

**Minutes of the
City of Portsmouth's
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
January 14, 2026**

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

Members Excused: Dennis Souto

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

1. Acceptance of the December 10 Meeting Minutes

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams moved to **approve** the December 20 meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Griffin. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

There were no tree removal requests.

3. Old Business

Conversation Regarding City Hall Spruce Tree, Including Review of a Third-party Tree Risk Assessment.

Mr. Wiater told the Committee that the consultant was Tim Bergquist of TimBer Property Consulting. He reminded the Committee that the resident's concern was if the tree fell, it could domino into a neighboring tree that could fall onto her property. He said Mr. Bergquist stated that there was root flare with proper healthy taper and no indication of fungal decay or lifting of the root plate, so he concluded that whole tree failure was not a reality at this point. Mr. Wiater agreed that the tree had no major health or safety concerns. He said he noted some minor structural concerns about the two leaders but that they did not indicate any signs of splitting. He said the tree also has an extended branch that could break off in a high wind, so he recommended reducing that branch and then aerially inspecting the situation. He concluded that there were no structural or health concerns with the tree that would require its removal and that the tree should be allowed to continue to exist. He said if its health changed, the Committee could review it again. He said the tree could be pruned within the week if the weather cooperated.

Donna Acox phoned in and said she appreciated that a consultant was hired. She said she was satisfied and hoped the assessment would help mitigate any risk to her property.

Gary Laurash of 18 Mt. Vernon Street was present. He said the tree abutted his property, and he thanked the Committee for taking the time to go through the process and reach a decision based on facts.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to accept the recommendations and have Mr. Wiater implement them. Ms. Chag seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

4. New Business

- **Resident Elyse Hambacher has suggested a pet memorial known as “Furever Tree” be considered for a City space. Meeting packet includes article for additional context.**

Elyse Hambacher of 125 Elwyn Ave was present. She showed the Committee the video of a Hinoki Cypress tree in New York City’s Central Park that was known as the “Furever Tree”. She said it started in the mid-1980s in a secret location of Central Park and that the tree was recently cut down due to its decline. She said the idea of the tree was to honor past pets. She said her dog recently died and then she learned about the Furever Tree and thought it was a nice way to memorialize her pet as well as the pets of other citizens in Portsmouth. She reviewed some examples of the tree. Dog ashes and holiday ornaments were discussed. Mr. Dupere said ornaments broke tree buds and branches by hanging lights on the branches, dog ashes were toxic, and dog pee damaged tree roots. He said none of those issues were good for trees and thought it could place a burden on the City. He said the State had previous similar requests from citizens to bury dog ashes in the Urban Forestry Center. It was further discussed. Ms. Kelley-Adams suggested a piece of public art instead of a real tree. Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams said she would be willing to work with Ms. Hambacher or a committee to see what could be done instead of a live tree, like a mural or a tree sculpture. Ms. Hambacher asked if an enclosure at the base of a tree would prevent people from planting their pets’ ashes. Mr. Dupere said it would not, and it was further discussed. Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams said she could connect Ms. Hambacher with the Public Art Committee to discuss a piece of public art.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to further explore the idea and what it would take to implement it. Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **2025 Year in Review, by the numbers.**

Mr. Wiater said there were 703 completed work orders in 2024 and 701 completed work orders in 2025. He said tree planting comprised most of the completed work orders in 2025, and over 200 clearance prunes were done. He said the inventory system was being refined and that a lot of clearance pruning was done so far in 2026. Ash tree removals were discussed. Mr. Wiater said two members of his staff were now licensed arborists. He said he attended the Massachusetts Tree Wardens Association seminar and now had his Massachusetts license.

Other Topics Discussed

- Mr. Dupere discussed workshops for volunteers for hands-on pruning and said he was directing a tree pruning that day. He said members of the Committee could also attend a pruning class, the first of which would be held in Manchester. He said tree prunings were usually held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month from 10 to 2. He said they would prune different tree species but would first focus on trees that had been neglected. He said there were currently about 900 volunteers from NH.
- The spruce tree on City Hall property was further discussed.
- As a follow-up to Ms. Chag's initiative to identify trees in South Cemetery, Vice-Chair Griffin distributed a document to the Committee that indicated 75 special trees that would be placed near key burial spaces.
- Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams asked whether the Pleasant Point landscape architect Robbie Woodburn had provided more information to the Committee. Mr. Wiater said he spoke to her and that she wanted to revisit the issue at the February meeting.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next meeting: Wednesday, February 11, 2026

The meeting **adjourned** at 8:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault

Trees and Greenery Committee Meeting Minutes Taker