

Shepherdstown Tree Commission Minutes

Thursday, September 12, 2024

6:00 pm

Town Hall

Members Present: James Dillon, Linus Bicker (acting chair), Charlotte Baker-Shenk

Absent: None

Visitors: Robin McGrorty, Jamie Byron, Shawn Walker, Mayor Gatz, Dave & Gail McMillion

1. **Call to Order:** L. Bicker called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

2. **Approval of August 8, 2024 Minutes.**

C. Baker-Shenk noted that there were items approved for action in these Minutes (in both old and new business) that need our attention since there was likely no follow up due to administrative changes.

J. Dillon moved to approve the Draft Tree Commission minutes of August 8, 2024. No objections noted.

3. **Changes in Commission membership. Review of Ordinance.**

L. Bicker stated that L. Robertson and apparently also J. Haynes have resigned from the Commission. Bicker expressed appreciation for their many years of work on the Commission.

L. Bicker reviewed the Shepherdstown Tree Commission ordinance which says it shall consist of 5 members appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the Town Council. Chooses its own officers, makes own rules and regulations, and keeps a journal of its proceedings.

Introduced Robin McGrorty, who has submitted his application to join the Commission (for Mayor and Town Council approval at their next meeting on October 9). McGrorty is an ISA certified arborist with extensive experience working with trees in urban environments and also has a permaculture design certificate. Has been working with Viking Tree Service (soon to end this employment as he initiates a new project for homeschoolers). Described why he thinks it important that the Town also solicit proposals from local tree care vendors.

McGrorty, J. Byron, and S. Walker engaged in an informative discussion on the social and economic value of trees (mental and physical health effects, impacts on store frontage when there's shade, even increasing the amount of time customers spend in a business).

Many reasons why it's so important that the Town do all that is necessary to care for its trees and promote a healthy canopy.

4. Review Process for setting agenda and reviewing minutes.

C. Baker-Shenk proposed that, from now on, both draft agendas and minutes be distributed in such a manner as to allow regular attendee feedback (and potential revision) prior to their use and distribution. So draft minutes, such as these, would be distributed within a week of the prior meeting, offering opportunity for participant feedback, would then be revised as needed, published and distributed to Town administration as is required. Same process for meeting agendas: distribute well in advance of the meeting, allowing for any suggested additions/changes, revise as needed, and then publish and use at the meeting. All agreed to this change.

5. Public Comments:

Dave McMillion (206 W. High St) said they had filled out a Maintenance Request Form.

They have a weeping cherry on their alley (next to one-car garage) that they think is not a Town tree, and that has dying, dropping branches. Members confirmed that the McMillions have the right to prune or remove the tree as they see fit.

As previously requested, they are concerned about structural integrity of the linden tree (#157) --needs structural pruning now. Members agreed.

6. Potomac Edison Approved Tree Species List

J. Dillon noted that this list is outdated and needs some revision since it includes invasive species and does not include some other viable native tree species. Dillon is willing to work on a revision; J. Byron will work with him.

7. Monitoring and Making Decisions about Town Trees

J. Byron suggested we create a list of trees that need monitoring for possible action.

L. Bicker offered to create a new Google Drive folder that would include this list.

L. Bicker distributed and talked through the draft he's creating to handle service requests ("Tree Action Life Cycle"). Regarding our decision process, J. Dillon noted that he's a horticulturist, not an arborist; feels it best that an arborist does the assessment. Or Dillon could do the initial assessment and then have one of the 3 arborists here confirm or change any decisions, especially if it involves removal of a tree. S. Walker noted that this process could also help in communication with Town residents who might have concerns. Helpful to have "several eyes" on a decision.

It was noted that, unlike prior process, approvals for contracted work will need to come from the Mayor or his appointee.

8. Tree Inventory and Management Plan (created by Bartlett April 2022)

How can members best access this information? Dedicated computer? On thumb drive distributed to each member? L. Bicker will try download onto the new Google Drive. C. Baker-Shenk stressed that all notes about trees (agenda, minutes, etc) need to reference the tag numbers given to each Town tree in this inventory.

How identify physical locations of trees in inventory (which are noted only by numbers and tiny circles on small street maps)? Mayor Gatz has a list of names and addresses of Town residents which might be helpful.

9. Soliciting Bids for Vendor Work

Who best to solicit bids from vendors? The Commission agreed this should be someone who understands the issues—a Tree Commission member, and preferably, an arborist.

Mayor Gatz recommended the Commission create a “preferred list” of perhaps four vendors, trusted tree companies.

Questions: Do we give preference to local vendors? If we receive multiple bids, who decides?

It was noted that Bartlett has great capacity (“one stop shopping”), good for general maintenance, but that smaller jobs or special projects might instead go to smaller, local companies. J. Byron suggested difference between low level/low risk jobs (eg. pole or hand saw pruning) that might be handled locally by a company on a retainer – as opposed to bigger take-down, high-risk climb jobs that might go to a bigger company.

R. McGrorty recommended the Commission create a “standard of care” document so vendors will know what we expect from them.

10. Beginning Review of not-yet-approved Bartlett Proposals

J. Byron noted that many Town trees were planted way too deep.

Root collar surgeries can be done in winter.

Hard to decide on the 3 Bartlett proposals (3/5/2024, 4/4/2024, 5/20, 2024) without deciding on the quality of each tree.

Agreed to start a **“TREE TRIAGE” list** to help us review the Bartlett proposals. L. Bicker will create this database.

Sugar maple #369: bark beetle treatments are certainly important to do but no imminent threat at this moment.

Old library crab apple. #357 (in front of Market House) – S. Walker will talk with Derek at Bartlett about its care and growth regulator recommendation. Need top quality work on this highly valuable tree. Think better to wait until killing frost (or mid-Nov to mid-March) before pruning.

Will application of growth regulator affect wound closure on birch tree (corner of Dule and German) hit by accident? #? J. Byron will research this.
It was noted that this tree has been treated against borers (borers are the main reason river birch die).

***Commission decided to request that Bartlett treat against borers NOW but wait on pruning and growth regulator.

***#274 Flowering Cherry (Carmen & Austin Slater (!00 W. New St) –not a native tree. Best if prune after leaves drop but because of effects on their home, decided go ahead now and prune. (Can see leaf spot; tree in decline.). A small job. Local contractor?

#382 Ginkgo – does this really need pruning? Commission members will check on this.

***#383 American Linden (Commission already approved) – ASAP prune out dead wood and remove vines at base of tree. Very valuable tree.

***#384 American Linden --S.Walker recommended also focus on this tree (close to alley). Not in Bartlett proposal currently. Commission agreed to request Bartlett solicit new proposal; valuable tree.

***Late Season Management – approve this work ASAP

#160 (wrongly listed in inventory as serviceberry?) Parrotia – need prune for road visibility and dead wood out.

#161, #155, #157

11. Brief Description of Tree Commission

C. Baker-Shenk distributed for feedback some proposed language requested by Mayor Gatz for website on work/goals of the Tree Commission. Members offered feedback. Baker-Shenk will revise and email out for further review tomorrow

12. Adjournment – meeting adjourned at 8:00pm; all in agreement.

