

Palmer Township, Northampton County

Shade Tree Commission Meeting Minutes

October 3, 2024, 6:30PM, 3 Weller Place, Upper-Level Municipal Training Room

1. Roll Call

- a. Present: Shannon Wisniewski, Sandi Bush, Patrick Romano, David Demopoulos, Michael Brett, Robert Williams, Scott Kistler, Lee Hilbert, and Paige Strasko.
- b. Paul Strasko was present for a portion of the meeting as a member of the public.
- c. The meeting was called to order at 6:33PM.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from August 1, 2024

- a. Romano made a motion to approve the minutes and Bush seconded. Demopoulos stated that his name was misspelled, and Ms. Strasko stated that she would correct the spelling mistake. The minutes passed unanimously with corrections by voice vote.

3. Old Business

a. Membership/Newsletters/Publicity

- i. Wisniewski and Bush summarized that Bush had prepped pruning information for the February newsletter, having a placeholder in the newsletter for Arbor Day in 2025, and other future article topics including choosing the right tree for the right place and native versus ornamental trees.
- ii. STC members and Ms. Strasko also discussed drafting a shorter or lighter article in the summertime to ensure that nothing was cut if there was not enough space for a full page or two due to Palmer Days advertising and scheduling.
- iii. STC members briefly discussed Arbor Day in 2025, changing the day to a Saturday for greater availability, if Public Works crews would be available/able to work on a Saturday for the event, possibly partnering with the library again, the turn out for 2024, planting locations around the municipal building, and Arbor Day's date in 2025 being April 25th.
- iv. Bush clarified what the group wanted as a second article in the February newsletter, and all agreed to include a native species article. Romano stated that all articles and activities from the STC were very educational.

4. New Business

a. 2210 Corriere Road Plan Review

- i. Wisniewski stated that in the future the group will request paper copies of plans for pickup so that all members can review adequately prior to the monthly meeting.
- ii. Bush asked why the STC is being asked to review when the Township pays Gilmore to complete a landscape and lighting review and added that

she agrees with everything the landscape architect for Gilmore stated in their review letter. STC members and Brett briefly discussed that there are multiple stakeholders for these plan reviews and that Gilmore's review is very technical whereas STC member review is more personal and in line with what Township residents may want to see come out of a project. Brett also described that STC members have a more personal touch and understanding of the project site versus Gilmore employees looking for black and white issues on paper.

- iii. STC members discussed having at least three tree species to avoid wipe out from disease, the need to fulfill the parking space requirements for tree planting and briefly discussed if renovations or upgrades trigger all requirements for plan review and building requirements. The group finalized their plan review comments for submission.

b. 2463 Nazareth Road Plan Review

- i. Bush stated that she also agreed with Gilmore's review letter for this project as well and did not have anything to add.
- ii. STC members discussed the site needing larger trees, no planting islands present behind the building, buffer screening in the front of the building from the Route 22 off-ramp, asking for salt tolerant species and low grow shrub recommendations from Gilmore, replacing three of the parking lot trees with Little Leaf Linden trees that grow faster and taller than selected maple and Gingko species, avoiding lifting of asphalt from tree roots, and finalizing their plan comments.

c. Investing in Palmer

- i. Wisniewski discussed her intentions of putting together a road map to focus the conversation of next steps. Wisniewski began the discussion by confirming the original ask of the supervisors; to develop a new ordinance that protects public trees and institutes a permit process for street tree removal. Wisniewski compared Township Ordinance Chapter 32 with Chapter 176, the group's recommendation of ordinance adoption, protecting tree assets, and suggested that street trees are left vulnerable. Wisniewski also brought up the point from the Supervisor's meeting where they suggested that the ordinance had bad timing with stormwater and stated that this seemed irrelevant to the discussion.
- ii. Wisniewski detailed that trees need to be removed or maintained to prevent the spread of disease, negligence of property management, how stumps can harbor pests and disease, that any new plantings can be undone and there is no mechanism to protect the Townships investments.
- iii. Wisniewski recapped past meetings with Code Enforcement where STC members shared their proposed tracking system with Township staff and

solicited their feedback. Wisniewski mentioned that the staged approach to notices worked for the STC, and that they clarified permit language and procedures with the Code and Permit department as well.

- iv. Wisniewski shared the Commissions disappointment, stating that there was clearly a miscommunication, and issues should have been discussed rather than repealing what was codified.
- v. STC members discussed that while they recommend the Township continue to follow on the notices that were issued to residents while the ordinance was in place, they realize it is unlikely it will be done. The group stressed the importance of that education to residents and Township staff. They also raised their concern that trees are not included in the property maintenance code for the Township.
- vi. Romano commented on his thirty years of being a Palmer Township resident, that he moved to the area for the tree canopy, the money invested into the nine trees on his property, and that he has watched Palmer's streets become deforested over the years. Romano finished his statement with the group looking to stop the bleeding for tree removals, and by describing their meetings with Code Enforcement as well. Romano shared his collaborative relationship with Code Enforcement over the years.
- vii. Bush commented on her outrage with the Board of Supervisors (BoS) and lack of management ability, that she is shocked at the number of hours put into the ordinance, the lack of support, and that a five-minute conversation eliminated all the work that went into the ordinance. Brett and other STC members discussed their concerns. Wisniewski concluded the conversation by stating that the STC wants to see what's best for the Township and wants to see something start sooner rather than later.
- viii. Brett discussed possible next steps with the group regarding reinstating the ordinance, acknowledged that the other BoS members didn't read the ordinance, and that the BoS wants to drive the changes. Brett advised that STC members should pose more questions to the BoS, that it would be easier to understand what the BoS does and does not want to include. Brett also suggested that the group pose ideas as simple open-ended questions. STC members asked clarifying questions and discussed the process for ordinance review and approval moving forward.
- ix. Brett, Williams, and STC members also discussed perceived issues with tree removal permit process, the size of the Township staff and constraints of staff size compared to the City of Easton. Also discussed were expectations around communication from the Township. The group agreed that a revised and approved ordinance was achievable by Arbor Day.

- x. Williams made clarifications including the frustration from the Code department, misperceptions of the department, priorities of Code Enforcement, and discussed the possibility of another enforcement officer. STC members were interested to know how the discussion was brought up since they were present for an update to the fee schedule the night the BoS decided to advertise repealing the ordinance. Williams stated that Daniel Nicolo was present for the fee schedule, and he was encouraged to share his frustrations. Williams gave extensive explanation of his experiences as a manager and background in the military, that he supports their efforts, he wanted to replant two trees for every one removed, and that the STC members did not do anything wrong, they simply had to manage the misperception politically and administratively.
- xi. STC members discussed having the BoS more invested in the ordinance, having the right frame of mind, and that it should have been a non-issue at the past BoS meeting. Williams also clarified the timing of the stormwater fee, that the tree ordinance was too much for the BoS politically, and they backtracked but the ownership was still there. Williams stated that he believed the group could have an ordinance in place before Arbor Day in 2025. STC members, Brett and Williams discussed the group making revisions to the ordinance, updates for out-of-scope trees, other recent political failures, and amendments to bring back to the BoS in November.

5. Reports

a. Board of Supervisors

- i. Brett had nothing further to report.

b. Tree City USA/Grant trees available

i. Tree Pennsylvania

1. Wisniewski discussed the recent communication from the grant administrators for Tree Pennsylvania, the award of 15 bare root trees for planting at Fox Run Park and Anthony Court, and the number of trees possible for future awards now that the STC has been awarded.
2. Kistler and Wisniewski discussed relocating trees that were included in the recent tree planting bid for park and street tree replacement, how many in each location needed to be moved, addressing specific areas in Fox Run Park, Kistler's methodology for layout of planting locations, and avoiding overhead and underground utilities in both areas.
3. Bush, Wisniewski, and Kistler discussed previous communication about the grant application, plans for planting, Public Works (PW) involvement in planting, timing of the grant approval, and Kistler

approving the plans submitted for the grant applications. Kistler asked clarifying questions about PW involvement with the planting process. Wisniewski explained that she had previously discussed PW picking up the trees, planting, and watering them after planting. STC members and Kistler also discussed utilizing gator bags to ensure trees had enough water, the planting season, and installing gator bags in the spring. STC members and Kistler also discussed that the trees for pick up are one-and-a-half-inch caliper trees, that there was not a specified pick-up date yet, all dead trees in both areas have been removed, Wisniewski shared a map of planting locations submitted to the grant, and that there are multiple stakeholders interested in tree planting.

4. Demopoulos asked clarifying questions about the grant mapping and database for planting and asked if he would be able to help map the bare root tree planting. Wisniewski explained that the software the grant program uses is more of a database cataloguing system than a map to show locations.

ii. Bare Root Trees

6. Public Comment

- a. There was no public present to comment.

7. For the Good of the Order

- a. Wisniewski discussed the pending planting plan for Old Orchard Park, research the group has done for volunteers that would be able to assist with planting, working with Gilmore and the Township's arborist to develop a landscaping plan for the park, beautifying Old Orchard Park and utilizing low-maintenance plantings to reduce mowing areas for PW. Kistler discussed the history of tree planting and removal in Old Orchard Park, and parks overall, and that he was looking to reestablish the integrity of the trees in the park. Wisniewski discussed the process that STC members have followed to this point, meeting with other Township boards and committees, asking Gilmore to develop a rough sketch landscape plan, discussing cost of the plan and work that would come from the landscaping plan, general locations of Township planting through the planting bid. Kistler stated that he was unaware of the scope of the landscaping plan, that he avoided planting trees along the back row of the park where pines were previously removed, and differences in plantings for the Southwood Drive median.
- b. Romano asked if they ever heard back from the Township solicitor regarding the ROW definition. Wisniewski said no, but the question will be reframed moving forward, and the group will discuss variation of measurements and determination of street trees.

8. Next Meeting: November 7, 2024

9. Adjournment

- a.** Romano made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Demopoulos seconded. The motion passed unanimously by voice vote and the meeting adjourned at 9:09PM.