

MINUTES: ROCKINGHAM TREE COMMITTEE

DATE: APRIL 4, 2016

PRESENT: ELLEN HOWARD, ALMA BEALS, ROBERT McBRIDE, CHIP STEARNS, POLLY THOMPSON, ANDREA URBANO of Vermont Urban and Community Forestry

The meeting convened at 1:30 PM.
Ellen volunteered to act as chair.

Agenda Items

1. Tree Committee Chairperson

The tree committee has been without a chairperson since Ellen's retirement last summer. Historically, the Planning and Zoning office staffed and served as the chair of the Tree Committee. While the question of who will staff the Committee is explored, Ellen and Polly have agreed to co-chair.

2. Status of the Tree Committee

The Committee asked Municipal Manager Stearns to assign staff to assist the Committee, as some of the business conducted by the Committee requires action on the part of the town of Rockingham (such as completing, signing on to grant applications or paying for the purchase of trees). Chip declined to do so, and instead told the Tree Committee that in order for it to continue to function as a town-recognized entity it must ask the Selectboard to allow it to exist. Ellen and Polly will prepare a memorandum for the elected officials, in advance of a presentation to the Selectboard. The document will explain the work of the Committee, both past and present. It will also make some suggestions for how to move forward.

3. Care of the Urban Forest Project

Rockingham was invited to participate in the Care of the Urban Forest Project, a Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program (VT UCF) grant that has three parts: an inventory of public trees, the development of a maintenance plan, and the training of tree care participants. A detailed inventory of Rockingham's public trees has been produced. Andrea Urbano, consultant for the State program, came to the meeting to discuss the second part of the Project: the maintenance plan. She will be writing up the plan for our town, identifying our goals and capacity.

Maintenance suggestions were included in the inventory. For example, it was discovered that 277 of our public trees need pruning. In order to come up with a new plan that will mesh with what the town already has in place, Chip gave Andrea a copy of "Street Tree Care Plan for Rockingham, Vermont". The committee then answered a number of questions.

-Who are the key stakeholders in Rockingham? A: All of the citizens who enjoy our town's trees.

-Who needs to be made aware of the plan? A: Tree Warden, Highway Department, Selectboard, Bellows Falls and Saxtons River, Trustees, Conservation Commission, schools, library

-Who will contribute to the plan? A: Tree Warden, Highway Department, Tree Committee

-Who will be the main contact for the state? A: Polly Thompson, polly@sover.net

-Who is involved in the care of our public trees? A: Tree Warden, Highway Department, Tree Committee, utilities, hired landscapers and arborists, River Valley Tech students

-What information exists that will help in the development of the plan? A: Public Tree Inventory, "Street Tree Care Plan for Rockingham, Vermont"

-What is the tree budget now? A: \$2,500 tree maintenance, \$200 tree fund, \$3,500 Capital Fund for Trees

-What equipment is available for tree care? A: The town has all the equipment needed, from a bucket truck down to hand saws. There is a chipper with a 12" diameter capacity. Catastrophic tree failure can be taken care of by the Highway Department. All department employees have completed the four levels of Game of Logging training. The town can do all maintenance except power line work.

-Who has been hired in the past for tree care and planting? A: All Seasons, Rice, Maple Hill Nursery, Skyline Nursery, Eric Clark, MJS Landscaping.

-What specific goals would we like to see in the plan? A: In addition to addressing the maintenance outlined in the inventory report, we want to be sure to keep planting. We would like to continue to work with the Envirothon Club from the high school. We would like the plan to include visual pieces as well as text. In particular, we hope that illustrations will address the ongoing problems of volcano mulch and damage by mowers and string trimmers.

To summarize what we want to see in the Maintenance Plan:

1. Suggestions for outreach to the community to encourage awareness and involvement by the public.
2. A plan to keep planting, especially in the village of Bellows Falls where pedestrian traffic is high.
3. A plan to start to whittle away at the maintenance backlog.
4. A method for entering GIS data on an annual basis
5. A pest plan (we have one for the Emerald Ash Borer)
6. A resource list
7. We want a long-term plan, something we can use for the next twenty years.

Andrea will prepare a plan and present it to the committee by early summer. We thanked her and the rest of the staff of VT UCF for their devotion to our urban forest.

4. Caring for Canopy Grant

Thanks to a matching grant from the state, we will be planting seven crabapples by early June. As soon as there are trees at the nurseries, tree committee members will visit Maple hill and Skyline to pick the trees for Green ST and South ST.

5. Green Mountain Power Tree Planting Locations

Three trees will be planted using funds supplied by GMP, one at Island Park and two on Atkinson.

6. Meeting Schedule

It was agreed that regularly scheduled Tree Committee meetings will help us accomplish our work. For now, we will meet on the first Monday of the month at 4PM. The meeting place will be the third floor conference room in town hall. The next two meetings are scheduled for May 2 and June 6.

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM.

Compiled by:

Polly Thompson

Tree Committee member