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ROBERT LEBLANC, TREE WARDEN

Touch the Future - Plant a Tree

**MINUTES OF THE SALEM TREE COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 22, 2022**

A meeting of the Salem Tree Commission was held on February 22, 2022 at 6:00 p.m., via ZOOM, an online video conference call system. Present on call were:

1. Chair Darleen Melis, Vice Chair Kirt Rieder; Members: Curtis Dragon, Paul L'Heureux, Rachel McCarter and David Rowand; Tree Warden Robert LeBlanc and Commission Clerk Joanne Roomey. Absent were Joshua Arenstam, Naomi Cottrell, and Susan Yochelson.
2. **Tree Warden's Report**

- The Salem Tree Department has been working on the list of See Click Fix requests that are in the system. Presently there are (49) for tree pruning and there are (9) requests for tree planting. The crew has been down to two staff members and the complications from vaccination requirements and on-going work-related injuries has slowed the progress. Last year, at this time, the number of pruning requests in the queue was in the single digits. Looking forward to the next several months, there will be a greater reliance on subcontracted tree work to keep up with demand and get that number of pruning requests down.
- Trench permits are still coming in and have kept Mr. LeBlanc busy with the on-line format. He has created a trench permit template outlining the required conditions that gas and electric utilities must meet when they apply for mostly Public Tree permits. Last month, he stopped a gas crew working on Broad Street as he had not seen a permit application for the project. Later that day, he was contacted by the supervisor, and was told that the crew had to vary from the original excavation location due to the connection inside the house. Presently they are considering a better way to look ahead at their work schedule in order to keep Mr. LeBlanc aware of the work in the streets.

Reading through the Tree Ordinance Ch. 43, Mr. LeBlanc realized that he may not be able to fine the utilities for working without a permit but discovered that he can fine them if they do not follow the conditions set out in the permits, so that may be the catch-all to better control the process. Mr. LeBlanc has also created a template of conditions for excavating near a Public Tree for sidewalk or driveway aprons. This is a little different from a trenching permit.

- Two weeks ago, Mr. LeBlanc spoke with the facilities manager at the Community Life Center (CLC) about the landscape contract. He told him that he needed to be more

vigilant about the excessive use of mulch around the trees. He understood the problem and Mr. LeBlanc will check back with him as the spring season gets under way.

- Over the past six months there have been a couple of tree failures in the open space parcels in the city. Following several site visits and discussions, Conservation Agent Katherine Kennedy has agreed to consider a “standing permit” for maintenance purposes to remove or prune conservation land trees that overhang roads, sidewalks, and private property. Mr. LeBlanc has also suggested to her that the Conservation Commission discuss managing these wood lots. Many of them are overgrown and choked out with invasive plants, diminishing the value and habitat of these green spaces. Mr. LeBlanc will be working with her to see if that can be implemented, instead of abutters calling the city to report chronic problems. A program that is more proactive and less reactive to this potential liability would be a positive development for the abutters as well as increase the overall urban canopy in the city.
- The city’s tree planting contract ran out on December 31, 2021. The contractor, who has been planting and watering trees in the city for the past two years, feels they were not making enough money on the contract. The new contract will need to be advertised in the Central Register and on the procurement website for this upcoming year. Any new contract may impact the cost of trees for the next couple of years and may lead to adjustments for the per caliper inch costs for Tree Replacement requirements.
- The Greening of the Gateway Cities Municipal Grant has been signed and executed, a \$20,000 grant for tree planting site preparations. The grant was written for the Washington Street corridor re-planting – removal of dead trees and compacted soil in preparation for vase-shaped trees and prickly bushes. Mr. LeBlanc will be working with Dave Bresnahan and the DCR on this for the spring.
- The Tree Warden will hold a Public Shade Tree Hearing tomorrow night. Mr. LeBlanc initiated the action for a large silver maple on Mall Street that dropped large limbs several times over the past couple of years.
- The Conflict of Interest Law training must be completed. Right now, only Dave Rowand and Kirt Rieder have completed both parts of this mandatory requirement for members of public boards and committees. Mr. LeBlanc would like to submit the certificates of completion to the City Clerk ASAP.

3. Gonyea Park Planting Plan – update Parks & Rec. Commission

Superintendent of Parks Trish O’Brien decided to delay any action on tree planting in the park until March so that the city would have more time to consider its options.

4. Salem Common – hiring of landscape architect to oversee spring planting

The second state funding appropriation to “be expended for repairs and maintenance of Salem Common” was awarded in July 2021 in the amount of \$75,000. A portion of those funds will be spent on pruning the Common trees and another portion will be used to hire a landscape architect to design and execute a spring tree planting program. In addition, two Salem charitable foundations will be donating \$5,000 each into the Salem Tree Donation Fund in order to increase the number or size of the trees to be planted.

5. *The Blue Trees Installation at PEM – Janey Winchell*

Ms. Winchell showed a PowerPoint presentation regarding the public artwork for *The Blue Trees Installation* at the PEM. Installation starts April 20, 2022, weather permitting. Konstantin Dimopoulos together with Wes Bruce are the artists. Signage explaining why the trees are blue will be located on the PEM windows behind the three, blue-tinted Essex Mall gingko trees. The signs will also have QR Codes linking to a video by Mr. Dimopoulos focusing on the growing issues of deforestation and other threats to trees around the globe. The harmless blue colorant is environmentally safe, non-toxic pigment that will wash away over time with the trees gradually returning to their natural state.

The Tree Commission will host an information table near the blue gingkoes to enlist Salem residents into personally planting trees as part of Arbor Day.

6. *Tree trunks and root flares*

To demonstrate the proper mulching of trees that allows the root flare and tree roots to breathe, the Tree Commission website now hosts in the “Quick Links” section: [Video - Mulch Properly To Prevent Disease](#)

7. *American Rescue Plan – Update on Rep. Tucker’s \$200,000 to “plant trees and improve Salem’s urban tree canopy”*

Mr. LeBlanc is waiting for the account number in order to encumber the money. There is a total of \$200,000 and the money will go towards tree planting, pruning, maintenance and equipment purchases: \$75,000 for pruning and maintenance, \$70,000 for new tree planting and \$55,000 towards the maintenance of Open Space wood lots.

8. *Salem Tree Donation Fund*

Mr. LeBlanc spoke with Anna Freedman, City Finance Director, regarding donations (\$5,657) and fines (\$31,700). As of today, the total balance is \$21,269. The Tree Donation portion of the available funds will be going towards Century Tree plantings. The commission will coordinate with Mr. LeBlanc on the locations of the Century Trees.

9. *New Entrance Corridor Overlay District language – Kirt Rieder*

Mr. Rieder discussed the zoning ordinance regarding the required caliper inches for trees along the frontage in new developments. Many projects select small or ornamental trees rather than the intended tall canopy trees and end up over-spending for 3” caliper ornamental trees. The language of the ordinance may have to be modified. Diversity of tree types is key. The Planning Board will pursue a discussion to modify the ordinance.

10. *Tree Manual – Review of tree planting lists including additions from Hurricane Sandy study*

The commissioners discussed with Ms. Melis certain sections of the Tree Manual that should be modified based on matters that have arisen over the past two years. The Tree Commission decided to update the manual, a couple of sections every month.

11. Approve Tree Commission Minutes of January 18, 2022

Mr. Dragon made a motion to approve the Tree Commission Minutes of January 18, 2022. Seconded by Mr. Rowand. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously.

12. New Business: None

13. Next Meeting Dates: Monday, March 21, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. and Tuesday, April 19, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom.

14. Adjournment

Mr. Rieder made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Dragon. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:25 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**