

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
May 8, 2024**

Members Present: Chair Peter Loughlin; Assistant Chair Patricia Bagley; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley; Members Michael Griffin and Deborah Chag.

Members Excused: A. J. Dupere, Dennis Souto

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

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the April 10, 2024 meeting.

*The April 10 minutes were unanimously **approved** as submitted.*

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **470 Richards Ave:** 2 Bradford pears, fair condition, homeowner request, removals recommended by City. A third pear tree fell onto the home at this address during the winter storm that occurred on 4-4-24 and is the basis for these removal requests. The remaining pears are significantly pruned for utility clearance, with all weight going towards the home.

Mr. Wiater said the two trees were damaged in the April storm. He said the trees were pruned by Eversource but had defects. The homeowner Pamela Esposito was present and explained why one of the trees was a hazard.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice recommended removal of the two tree, seconded by Ms. Kelley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **303 Thornton St:** 1 silver maple, fair condition, homeowner request, removal recommended by City. A neighboring tree was removed due to a significant leader failure at 295 Thornton St. on 4-4-24 and is the basis for this request. This tree is in a similar condition to the tree removed: declining canopy, cavities.

Mr. Wiater said a tree was removed next to the 303 Thornton one due to the April storm and the silver maple left standing was in a similar condition as the removed one. He said the owner requested that it also be removed. He said there were cavities in the tree with resting water and if it were pruned, what would be left would be inappropriate for the tree to live a healthy life. He said the tree that was removed was at 239 Thornton Street and the tree requested to be removed is between 30-40 years old.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Ms. Kelley recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Rice.*

There was further discussion. Mr. Griffin said the tree looked like it was in good condition and could be saved. He said there was a pattern of taking down trees that people thought would fail. Mr. Rice said silver maples were notorious for failing. He pointed out that Mr. Wiater was trained in tree hazard detection and felt that it was appropriate to remove the tree. Associate Chair Bagley noted that silver maples were brittle and that she had seen chunks of them come down unexpectedly. Mr. Griffin asked if the reasons that some silver maples went down was the tree's health or ground saturation. Ms. Chag asked what happened to the tree's neighboring tree when the tree went down. Mr. Wiater said both trees were small and shielded by the structures around them. He said he thought, except for the tree at 470 Richards Street, that the trees were affected by the saturated ground. Mr. Rice said Mr. Wiater did a good job of identifying the trees that are healthy but more of a nuisance for a resident vs. trees that could be at risk. He said the City managed thousands of trees and it was important to have a consistent methodology.

The motion passed unanimously.

- **85 Lawrence St.:** 1 Norway spruce, fair condition, homeowner request, removal recommended by City. A neighboring tree failed during the storm of 4-4-24 and is the basis for the removal request. The tree failure may have stemmed from root and heartwood decay potentially caused by trenching for water service infrastructure damage.

Mr. Wiater said the tree was damaged by the April storm and had a lot of water runoff and ground cover that could lead to a weakened root system. He said he spoke to one of the City's GIS specialists who said the trees were on the right-of-way. He said there was a water service line under both trees and there could also be trenching damage. Mr. Wiater said he felt that the tree should be removed. The homeowner Tracy Clarkson was present and said there was no storm drain on Lawrence Street and that it was like a river coming down the street. She thought the tree should be removed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Assistant Chair Bagley recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Wiater. The motion passed by a vote of 5-2, with Mr. Griffin and Ms. Chag voting in opposition to the motion.*

- **250 Clinton St.:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, homeowner request. The tree is on the paper road next to the house. The homeowner is worried that branches or the tree will fall on the house and would prefer that it be removed. All major leaders are attached to the trunk of the tree with included bark.

The homeowner Jessica Patton was present. Mr. Wiater said Ms. Patton recommended that the tree be removed because it had structural and safety issues and there was evidence of poor compartmentalization between the stems on the tree due to the codominant nature. He said there was another Norway behind the subject tree. He said he

pruned the tree in question four years ago and had thought about removing a leader, but it wouldn't remove the hazard from the remaining leaders. He said the tree was healthy but the concern was more the nature of the structure in that area. Ms. Kelley asked if another tree would be planted due to the site and potential for erosion, and Mr. Wiater agreed. Mr. Griffin asked if removing the tree would expose the two other trees. Mr. Wiater said he thought the trees were far enough apart for wind dampening to not be a concern but that he would have to examine them further. Ms. Kelley asked if there was an erosion mitigation plan. Mr. Rice said the City was aware of the erosion in that area and that the slope stabilization effort was warranted, but it was a matter of priorities.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice recommended removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Wiater.*

There was further discussion. Ms. Kelley asked if the other Norway on the property could also be removed. Ms. Patton said she wasn't sure if the other tree was on her property but was not opposed to removing it. Ms. Kelley said she was concerned that if one tree was removed, the other one would fail, and she wanted to know who the other tree belonged to and figure out if it would be the owner's or City's responsibility to remove. Mr. Wiater said the trees were close to the wetlands and if a tree was diseased or had a structural issue and the homeowner wanted it removed, it would require a letter from a certified arborist. He recommended tabling the request to the next meeting.

The motion was **amended** as follows:

*Mr. Rice moved to **postpone** the request to the June meeting to allow Mr. Wiater to further investigate the issue. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **247 Cass St.:** 1 Norway maple, poor condition, removal recommended by City. This tree has been pruned within the last three years and its limbs are continuously declining. There is a large central leader that has fruiting bodies covering its bark.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. Ms. Chag *recommended removal and replacement of the tree, seconded by Mr. Griffin. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- Greenland Rd. at off-leash dog park: 1 white pine, Eversource request, removal recommended by City. This tree is just outside the easement for the large transmission lines, and Eversource is requesting its removal due to the risk of interfering with the lines. The tree is at the top of a hillside, with all foliage weight towards the utility infrastructure.

Ms. Chag said there were several tall pines and asked why that particular pine was singled out. Mr. Wiater said he got a removal notice from Eversource. He said the tree was flagged a year ago but was outside of the easement for the large infrastructure and was then revisited by ACRT, an Eversource contractor. Mr. Wiater said he thought they wanted to remove the tree because the canopy was weighed toward the infrastructure and

was a risk. Mr. Griffin said he would think Eversource would be happy if the committee said they did not want to remove the tree, and it was further discussed.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin recommended not removing the tree, seconded by Ms. Chag. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **644 Greenland Rd.:** 1 red maple, fair condition, homeowner request. The tree has been pruned for utility clearance, resulting in a one-sided canopy heavily weighted over the road. There are also wounds at the base of the tree that are rotting.

Mr. Wiater said the tree had areas of decay toward the base but could either be removed or kept. He said the tree was not in the best or worse condition and there was a risk of failure, but if the tree fell it would land on the street. Ms. Chag said tree canopies had a calming impact on traffic. It was further discussed. Mr. Wiater said he could prune the tree for height clearance and perform a weight reduction prune of the upper canopy.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin recommended pruning the tree as Mr. Wiater described. Associate Chair Bagley seconded. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

3. Discussion of Selection, Size and Success of Recent Tree Planting

Chair Loughlin noted that Mr. Dupere's class that afternoon would be about bare root planting. He asked if the committee members had any thoughts about bare root planting vs. root ball planting. Mr. Rice said they had a failure rate of about 30 percent with burlap trees but were now planting 100 trees instead of 20-30 trees, so the success rate was significant. He said trees grew faster when they were bare root and it was less traumatic. Mr. Wiater said he used to work for the City of Denver and they were planting 2,000 trees a year. He said it was a mechanized process and that they were not taking all the burlap off and were planting too deep. He said the way planting was done in Portsmouth made more sense. It was further discussed. Assistant Chair Bagley said she thought a short blurb about trees should be placed into the City's newsletter now and then to educate people. Mr. Rice said he would speak to Ms. Seacord about it. Ms. Chag said it would be good to note that bare root planting has a higher success rate.

4. Update of Ongoing Tree Planting for the City's 401st Anniversary

Mr. Wiater said 154 trees were planted so far in 2024, including additional magnolia trees in Goodwin Park. Ms. Chag asked the reason certain species of trees were planted in front of the library. Mr. Wiater said Ohio buckeye had nice flowers and lots of benefits to wildlife. He said the two amur maackia trees near the road were smaller ornamental trees and the two alders were good replacements for the former ash trees. Ms. Chag asked if she could label the trees to let people know what kind they were, and Mr. Wiater agreed.

5. Old Business

Mr. Wiater said the 90-day holding period for the tree removal at the corner of Hillside Drive and Greenleaf Avenue was not helped by the traffic control measures and that residents were still complaining about the issue. He said they would move forward with the tree's removal. Ms. Kelley said the former cut-thru on Hillside Dr was fenced off by the ABC Buildings, forcing everyone to go onto Greenleaf Ave, which was dangerous. Mr. Rice said it was a sight challenge and that the residents requested the removal of the trees to have safer access on the north side of Greenleaf Ave. He said the vote was postponed to confirm that the committee was okay with it. He said the tree would come down at some point and there would be a sidewalk. Mr. Wiater said they heard more from people who wanted the tree removed because it was a consistent problem. Ms. Kelley said the City Council received 8-9 emails from residents who supported removing the tree but didn't get emails from those who were against it. Mr. Rice said the October 11 Trees and Greenery meeting would revisit the issue and move forward with the removal.

6. New Business

There was no new business.

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 12, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:09 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Secretary