

**Minutes of the
City of Portsmouth's
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
September 10, 2025**

Members Present: Chair Patricia Bagley; Vice-Chair Michael Griffin; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Tree Supervisor/Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Members A. J. Dupere, Dennis Souto, Deborah Chag, Scott McDermott and Ian Hanley

Members Excused: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley-Adams

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

1. Acceptance of the August 13, 2025 Meeting Minutes

*The August 13, 2025 meeting minutes were **approved** as presented.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **700 South St:** 1 white ash, poor condition, tree removal requested by the resident, removal recommended by the City. The tree is declining due to EAB.

The resident Jack Spaulding was present in support of removing the white ash, which Mr. Wiater determined has EAB infestation after first attempting to prune the tree of hazards. Mr. Spaulding said he loved the tree but worried that it had become a safety issue in a high-traffic area for vehicles, walkers, and children. Mr. Griffin asked about EAB treatment and if it is still viable in this case. Mr. Dupree said it is not because once the tree shows signs of infestation, the pest has been present in the tree for several years, and much damage has already been done, which makes treatment ineffective.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed 8-1, with Vice-Chair Griffin voting in opposition.*

- **475 Broad St:** Revisiting this topic first introduced in May 2025. 1 Norway maple, 1 thornless cockspur, good condition, resident request. The removal of these trees will allow the grade of the sidewalk to be corrected and a driveway to be created.

The homeowner Brian Ratay was present and spoke to the removal of a hawthorn and a Norway maple, which initially came before the committee in May of this year. Mr. Rice said the new sidewalk to meet ADA standards (to allow construction of a driveway) would severely impact the roots of both trees because the grade will be lowered 12 inches. Mr. Ratay is coordinating tree planting in the right-of-way with Mr. Wiater once construction is completed in June or July of 2026.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to recommend removal of the two trees, seconded by Mr. Dupere. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0.*

- **300 Rockland St:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, and 2 red maples, good-to-fair condition, tree removals requested by resident. The resident stated the City trees are crowding those located on private property and by removing these trees in the ROW, the others will benefit. The central maple is subordinated by the surrounding trees. The Norway maple has a minor necrotic area, but with good reaction wood growth. The Norway is multi-stemmed, and while not an immediate structural issue, this will be problematic in the future.

Mr. Wiater said the homeowner requested the removal of a Norway maple and two red maples. Mr. Wiater said he did not recommend removal of any of the trees because they were all in good-to-fair condition, and removing public trees for the betterment of private trees is not proper urban forestry management. Mr. Wiater said they can attempt to prune the canopy of the City trees away from the private trees, and the Norway maple will undergo more significant pruning to account for the structural defects.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to not recommend removal of the three trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0.*

- **122 Thaxter Rd:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, tree removal requested by the resident. The tree is stressed and in a general state of decline. There are damaged roots near the driveway.

Mr. Wiater said the homeowner requested the removal of the Norway maple that was in fair condition. Mr. Wiater said the tree was problematic for the residents; it was not a specimen tree and was affected by the recent summer drought, which will continue to impact the tree for the next several years. He said this site will be planted in spring 2026.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to remove the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed 7-2, with Chair Bagley and Vice-Chair Griffin voting in opposition.*

3. New Business

- **Fenceline Clearance Policy** - Discussion on the importance of maintaining and installing new fences around City facilities which will require removing City trees. This is a public safety and resource concern.

Mr. Rice explained the Fenceline Clearance Policy around City facilities. He said some City trees would need to be removed, noting that it was a public safety and resource issue.

Mr. Rice and Mr. Wiater recused themselves from the vote, and Vice-Chair Griffin abstained.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Dupere moved to approve the policy, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0, with Mr. Rice and Mr. Wiater recused and Vice-Chair Griffin abstained.*

- **Tree Order 2026 - Review of trees on order from Schichtel's Nursery in New York.**

The review of the tree order was well received by the Committee. Ms. Chag asked that conifers be added to the list. Mr. Wiater said there will be a separate order of about five conifers but that they would come from a different supplier.

- **Portsmouth Pee Post** - The City will install a post in Haven Park to encourage dogs to urinate in one localized area to reduce urine damage to trees, shrubs, and grass.

The topic was discussed and well received. The intention is to first add a granite post in Haven Park as a trial, with potential to widely implement to Goodwin Park and Lafayette Park.

4. Old Business

Chair Bagley asked for a motion to have correspondence from resident Donna Acox added to the minutes. She explained that Ms. Acox lived at 14 Mt. Vernon Street, which abuts the ailing Norway spruce located in the City Hall lower parking lot, and that the topic of removing the tree was discussed at the August meeting and was voted to revisit the topic in December.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Ms. Chag moved to approve having the correspondence from Ms. Acox added to the minutes, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0.*

The letter from Ms. Acox reads as follows:

To: Mr. Maxwell Wiater, City Arborist Foreman
Mr. Peter Rice, Director of Public Works
Members of the Trees & Public Greenery Committee

I would like to first thank you all for the forum to express my concerns regarding the declining Norway spruce which is located on city property in the City Hall, lower Parking Lot and for the responsiveness of both Mr. Wiater and Mr. Rice in returning my calls about my concerns.

I first came to the Committee about this tree eight years ago and then again at the April 11, 2021 Committee meeting. Independent of my previous actions, this tree was addressed at the August 13, 2025 Trees and Public Greenery Meeting. Per the minutes of this meeting, Mr. Wiater said "the tree was showing signs of fungal needle cast and thought it should be removed". Further, it was his professional opinion as the arborist that "the disease was so present throughout the tree that it should not be treated".

My abutting neighbor, Mr. Gary Laurash was present at the meeting (I was out of the country for this meeting) and voiced that he did not want it removed citing that previously a tree was removed from this back corner of the city's property. (This was done eight years ago and it was because the tree was in poor condition.)

I will be out of state for the meeting on September 10 but I wish to have my concerns addressed and placed in the formal meeting minutes. These are my concerns: Over the past eight years I have watched this tree and its continuous and steady decline. While I am not an arborist, it is evident that the canopy/sail is significantly thinned, there are weakened limbs which break (as evidenced by all the branches I pick up in my yard and which land on my shed), the needles are dead appearing (brown and dry), and the tree continues to lean towards my property (it does not lean toward the Laurash property). Given the state of the tree and the pervasiveness of the fungal needle cast beyond treatment, I can only reasonably assume that the tree will continue its decline while increasing the risk of damage to my property and potentially personal injury/death thereby increasing liability for the City. Additionally, surrounding this dying Norway spruce tree are several very large and looming trees. It is a great fear of mine that should this disease Norway spruce tree fall, it will pull down other surrounding large trees with it, causing very significant damage my home and its content and threaten the well-being of all in my home. I would like the minutes to reflect my endorsement for the removal of this tree in the most expedient manner possible,

Respectfully,

Donna L. Acox

5. New Business

Ms. Chag mentioned that she noticed a resident pruning a newly-planted City tree. Mr. Wiater said he strongly discouraged this kind of thing from happening because it was best to have his team prune City trees properly.

Next meeting: Wednesday, October 8, 2025

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault

Trees and Greenery Committee Meeting Minutes Taker