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ACTING TREE WARDEN

Touch the Future - Plant a Tree

**MINUTES OF THE SALEM TREE COMMISSION
OCTOBER 16, 2023**

A meeting of the Salem Tree Commission was held on October 16, 2023, at 7:00 PM, via ZOOM, an online video conference call system in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Present on call were:

1. Chair, Darleen Melis, Members: Naomi Cottrell, Cady Goldfield, Paul L'Heureux, and Susan Yochelson; Conor Morgan, General Foreperson, Cemetery/Tree Division, DPS; and Commission Clerk Joanne Roomey. Absent were Rachel McCarter, Jane Rumrill and Vice Chair Kirt Rieder.
2. **Report: Conor Morgan, General Foreperson Cemetery/Tree Division of Department of Public Services**

As of one week ago, 92 work orders had accumulated since July. A breakdown of the requests is not available due to the resignation of the IT manager responsible for compiling this information. Work orders began to build up as far back as July when the tree truck was out of commission for almost two months. After the tree truck was finally repaired, the effectiveness of the tree crew was diminished by staff absences and injuries. Currently, the tree crew, which had 3 members, now has no employees. The tree foreman has been absent due to a long-term injury; one member transferred to the street department in search of additional overtime and the other staff member resigned. Since then, requests and work orders have piled up. The department has discussed at length how to rebuild the tree crew, and to that end I have set up additional training consisting of weekend CDL (commercial driver's license) training. Further recruitment and training of a new tree crew has been discussed. The backlog of work will be carried out by private contractors who have been under contract with the city for on-call tree work following big winter storms. We are now expanding their scope of work. It took some time to revise their contracts, but once that happened two contractors were each given 46 work orders. Once we receive their quotations, we can create purchase orders and have the work carried out. People are concerned about trees falling on their cars and there are several tree health inspections also being carried out in advance of the winter weather. Once they are completed, a second phase of work orders can be contracted out. Salem has a lot of unstable trees – Bradford pears, Norway maples and ash trees, all with cars underneath them. Downed branches are given priority as always.

The cemetery crew also has large scale staff issues with one staff member now absent on a long-term basis due to injury and another staff member planning to do the same for at least 12 weeks beginning in early November. The staff shortage is acute, but my understanding is that policy or the union contract prevents us from replacing people who are absent on a long-term basis. We have gained one seasonal employee.

Emergency branch removal from the public way has been attended to by the cemetery crew. Activities at Greenlawn centered around the final weeks of grass cutting and weed whacking. We have also been preparing for leaf season. All equipment for this purpose has been maintained and is ready for service. Staff have used leaf chopping blades on the mowers to deal with the first flurries of leaf fall. A large water break occurred yesterday and is currently being repaired.

Development of the Greenlawn Master Plan involved advances at the Dickson Chapel Slope and the Burke Lot. As discussed at the previous Tree Commission meeting, landscape Architect Martha Lyons has produced several designs to develop the columbarium at the Dickson Chapel. There may be discussions about narrowing down those schemes to a shorter list with the help of public consultation. Martha had planned to present to the Cemetery Commission this Tuesday, however that meeting has been cancelled. Developments at the Burke lot are as follows: previously a scheme had been devised which called for the removal of some of the central large trees including one impressive *Abies fraserii* (Fraser fir). This scheme realized over 700 lots and retained most of the trees on the edges of the lot. It has been decided that we will now retain the large Fraser fir at the expense of some burial plots.

A revised list of Greening the Gateway Cities Program (GGCP) planting locations has been submitted to DCR for approval. Once they are approved, we will begin improving planting pits in preparation.

A discussion followed about the staffing problems in the department. Mr. Morgan explained that hiring and retaining staff is difficult, as the work is dangerous – resulting in injuries that can keep employees off the job for very long periods. Policies do not allow these employees to be replaced. The problem is compounded by the fact that salaries are not high enough for the level of danger, overtime is not available, and other city employees are being paid the same rate for jobs that don't involve risking their lives, such as lawn mowing vs. using a chain saw. In addition, if another job opens in the city for which the employee is qualified, they can switch. This has resulted in at least one opening.

Following this discussion, Ms. Melis volunteered to reach out to the Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School with descriptions of available openings and Ms. Goldfield will reach out to the NSCC as well to see if any students or alumni are interested in employment with the city.

There will be a Tree Hearing before the next Tree Commission meeting in November regarding North Shore CDC, and possibly others. Hearings will be posted according to the Salem Tree Ordinance.

3. Greening the Gateway Cities Program

Neither Anna Sheridan, Green Scape Coordinator, nor David Bresnahan, DCR Forester were able to attend the meeting. Ms. Melis submitted the following report by Mr. Bresnahan: 125 Trees have been planted this far in the fall planting, the majority of which are on private property. A grand total of 840 trees have been planted so far by DCR. The fall planting season is scheduled to end on November 17. Anna Sheridan has been working with DCR with canvassing outreach and door knocking. Two forestry assistants will stay on until December 2 and if the unusually warm weather continues, additional trees may be planted in late November. In the weeks to come, additional trees will be planted at Salem State University adjacent to the community bike path and the Stanley Building. SSU has proved to be excellent stewards of the trees DCR has planted so far. To avoid the tourist traffic in Salem the DCR crew has been planting in Lynn. In early November, 14 trees will be planted at the Colonial Terrace, which is part of the Salem Housing Authority, located at #6 Nichols Street, off Boston Street. As we close in on planting 1,000 trees, I am looking for suggestions of locations and species in the planting zone to plant a century tree, or similar, to celebrate this benchmark. I will make myself available to provide an accurate inventory of public trees, including Salem Housing Authority parcels, after the fall planting season is over.

4. Tree Care Instructions for Owners of Newly Planted Trees

The commission discussed how to best use a flyer that was created for homeowners with instructions for caring for newly planted trees. It includes how often to water new trees, along with instructions not to prune, fertilize or over mulch newly planted trees. While it is on the Tree Commission's website (**Tree Care Flyer (Spanish & English)** https://www.salemma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf7986/f/pages/newly_planted_tree_care_guide.pdf), it has not been distributed to homeowners who request a tree. Ms. Melis will follow up with the Mayor's Office to see if this can be sent out.

5. Letter of Complaint from the Federal Street Neighborhood Association

Ms. Melis presented a letter from the Federal Street Neighborhood Association in which they voiced their concerns regarding recent work on City-owned land at 318/330 Bridge Street. They stated that "trees and other vegetation were removed, and soil and associated vegetation were bulldozed and excavated. It is our belief that in neither activity were the appropriate procedures followed, namely notification to and approvals from the Conservation Commission and Tree Commission, as well as public notification, in accordance with our ordinances." There was a discussion about when public notification needs to be held. Mr. Morgan thought that this site qualified as undergrowth since the materials were under the ANSI (American National Standards Institute) 8" caliper standard for tree size. It was clarified that Salem's Tree Ordinance has no caliper specifications and the unless the tree to be removed is unsafe, public notice must be given.

6. Century Tree Tags – Review of Event on October 4th at Salem Common

There was a Century Tree Tagging Ceremony held on Wednesday, October 4th at 11:00 AM on the Salem Common. The commission recognized the generous charitable organizations and individuals who donated to the Salem Tree Fund to make planting of the

8 Century Trees on the Common possible. In total, 37 new trees were planted at the Common in spring 2023. The commission also thanked Ms. Contrell for making the design which greatly improves the sense of space on the Common. All donations are welcome for future plantings in our neighborhoods.

7. Approve Tree Commission Minutes of September 18, 2023

Ms. Goldfield made a motion to approve the Tree Commission Meeting Minutes of September 18, 2023. Seconded by Ms. Yochelson. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously.

8. New Business:

- Robert Lutts, Managing Partner and Founder Cabot Wealth Management and a member of the Salem Rotary Club, wants to donate a Century Tree after seeing the Century Trees planted on the Common. Ms. Melis suggested that we need more shade trees downtown, and asked if she could bring this issue to the Rotary Club.
- There was a discussion about creating urban micro forests, which is being done in France and there is an experimental one in Cambridge, MA. The concept is to recreate a natural forest environment with self-sustaining features where the understory and layers give one another nutrients; maintenance is not required. It was pointed out that this would not work well in Salem's urban environment. Ms. Cottrell and Ms. Goldfield explained that it would need a large open space of at least an acre. It would not work on a small lot where there is congestion. It would not be maintenance free; it could obscure sightlines and it would be subjected to invasive species overtaking the undergrowth.
- There was a lengthy discussion about the dead ash trees scheduled to be removed from **Forest River Park** and which species will replace them. This decision will be made by the Parks Department, which is solely responsible for the trees in the parks. Ms. Greenfield suggested that due to poor soil conditions and a significant amount of ledge, it would take remediation with loads of topsoil to make any tree planting viable. She would recommend slow growing hardwood trees such as *Carya ovata* / shagbark hickory, *Carya glabra* / pignut hickory or *Carya cordiformis* / bitternut hickory to reduce the risk of breakage and falling limbs. Ms. Cottrell would recommend increasing tree diversity by planting in the park's rolling hills species with seed pods that are typically not used near parked cars. These would include the female species of *Gleditsia triacanthos* / honey locust, *Liquidambar styraciflua* / sweet gum, *Gymnocladus dioica* / Kentucky coffeetree and *Catalpa speciosa* / catalpa. Unfortunately, not many growers offer female trees. Ms. Melis asked if it would be possible to add shape to the previously random layout of the trees in the park, but this would require using a landscape designer. It was suggested that the new trees could be placed to create a woodland path.

There was also a discussion about what species of tree could work in the far corner of Lappin Park where several trees were taken down. This is a small space hemmed in by buildings. Mr. Morgan will look into it.

- The commission reviewed a well-illustrated document created by the Cambridge, MA tree warden on how to plant ball and burlap trees. It was decided that this thorough and

informative document should be posted on the Tree Commission website. See “Correct Tree Planting” https://www.salemma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif7986/f/uploads/correct_tree_planting.pdf

- Mr. Jodoin will lead a crew of volunteers who will be trained to remove mulch piled on tree trunks and expose root flares on trees at the Community Life Center, 401 Bridge St. This will take place Saturday, November 4, 2023, and Saturday, November 11th from 9:00 a.m. to noon.
9. **Next Meeting Dates:** Monday, **November 20, 2023**, and Monday, **December 18, 2023** at 7:00 PM via Zoom.
10. **Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the Tree Commission this evening, Ms. Goldfield moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Ms. Cottrell. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at **8:18 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne M. Roomey
Commission Clerk

**Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 30A §18-25 and
City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033**