

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

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 (via Zoom), Dennis Souto, Deborah Chag, Scott McDermott and Ian Hanley

Members Excused: None.

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

1. Acceptance of the November 12, 2025 Meeting Minutes

*The November 12 meeting minutes were unanimously **approved** as presented.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **45 Pleasant Point Rd:** 2 river birches, fair-to-good condition, removal requested by resident. The new owner of this property is planning a renovation and will include the removal of these trees. They are multi-stem trees with typical dieback. (See included proposed landscaping plan.)

City resident Reverend Betsy Tabor was present and said she bought the house to the left of 45 Pleasant Point Rd. She said there had been a lot of development in the area in the last ten years and approximately 50 trees were removed. She said the canopy of trees needed protection and that she would like to see the two birches replaced. Mr. Wiater said the landscape architect Robbie Woodburn was supposed to be at the meeting. Mr. Rice asked which trees were being removed. Mr. Wiater said the previous owner likely planted four birches in a row on the property line/right-of-way and that the two trees to be removed flanked the center walkway. He said based on the landscape plan there was no plan to replace those two trees. The construction in the area was discussed. Mr. Wiater suggested postponing the tree removal request to the January meeting when Ms. Woodburn could be present to provide more information.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams moved to **postpone** the discussion to the January meeting. Mr. McDermott seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

Note: The Committee then took the agenda out of order and addressed Item #4, the Norway spruce removal request in the City Hall lower parking lot.

- **46 McNabb Ct:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, removal requested and recommended by the City. The root flare is buried, and the soils are likely compacted due to location and use. It will be exposed to more external forces with the removal of the two other trees and its elevated location. The tree is within striking distance of several homes.

Mr. Wiater said the maple was brought up at the previous meeting and there were concerns about it remaining after the nearby two trees next to it were removed. He said the maple should be removed due to the lack of root flare and the amount of compacted soil around it that was likely caused by construction backfill. He said the tree was exposed on top of a small hill between houses, which could increase wind loading. He said it also made sense to remove the maple because the two trees near it were being removed. Mr. Souto said the tree removals would leave a big hole. Mr. Wiater said two large shade trees could be planted near the end of McNabb Ct.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend the removal of the Norway maple, seconded by Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams. The motion passed by a vote of 9-1, with Vice-Chair Griffin voting in opposition.*

The nearby resident Derek Rolfe phoned in via Zoom and said the tree's removal would make the area feel barren due to the other two trees being removed. He asked if it was possible to keep the tree. The surrounding views were also discussed, as well as whether planting another tree in the high location would be feasible. Mr. Wiater said he saw no reason not to plant a tree up that high and thought a few rocks could be moved. Vice-Chair Griffin said his concern was the City's liability of a major erosion washout. He said he did not know how long the tree's roots would hold that soil condition. Mr. Rice disagreed and said a few Norway spruces were removed before in the area and that the soil had held together well for over ten years. It was further discussed. Mr. Wiater said the Norway would be more exposed due to the removal of the other two trees and that he did not think it was a good site for a single tree to be in because of the site defect with the buried roots and the multi-stem nature of the tree's structure. Mr. Dupere said a retaining wall could be built on the steep slope so that a few evergreens could be planted.

The **amended** vote was:

Mr. Souto moved to recommend the removal of the Norway maple, seconded by Ms. Kelley-Adams. The motion passed by a vote of 7-3, with Mr. McDermott, Chair Bagley, and Ms. Chag voting in opposition.

- **485 Union St:** 1 pin oak, poor condition, removal requested and recommended by the City. A previous leader failure on the house-side of the tree is of concern, and there is a decent sized wound as a result.

Mr. Wiater said the pin oak had a leader failure and there was a crack forming between the two leaders. He said he and the resident were concerned and thought it should be

removed. He said the tree would otherwise have to be extensively pruned, which he did not think would be the solution because the tear out was significant.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the pin oak, seconded by Mr. Hanley. The motion passed unanimously.*

- **City Hall, lower parking lot (Revisiting from 8/13/25, updated):** 1 Norway spruce, fair condition, removal requested by resident. The tree is exhibiting signs of fungal needle cast. Decent foliage exists throughout tree, though foliage loss will likely continue. There are no structural issues observed from the ground.

Resident Gary Laurash of 18 Mount Vernon Street was present and said the tree directly abutted his property. He said he was at the August meeting when the issue was first discussed. Mr. Wiater said nothing had changed and that there was no structural issue to the tree and that it could continue to defoliate. He said it was in the middle of a larger cluster of trees and was declining, but he thought it could remain for several more years and then be re-addressed when all the needles were gone. Donna Acox of 14 Mount Vernon Street said she had been having the tree looked at since she bought her house in 2017 and that Micum Davis of Cornerstone Tree Care had thought the tree should have been removed in August 2019. She said she also contacted the former City arborist Corin Hallowell about it in 2019. She said her main concern was that her house was in the striking zone of the tree if the tree had a domino effect with a nearby one. Mr. Wiater agreed that the tree is declining and said there was a lot of decomposing material at the base of the tree and air spading could be used to investigate the base of the tree. He asked what Mr. Hallowell said about the tree in 2019. Ms. Acox said the action was tabled but two other trees were removed due to rot and access problems. Mr. Laurash said he did not feel that the tree should be removed because it looked the same as it had for ten years. It was further discussed. Mr. Rice suggested postponing the tree removal request so that he could get a second opinion from the tree expert Mr. Davis, which would give the Committee more information as to whether the tree should be removed.

Chair Bagley asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to postpone the vote until he had an opportunity to speak with Mr. Davis and get his opinion. Assistant Mayor Kelley-Adams seconded.*

There was further discussion. Mr. Dupere said digging around the base of the tree might reveal some details. Mr. Wiater said he was fine with postponing the request until the January meeting, noting that more investigation would be helpful.

The motion passed unanimously.

3. Old Business

No Old Business was discussed.

4. New Business

Ms. Chag said she and Vice-Chair Griffin would present information at the January meeting about tree identification. She said they were trying to construct QR codes on trees between the South Cemetery and the North Cemetery for the public to enjoy.

Mr. Souto said he gave a talk about trees at the Portsmouth Senior Center. He said people asked a lot of questions and that he would be happy to do another one. The Committee discussed giving talks at the Portsmouth Library and Community Campus. They also discussed educating and working with developers and architects to save more trees in Portsmouth. Ms. Chag said she would bring Eversource information to the January meeting about pruning trees amid power lines.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next meeting: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

The meeting **adjourned** at 8:48 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Meeting Minutes Taker