

**MINUTES of the
City of Portsmouth
Trees and Public Greenery Committee Meeting
August 14, 2024**

Members Present: Chair Peter Loughlin; Vice-Chair Patricia Bagley; Director of Public Works Peter Rice; City Arborist Maxwell Wiater; Members Dennis Souto, A. J. Dupere, Michael Griffin and Deborah Chag (via Zoom)

Members Excused: Assistant Mayor Joanna Kelley

Also Present: Dave Desfosses and Zach Cronin of the Department of Public Works; Andrew King, Regional Arborist for Eversource; and Kris Martel of Northern Tree Service

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

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the June 12, 2024 meeting.

*The June 12 minutes were unanimously **approved** as submitted.*

Note: The Tree Removal requests were not reviewed in order. The second item, Sagamore Avenue, was reviewed first.

2. Tree Removal Requests

- **Market St** (ROW between Shearwater Dr and Market St: 10 white pines, 8 Balsam poplars, 1 black birch, fair-to-good condition, removals recommended by the City. These trees need to be removed to facilitate a significant underground utility project.

[Recording timestamp 59:35] Dave Desfosses of the Department of Public Works was present. He said he was the project manager of the Market Street project and that Chinberg Properties and the Severino Trucking Company were the project developers who were asked to repair some failing underground pipes. He said he did not recommend replacement trees because they would be over utilities.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin moved to recommend removal of all the trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **Sagamore Ave:** 18 trees total, all for Eversource, all trees are recommended for removal by City, including: - 695 Sagamore Ave: 1 red oak, good condition; 749 Sagamore Ave: 5 red oak, 1 white pine, 1 black cherry, fair-good condition; City ROW opposite Cliff Rd: 7 white pine, 2 red oak, 1 black birch, fair-good condition.

[Timestamp 2:42] Project managers Dave Desfosses and Zack Cronin of the Department of Public Works were present. Mr. Desfosses said they were tasked with reconstructing the sidewalk system on Sagamore Avenue from the bridge up to Little Harbor Road to make it compliant with ADA and to make it capable of being powered. He said there were currently poles on the sidewalk and that drainage repairs were also being done around Tidewatch Condominiums. He said they obtained the necessary easements for the poles and that the contractor was ready for Eversource to install the poles. He explained that the trees had to be removed to place the wires and complete the pole installation process so that the sidewalk could be built. Mr. Rice said it was important to note that the adjustment of the roadway and sidewalk was driven by safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists and that the request for the tree removals was not taken lightly.

Christine List of 749 Sagamore Avenue said two of the trees slated for removal provided significant shade for them and their neighbors. She said she understood the reason for the project but had asked to see the plans several times. She said the two trees were 60-year-old oaks and that the trees replacing them wouldn't be the same.

Andrew King, Regional Arborist for Eversource, and Kris Martel of Northern Tree Service were present to explain the requirements that were driving the project. Mr. King said they worked within certain parameters and tried not to remove any vegetation outside of that zone. He said when they were doing a capital job, they tried to get a complete spec so that there would be no future encroachment. He explained why they had to remove some trees for the necessary clearance. Mr. Rice said there seemed to be options to be able to keep some of the trees. Mr. Martel said he wasn't keen about taking down mature trees but in this case, Eversource would not be able to get the clearance needed for their 3-phase lines without the trees being removed. He said most of the poles on that street were from the 1940s and 50s, but the more important issue was that construction configurations changed as time went on and the pole cross arms were now going to be eight feet long. He said this new infrastructure is considered a backbone distribution line carrying high voltage into the city. He said a few trees could remain but there wouldn't be much left to them, and the lines could not go up if the trees remained. He said it was a decision based on the City's upgrade that was brought to Eversource's attention a year and a half ago. He said they had no other options on where the lines or poles would go because the poles could not go toward the road and they would also be taller, which figured into the configuration.

Ms. List said she and the neighbors had not seen an analysis on where to put the poles and thought it was reasonable to just prune around those two particular trees. Mr. Cronin said the location was chosen a year and a half ago by the City and Eversource and the decision was made not to change where the wires were attached. He said the trees were not brought up at that time. Mr. Desfosses said part of the decision-making process of where to place a pole is where it will do the least amount of damage to a tree. He suggested that a Hendrix Company bundle of wire could be placed there instead and that certain trees could be revisited to see if there were different configurations that could be done to limit the amount of removal and pruning. Mr. Rice said things had changed with power distribution and it was an issue of reliability and safety. He said the need to bring it

before the Committee a year and a half ago fell through the cracks due to personnel changes and that he would see whether adjustments could be made.

Jennifer (last name indecipherable) of 749 Sagamore Avenue asked if it was known that there would be an additional 8-ft wide extension when the walk was done. Mr. Rice said it wasn't known but that it did not change the situation.

Kevin O'Keefe of 749 Sagamore Avenue said he and his wife were just asking that the wires be a little higher and that only two trees out of five be saved. He said drivers on Sagamore Avenue usually speed over the 30 mph limit. He said the sidewalk would only benefit the cyclists and that the project changed the landscape. Mr. Rice said the project would take the right turn lane out of Tidewatch and that section of road would be narrower, which would help reduce speed. It was further discussed.

Robert Graham said he was a resident representing 792 and 793 Sagamore Avenue owners who did not want any trees removed. He said the project's lack of communication was a failure to the property owners. He said the project would widen the road and result in increasing vehicle speed. He said they had to deal with three years of road construction and then started asking questions when they saw tagged trees. He said they would get much more sun if the trees were removed. Mr. Rice said they would try to minimize tree removals by using Hendrix products and would discuss it with Eversource, but the project could not move forward until the tree work was complete. It was further discussed. He suggested tabling the item to the September meeting so that he could return with additional information and with Eversource line personnel. Chair Loughlin suggested having a special meeting in two weeks and a site walk. Mr. Rice said he did not think two weeks was enough time. Vice-Chair Bagley thought a site walk was a good idea.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice moved to **postpone** the item to the September 11 meeting and in the meantime, schedule a site walk for the week before the meeting. Vice-Chair Bagley seconded the motion. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

Note: The next three items were reviewed as a group because they all involved Eversource and the Department of Public Works. [Timestamp 1:02:56]

- **140 Sherburne Ave:** 1 Norway maple, good condition, Eversource request, removal recommended by City. A utility upgrade on Sherburne and Lincoln will require the removal of this tree.

Mr. Wiater said the Norway maple needed to be removed because it exceeded the height of the new utilities.

- **150 Sherburne Ave:** 1 Fire cherry, good condition, Eversource request, removal recommended by City. A utility upgrade on Sherburne and Lincoln may require the removal of this tree, although it is likely that it will only need to be pruned.

It was noted that the fire cherry tree was really a Canadian plum tree. Mr. Wiater said he posted it for removal in case a full spec was required for the new utility line, but he recommended pruning it instead of removing it.

- **337 Richards Ave:** 1 Norway maple, fair condition, Eversource request, removal recommended by City. A utility upgrade on Lincoln will require the removal of this tree.

Mr. Wiater said the new pole location will change the course of the house service line and there was no option for pruning because that line would go over the central leader. He said he would plant new trees if possible.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin recommended removal of the trees at 337 Richards Avenue and 140 Sherburne Avenue and pruning the tree at 150 Sherburne Avenue. Mr. Souto seconded the motion. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **81 Clinton St:** 1 red maple, fair condition, homeowner request, removal recommended by City. This tree has a crack between the two main leaders with limited reaction wood forming. The center of the tree's canopy is declining, and there is evidence of limb failure toward the house.

Mr. Wiater said he accidentally tagged the tree in June because he misinterpreted the homeowners' interest in removing the tree. He said the owners did not want the tree removed. He said the weight of the canopy could be brought up to be more centralized, so he could have the tree pruned but wanted to inspect it every six months and after every storm event because it was a hazardous tree. There was further discussion and the Committee felt that the tree should be removed because it was hazardous.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Souto moved to recommend removal of the maple, seconded by Vice-Chair Bagley. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **339 Wibird St:** 1 ash, poor condition, removal recommended by City. The tree is showing signs of an EAB infestation.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Vice-Chair Bagley moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **Four Tree Island:** 2 Norway maples, poor condition, removals recommended by City. These two trees are significantly declining, there is a lot of dieback from the top of the crown.

Mr. Wiater noted that the trees were the two that were close to the road. Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Rice recommended removal of the two trees, seconded by Mr. Souto. The motion **passed** unanimously.*

- **Clough Field (near South St at Elwyn Ave):** 1 Norway maple, poor condition, removal recommended by City. There is a lot of dieback from the top of the crown.

Mr. Wiater said the tree needed to be removed due to its poor condition and that its removal would allow the City to do a more thorough job of pruning the other trees.

Chair Loughlin asked for a motion. *Mr. Griffin moved to recommend removal of the tree, seconded by Vice-Chair Bagley. The motion passed unanimously.*

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

[Timestamp 1:17:04] Mr. Wiater said he put the order in early to get the best tree selection and largest caliper possible and would bring the options to the October meeting. He said he wanted to have door hangers on citizens' doors to let them know when the City would plant trees, what the species would be, and the reason it was being done. Ms. Chag asked if there were evergreens in the inventory. Mr. Wiater said there were no conifers because they were not good trees for right-of-way sites. He said one conifer had been planted in a park and thought a few conifers could be planted each year.

4. Old Business

Mr. Griffin asked whether the owner of 250 Clinton Street had the tree removed at his own expense. Mr. Wiater said he didn't know the tree was removed. Mr. Griffin asked if the two ginkgo trees on Union Street would survive the construction, and Mr. Wiater said he would look into it. Mr. Griffin suggested that Mr. Wiater look at the maple tree on the corner of Union Street and Hawthorne Street because it was going up through the wires.

5. New Business

Vice-Chair Bagley said she was asked by a Pleasant Street resident about who was responsible for the weed removal along Pleasant Street from the Langdon House to the fish market. Mr. Rice said the weed control budget was cut 2-3 years ago, so the City manually pulled weeds as the budget allowed. He said the City was trying to get a street sweeper because early sweeping helped keep weed growth down, but there was a lack of resources. Vice-Chair Bagley said she wished there was a way to generate some interest from residents to take ownership of the sidewalk and clean it up. Mr. Rice said the City sent out a notice to residents every spring asking them to do so. It was further discussed.

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 11, 2024

The meeting **adjourned** at 9:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joann Breault
Trees and Greenery Committee Secretary