15 years old. He said new trees could be planted nearby in the spring.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend the removal of the three trees, seconded by Ms. Chag. The motion passed unanimously.* ~~(OBJ)~~

- **942 Middle Road:** 1 black walnut, fair condition, removal recommended by City. There is a large, spiraling wound starting from the southern base reaching about 15' tall. A cavity and decomposing wood exist where a large limb attaches to the trunk of the tree.

Mr. Wiater said he thought he could prune the walnut tree at first but said the odds of the large limb coming out in a windstorm was good. He said it would take less time to just remove the tree and plant another one. Ms. Chag asked what was planned for sidewalk removal in that part of Middle Road. Mr. Rice said nothing was planned. He said the Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan was being updated and the intent was to have a bicycle corridor down Middle Road, but sidewalk renovations were not part of it. He said the sidewalk was in good shape and that it was a bigger project that the master plan would drive. Ms. Chag noted that there were five or six stop lights that people coming off Route 95 encountered that were annoying to people and people still sped anyway. She said trees were traffic calming. She noted a few studies, one of which was a 46 percent decrease in crash rates along urban arteries and highway sites after landscape improvements were installed. She said another study showed that placing trees and planters on urban roadsides reduced mid-block crashes by 5-20 percent. She said making the road narrower could also help. She asked that the committee consider those options in the future instead of removing more trees. Mr. Rice said the road had a challenging width and configuration, so there were limited things to do for traffic calming. He said speed had been an issue on that road for several years and thought that they way to address the speed was to reconfigure the roadway to make it much narrower. He said that would force people into an uncomfortable situation as far as speeding. He said the challenges in the area were multifold and that planting trees would not be the panacea. He said that all the new street projects include trees but was glad that Ms. Chag brought up the issue.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to remove the black walnut tree, seconded by Mr. Rice. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **Langdon Park:** 1 Norway spruce, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree has been in decline for many years. Buttress roots on the north side of the tree are rotten, and the foliage is very thin throughout the canopy. An additional Norway spruce in Langdon Park will be removed because it is dead.

Mr. Wiater said one of the trees he tagged for removal was completely dead and felt that the other Norway spruce should also be removed. He said its foliage was very thin and there was still some activity further up the tree, but there was no grand recovery for the tree and the buttress root on the north side of the tree was soft. Mr. Rice asked if it was possible to leave 30-40 feet of the tree to be used as a habitat for a while. Mr. Wiater said

he saw no reason not to because it was surrounded by other trees and the thin foliage would not hold pounds of snow and ice. He said reducing a lot of the weight above and leaving the tree to sit below the tree line of the trees next to it would keep the tree from experiencing more wind. He also noted that there is a very low frequency of people going under the tree for long periods. He recommended removing it in the future but allowing it to slowly decline as long as the buttress roots did not continue to rot. He said the tree still had several roots that were in good condition.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved that Mr. Wiater be allowed to either take down the tree or leave it to the extent that he felt comfortable with it. Ms. Chag seconded. The motion passed unanimously.*

Chair Bagley asked if there were other concerns about the trees in the Langdon Park. Mr. Wiater said the dead trees along Junkins Avenue were not as significant as the spruce and that some of the sugar maples were getting big. He said he would assess the situation and report back at the next meeting. Ms. Chag said the park might be a good place to plant some conifers, noting that they mitigate water and do not drop their leaves. Mr. Wiater said he intended to put another spruce to replace the one that was dead and that he planned to plant a conifer in Langdon Park, as well as one on Route 33 and one in another park. Mr. Dupere said 2026 would be Langdon Park's 150th anniversary and thought it would be a good time to do something. Mr. Rice suggested doing something on Arbor Day. Mr. Wiater noted that Langdon Park may be the City's first designated park as well, but was unsure. Mr. Dupere noted that former Vice-Chair Dick Adams knew a lot about the park's history, and Ms. Chag suggested that he be invited to the celebration.

4. New Business

951 Peverly Hill Rd. There is a small portion of City ROW on Peverly Hill Rd that was recently landscaped in front of condos A1-A5, and two serviceberries (*Amelanchier canadensis*) were planted without prior Committee approval. Arborist Foreman Wiater believes this is a good ornamental selection for these sites, and their multi-stem form will fill this space nicely but wants to discuss the concept of approving species selection after planting.

Mr. Wiater said circumstances led to two trees to be planted on the City's right-of-way. He said the contractor planted two serviceberries and that the committee would retroactively approve them. He said he had no reason to fault the contractor for selecting those trees for those particular locations, but he wasn't a fan of the stone landscaping. Ms. Chag asked if the landscaping would be a problem for the survival of the trees. Mr. Wiater explained why it would not. Ms. Chag asked if the trees could be removed. Mr. Rice said the trees were not in the approved site plan, so the condominium development was not obligated to maintain the trees, but he said the City could work with them to adjust the site plan to include the trees so if the trees died, the condo development would be obligated to replace them. Mr. Wiater said all signs indicated that the trees were on the City's right-of-way, even though the trees looked like they were on private property. Mr. Rice suggested that it be followed up with the Planning Department, noting that there should be a true boundary survey done for the development. Mr. Wiater asked if the trees

should be approved for now. Mr. Dupere said the trees were not a problem species and would not add any risk. It was further discussed and agreed that it would be determined whether the trees were on City property or not and that the condo development would be put on notice, but the tree plantings are approved retroactively.

5. Old Business

Ms. Chag asked how the former Chair Peter Loughlin being acknowledged by the City Council went. Mr. Rice said it went great and that a piece of pink granite would be placed in Mr. Loughlin's tree farm as an acknowledgment of his service.

Mr. Rice said the City Council passed a new ordinance relating to a manual for a volunteer member of a committee. He said new members as well as existing ones would be encouraged to read the manual, which outlined members' roles and responsibilities as well as appropriate actions to be taken. He said the Legal Department and the Deputy City Manager would reach out to committees. He said he had asked if an orientation could be done. He said the City appreciated resident participation in the committees because their input better informed the City of what the community's desires are. He asked everyone to encourage others who may be interested in participating in committees

Next meeting: Wednesday, February 5, 2025

The meeting **adjourned** at 8:40 a.m.

Submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Meeting Minutes Taker