

CHATHAM BOROUGH SHADE TREE COMMISSION
May 27, 2021

7:30 p.m.

Chairman Colleen Truppo called this Regular Meeting of the Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. This was a virtual meeting. All Commissioners and the Recording Secretary were present by way of Zoom.

Names	Present	Absent
Colleen Truppo, Chrmn.	X	
Kristy Chmura, Vice Chrmn.	X	
Fran Drew		X
George Sweetin	X	
Dean Wilson		X
John Tortorella	X	
Patrick Florentino		X
Beverly Klepper	X	
Council Member Karen Koronkiewicz	X	
Liz Holler, Recording Secretary	X	

Chrmn. Truppo read aloud the Mission Statement of the Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission.

Public Comment

There was none.

Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

Mr. Tortorella made a motion to adopt the minutes of the April 22, 2021 STC meeting as submitted. Mr. Sweetin seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. The meeting minutes of April 22, 2021 were approved.

Tree Removal Request for 27 North Hillside Avenue

Chrmn. Truppo reported that there has been communications from the homeowner at 27 North Hillside Ave. He has asking permission to remove two nuisance trees on his property. The homeowner has even offered to pay for the removal. He also offered to pay for some replacement trees to be planted elsewhere in the Borough.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that John Linson, the town arborist, has examined these two trees and recognizes that they have a negative affect on the historic barn on the property. Mr. Linson, in his letter of recommendation to the STC, mentions the legal ramifications that may result if the Borough refuses this tree removal request. There's the possibility these two trees could damage the barn during storm conditions. It is Mr. Linson's professional opinion that these two trees be removed.

Chrmn. Truppo made a motion that the Borough Shade Tree Commission allow the homeowner to remove the two designated trees at 27 North Hillside Avenue. Mr. Sweetin seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken. All Commissioners present voted “aye”. The motion passed.

Council Member Koronkiewicz confirmed with Chrmn. Truppo that the homeowner is willing, by escrow, to replace these trees somewhere in the Borough. Vice Chrmn. Chmura had reluctantly voted in favor of these removals, taking onto account Mr. Linson’s recommendations.

Discussion on Ordinance 314-4

Chrmn. Truppo noted that Mr. Tortorella had brought up this ordinance at the last Commission meeting. Mr. Tortorella put up the section of the ordinance that is under discussion. It contained language regarding public utilities and transmission lines interacting with local trees.

Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that this ordinance requires any public utilities company, cable TV, or service provider to obtain prior written permission from the Shade Tree Commission to prune and remove trees. Commissioners had questioned whether this written permission has ever been granted at any time.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that she had asked Borough Administrator Steve Williams and the Borough Attorney look into this situation. No evidence was found in the Borough records that the Shade Tree Commission had ever granted this type of permission. Chrmn. Truppo noted that the utility companies have had some communications with the Borough Public Works Department about their tree work; however, there should be an opportunity for the Shade Tree Commission to be more pro-active in this process. Chrmn. Truppo suggested that when the STC receives the list of tree work from the public utilities, the list be passed on to John Linson. Mr. Linson could then review the trees on the list and provide a summary report on these trees to the STC.

Mr. Tortorella felt that the Commission should not stand in the way of what the utilities need to get done. Many times their tree work is to ensure that residents in the Borough maintain electrical power. However, Mr. Tortorella believed that the Commission should be aware of where, in the Borough, tree coverage is being lost, so future plantings can be arranged and carried out. Also, Mr. Linson may come up with better options for the public utilities consideration.

Chrmn. Truppo brought up the liability risk if a Borough tree falls and injures a person or a structure, and it was discovered that the STC did not give their approval to remove this tree. Mr. Linson could give recommendations on what type of tree would be a good replacement for the one being removed, and the best time to plant the tree. Chrmn. Truppo asked Mr. Sweetin for his comments.

Mr. Sweetin pointed out that there are instances where the Borough, in the past, has planted the wrong tree in the wrong location. Mr. Sweetin recalled that there have been times when Mr. Linson has made tree recommendations to the homeowner, and the homeowner still gets upset. If there is an issue with a Borough tree, the Borough will sign off on the tree. Permission is not required from the homeowner. Mr. Sweetin explained the process the public utilities follows

when they receive their notification list for tree work. The public utilities will also be made aware of who has to sign off before this work is done. Mr. Sweetin pointed out that if the Mayor or the Borough Administrator does this signing-off, then sign-offs are not needed from the Police Department, the Public Works, or the Shade Tree Commission.

Mr. Sweetin recalled that the last time the public utilities did a maintenance cycle, a DPW representative came out and signed off on everything. As far as notification goes, the Borough had been notified.

Mr. Sweetin explained to Chrmn. Truppo that the STC can refuse JCP & L and then JCP & L will bring in their attorney. The Board of Public Utilities could then make a phone call to Chatham Borough to let them know that JCP & L will follow through with their project.

Mr. Sweetin recommended that the Commission genuinely work with the utilities with their tree projects. Sometimes things get difficult, but eventually everything works out.

Mrs. Klepper brought up the trees that were cut down on Cougar Field a couple of years ago. Is this an instance when they should have notified the town first.

Mr. Sweetin noted that tree removal was done on Chatham Township property; however, he was the planner for that project. He pointed out that JCP & L has to answer to the BPU when it looks like they aren't doing their job. When an electrical outage occurs, JCP & L has to come up, in 3 days, with a reason why it occurred.

Mr. Sweetin also noted that a number of those trees removed near Cougar Field were hollow. He stated that when he assesses a tree, he goes from ground to crown.

Chrmn. Truppo thanked Mr. Tortorella for bringing up this matter. Sometimes it feels like the STC is left out of these particular tree projects. Perhaps John Linson could still look over these tree removal requests and provide input.

Mr. Tortorella asked Chrmn. Truppo if she had spoken with the Borough Attorney about this ordinance situation.

Chrmn. Truppo answered no. Borough Administrator Steve Williams had spoken with the Borough Attorney on behalf of the Shade Tree Commission. Mr. Williams had asked the Borough Attorney if there had ever been any written communications from the public utilities asking the Borough if trees could be removed.

Mr. Tortorella asked whether Mr. Williams had any plans to put the public utilities on notice of their obligation to seek the STC's permission on these tree projects or to seek a blanket permit from the STC.

Chrmn. Truppo believed Mr. Williams will follow through.

Mr. Sweetin offered to bring in the JCP & L documents that he needs to have signed off on by a municipality, before tree work is done.

Chrmn. Truppo felt that would be a good idea. With the documents, the public could understand then that trees are not arbitrarily removed.

Mr. Sweetin explained the four-year maintenance cycle that JCP & L must follow for trees. He reviewed which signatures had to be obtained before any work is started, including the STC.

Mr. Sweetin pointed out that JCP & L does not have to notify residents that they will be doing tree trimming. JCP & L has a certain Right-of-Way through the trees that they must maintain. The BPU will come after them if they don't.

The Board had no further comments on this topic.

Update of Memorial Planting for Ken Chmura

Vice Chrmn. Chmura reported that her father's Memorial Mass was well attended at St. Patrick Church. The Mass was held on Arbor Day.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura thanked the Shade Tree Commission for their memorial tree that was donated in her father's memory.

Chrmn. Truppo has sent out memorial forms to interested residents, many of which are members of the Chatham Historical Society, who would like to donate towards a memorial tree in remembrance of Ken Chmura. A nice walking path will be created in Garden Park, as well as the planting of trees. All the necessary paperwork is on file with the Borough. Mrs. Piccolo has sent Chrmn. Truppo the plans for Garden Park. Chrmn. Truppo felt it would be a good idea to plant the trees in early autumn, so the summer heat won't impact them.

Chrmn. Truppo brought up a suggestion from Mr. Sweetin of doing a demonstration on the correct way to apply mulch and how to take care of trees. Vice Chrmn. Chmura felt her father would have definitely approved of such a demonstration.

Chrmn. Truppo discussed with Vice Chrmn. Chmura what type of tree could be planted in her father's memory. Vice Chrmn. Chmura said she could meet with the Commissioners to decide on a good spot in Garden Park for her father's tree.

Chrmn. Truppo asked if Mr. Sweetin could help select a good tree. Mr. Sweetin offered to help Vice Chrmn. Chmura look through a selection of trees that may be good.

Chrmn. Truppo will send the memorial tree plans to Vice Chrmn. Chmura and Mr. Sweetin. They will text each other to set up a mutual time to walk the site and discuss the tree.

2021 Tree Planting

Chrmn. Truppo has kept in touch with Mr. Torello about the Tree Planting Program for this year. So far there have been 25 requests for trees to be planted. There will probably be more. Mr. Torello had suggested to Chrmn. Truppo that the same number of trees from last year be reserved from Hall's Nursery. More time will be given to decide on the best location and species of each tree to be planted.

Chrmn. Truppo brought up an excellent suggestion made by Mrs. Klepper that more clarity should be given to residents about where the Borough right-of-way exists on a street, even though it varies sometimes. Perhaps it could be explained on the Borough website, using actual photos of a typical Borough right-of-way.

On other matters, Chrmn. Truppo reported that the STC's Tree City application is up to date as well as the NJ Department of Forestry paperwork. The Chatham DPW has been very helpful in submitting budget information needed for these forms.

Community Forestry Plan & Windshield Survey

Chrmn. Truppo noted that the Community Forestry Plan has to be done every five years. The STC's Windshield Survey is done every two years. The last Forestry Plan was done in 2016. Because Covid threw this schedule off, the next Forestry Plan will not be due until 2025. The Borough usually pays an arborist to undertake this plan. However, the Borough still remains in compliance in this area.

Regarding the Windshield Survey, John Linson will provide a list of local trees that are in need of pruning versus removals. He will probably do the survey some time this summer. Mr. Linson will then issue a report that can be reviewed at a fall STC meeting.

NJUCF Grant opportunity

Chrmn. Truppo reported that the New Jersey Department of Urban & Community Forestry (NJUCF) has a request for proposals out now. They are due on July 9th. There are a couple of opportunities for communities to apply for funding. Chrmn. Truppo discussed the category which the STC could be eligible for. She asked if any Commissioners would be interested in helping with this application.

Mr. Sweetin offered to donate some time. Chrmn. Truppo said she will help with the paperwork and the administrative end.

Shepard Kollock Clean-up

Chrmn. Truppo noted a year ago that former Council Member Weber had offered to have the Boy Scouts clean up Shepard Kollock Park. The casings have to be removed from recent tree plantings. She will touch base with Mr. Weber regarding this project.

Arbor Day 2021 Update

Vice Chrmn. Chmura reported that her Arbor Day video contest did not work out. She suggested another try be done next year, maybe in conjunction with a town tree planting event.

Mr. Sweetin reported that the Chatham Fire Department has planted a tree, and the Chatham Borough PBA has planted a tree. At this point in time, Mr. Sweetin didn't know when the official dedication ceremony will be held for the PBA tree. The planting site and dedication date are being worked on. The Chatham Fire Department will dedicate their memorial tree on the 4th of July. He will notify the Commission when the PBA tree will be dedicated.

As a last discussion, Mr. Sweetin reported that after the annual Chatham Clean-Up Day, he had found a number of local trees with way too much mulch applied to them. He suggested some of the Commissioners who know the correct mulching procedures, be on hand at the next Clean-up Day.

Mr. Sweetin suggested a section of the Borough Calendar could give suggestions on good mulching practices. He showed Commissioners a Tree Owner's Manual, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, that goes into detail about planting and caring for trees. Info on correct mulching is included. Mr. Sweetin offered to send copies of the manual to Commissioners. He also offered to send them a link of the manual instead. He felt this particular information on tree care would be easy for homeowners to follow. Mr. Tortorella found the link for Mr. Sweetin and emailed it to Commissioners.

At 8:47 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, June 24, 2021, 7:30 p.m. It will be a virtual meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler
Recording Secretary