

Meeting of the Mountain Lakes, NJ Shade Tree Commission
Wednesday March 8, 2023 - 7 PM

Members in Attendance: Sandy Batty, Dan Amato, Lucas Stelling, Phyllis Deering, Marnie Vyff, Doren Greene, Margaret Berei and Rebecca Hirschfeld (Student Liaisons), Chris Cannon (Council Liaison)

1. The February 2023 minutes were passed as written.
2. Annual Report/Tree City Application

Sandy got the report in to the NJ Urban Forestry. Phyllis has submitted the tree city application as well. Mitchell provided the expense numbers to Sandy, but she hasn't heard back. Chris mentioned that the town was busy with the budget. On the topic, STC inquired about their budget for next year. Chris said it has 7.49% increase, including an extra \$4200 for prune and remove.

3. Arbor Day planning

Nothing to report for Arbor Day planning. Phyllis has been in contact with Beth Azar, Wildwood Principal. Phyllis is returning from her vacation on March 16th and will meet with Beth to finalize the agenda, and to tell her we are giving her the tree honoring her.

Marnie inquired about the planning timeline. Arbor day is April 28th, so the STC only has only one more meeting before the actual day. The flyers, virtual backpack, etc. all need to be handled and coordinated. Phyllis wanted to meet in person to coordinate, and she will be back in advance of the next meeting and will coordinate with Beth before then. STC can update last year's materials easily.

4. Seedlings distribution

Distribution scheduled at the Trout Derby. Cath Mitchell offered via email to assist with the distribution. Phyllis and Doren will also help with distribution.

5. Setback ordinance

Sandy, Lucas, and Phyllis met about the setback ordinance. Lucas had not had a chance to review the memo provided by Sandy. The group discussed the memo. Marnie noted a typo in the first line, to be fixed.

The motivation for this update is based on the fact that the setback tree management plan ordinance says a removal permit does not have to be completed when a plan is required. The subcommittee recommended designating the existing protected trees, trees to be removed and the setback line on the development plan. Currently, the STC has to review two sets of plans to determine if a tree is within the setback.

Finally, if trees are being removed from within the setback, the subcommittee recommended that they should be replaced within the setback since that is where they are being removed from.

Marnie asked if this already governed by the tree permit ordinance for residents. If residents want to take trees down, a permit application must be submitted inclusive of a sketch plan of the site, and the associated fees (beyond the 3 trees removed or greater than 50%).

Lucas asked how this would be enforced? Sandy suggested saying that the trees need to be replaced within the year. Marnie suggested getting the fee up front then reimbursing the fee upon proof of tree replacement. Lucas inquired about the replacement trees - are we identifying the actual trees? We should ensure that shade trees are being replaced with shade trees. Also, should we cap the fee amount for larger scale projects. Something to look at for the future amendments to the ordinance. Lucas suggested working on only one amendment at a time due to the complications within the ST ordinance.

State stormwater regulations have not been released yet, but may have recommendations regarding tree replacement.

STC will review the tree setback management plan as it relates to tree removal permits. Postponing the vote on recommendations for the ordinance. Revisit the item next month. Items to address - 1. Capping the fee. 2. Do we want uniform replacement? and 3. Should the STC take one item at time.

6. Liaison reports

- MLHS

Margaret and Rebecca - Coordinating at the middle school to improve the recycling efforts. Margaret and Rebecca are trying to bring the initiative to the high school. The janitors at the high school have somewhat limited capacity. Margaret shared that flyers were posted to encourage better recycling efforts. Rebecca clarified that they're trying to make it as simple as possible. Students are being somewhat apathetic about their trash and recycling, so the team is considering using 3-D printers to create custom trash lids to encourage better student recycling efforts.

- Environmental Commission

Marnie shared a few items - Trout Derby, the green team and environmental commission are working together to coordinate with the hardware store on 46 to have a discount on electric leaf blowers. Sale may run for a month.

Cynthia and the Council are starting to work on having Mountain Lakes come in conformance with the NJ Highlands Council's master plan.

- Woodlands

Concern about responsibility for trees in parks. The issue is calling the smaller Borough-owned parcels "pocket parks". The Ordinance 9-6A that covers the STC states that STC is responsible for the trees in parks, and it identifies specific parks in town. Doren suggested that STC work with Woodlands to address issues in parks.

There are over 100 borough owned lots. Marnie said the intention was to cover trees that might fall over roads and cause issues.

Lucas clarified that STC trust funds are used for the purposes of maintaining a municipal STC programs, which could be interpreted to potentially be used for Woodlands as well under the right circumstances. Doren will inquire with the Woodlands committee and report if there is a request. Sandy suggested the Trust Fund resolution may even be interpreted to cover costs for prune and remove. Lucas said that we addressed this a few years ago, but there's no clear direction for how to submit and draw up a plan for spending. Sandy shared that Mitchell previously said that Council has to give approval for use of the funds.

Lucas asked about what does "offset the cost" in terms of utilizing STC trust funds mean? Use the trust fund before our budget? It isn't totally clear.

7. Other business

Discussed what is occurring on Rt. 46 Westbound across from the former Zeris Inn site. The construction is for affordable housing for disabled veterans. The STC previously commented on the plans. We will take no further action on planting new trees until development is complete there.

Meeting adjourned 8:15 PM.