

## CHATHAM BOROUGH SHADE TREE COMMISSION

December 15, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Chairman Colleen Truppo called this Regular Meeting of the Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission to order at 7:41 p.m. This was a Virtual Meeting held by Zoom. The Open Public Meetings Act was read aloud.

Names	Present	Absent
Colleen Truppo, Chrmn.	X	
Kristy Chmura, Vice Chrmn.	X	
Fran Drew	X	
Dean Wilson	X	
John Tortorella	X	
Patrick Florentino	X	
Beverly Klepper		X
Tony Torello, Shade Tree Enforcement Officer		X
Council Member Karen Koronkiewicz	X	
Liz Holler, Minutes Clerk	X	

### Public Comment

There was none

### Motion to Adopt Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the October 20, 2020 Shade Tree Commission meeting were approved as amended. There were no minutes for the November 17, 2020 Shade Tree Commission meeting. That meeting had been cancelled.

### Discussion Items

#### STC Tree Planting Program

Chrmn. Truppo reported, that thanks to the DPW's help, the Commission planted 55 new trees around town. She also noted that Hall's Garden Center worked very well with the DPW on this planting project. Chrmn. Truppo reviewed the mix of tree species that had been planted. The cost of the 55 trees came to \$15,000.

Chrmn. Truppo stated that the good news was that all the homeowners that were on the tree requesting list, received a tree. Some additional trees were available for additional requestors. Unfortunately, some of the homeowners became unpleasant to the DPW because the species of tree was not the one they had requested. Also, some of the residents did not want trees planted in a certain location. DPW tried to explain to these unhappy residents that these trees are being planted on Borough property, and ultimately, the Borough and Shade Tree Commission decides where a tree gets planted and what type.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that she had asked Mr. Torello, the Director of the DPW, whether Public Works would be willing to help with the tree plantings in 2021. DPW indicated that they were willing to help again, but the residents should be educated that the public right-of-way belongs to the Borough. The Borough has the final say what could be planted on this right-of-way. Chrmn. Truppo noted that the Shade Tree Commission, not the homeowner, ultimately chooses what species of tree gets planted in the right-of-way. The Commission works with arborists to make sure the right tree is planted in the right location. DPW did a great job in doing the mark-outs.

Chrmn. Truppo reported that she had put firmer language in the 2021 Borough Calendar reminding residents the Borough Code gives the Commission the right to plant the trees that they see fit. This reminder can also be included on the Borough website. She pointed out that Mr. Pietruono, from the DPW, has driven around the Borough and knew where trees had been lost and needed replacing.

Chrmn. Truppo discussed forming an ad-hoc committee to help educate the public on the realities of the STC's tree planting program. She volunteered to serve on the ad-hoc committee along with Mr. Torello and Council Member Koronkiewicz, and hopefully Borough Administrator Williams. The public should know that the STC is trying hard to maintain a good tree canopy in the Borough with these plantings. Council Member Koronkiewicz pointed out that the Commission is honestly trying not to annoy people with these tree plantings. The Commission is just trying to make the town more beautiful. Council Member Koronkiewicz said she could mention this situation at a Council meeting.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura brought up the time when the Commission had mailed out post cards to residents educating them about the ash borer tree disease. Maybe another post card could be sent out featuring bullet points explaining the STC's functions such as maintaining the town's tree canopy, maintaining trees on the Borough rights-of-way, etc. Could this be done?

Chrmn. Truppo answered yes, a mailing like that could be done, provided there was money in the Commission's budget. She asked Council Member Koronkiewicz if there were other ways to reach out to the public.

Council Member Koronkiewicz brought up that a Mayor's letter goes out once a year. She will ask Mayor Kobylarz when that letter goes out.

Chrmn. Truppo asked if she could seek the advice of other Council Members on how to reach out to residents.

Council Member Koronkiewicz will also talk with Melanie Politi, the Borough Administrator's Assistant, to see if she had some ideas.

On other matters, Mrs. Drew brought up that she had sent Commissioners emails reporting that for the last two months two beautiful trees had been taken down on Inwood Road. Permits had been posted in the homeowners' windows. However, Mrs. Drew hoped that the Commission would update their ordinance so the STC has some control over the removal of trees on private

property. Mrs. Drew pointed out that many of the surrounding towns – Summit, Maplewood, etc. have control over both public and private trees.

Mrs. Drew suggested that two people on the Shade Tree Commission volunteer to look at the tree removal request applications, take a field trip to look at the tree in question, and make a decision on whether or not the tree should be taken down. Mrs. Drew felt this procedure would help preserve Chatham Borough's beautiful tree canopy. She believed that STC representatives should take a serious look at who had obtained permission to take down a tree and what reasons were given. Mrs. Drew believed that many trees were being taken down for no good reason.

Mr. Wilson asked why or who recently took down two or three trees on the west side of Lafayette Ave. and Chatham Street?

Mrs. Drew answered that JCP & L had taken down those trees. She reported that JCP&L has butchered trees from Lafayette Ave. on up to Southern Blvd.

Returning to the tree removals on private properties, Chrmn. Truppo felt that the five municipalities that Mrs. Drew was referring to may have an arborist on staff, or a Commissioner is elected to take on that particular task of reviewing tree removals. Chrmn. Truppo pointed out that all the Borough Tree Commissioners are volunteers.

Returning to tree removals on Lafayette Ave., Mr. Wilson said he just wanted to know why JCP & L did not notify the Borough Shade Tree Commission that these trees were being removed.

Mrs. Drew pointed out that she had emailed photos of these tree removals to Commissioners.

Chrmn. Truppo noted that the Borough, particularly the Shade Tree Commission, was not receiving any notification from JCP & L reporting what Borough trees they will be removing. JCP & L should be providing the Borough what particular trees will be removed and why.

Chrmn. Truppo asked if the Commission could have an actual contact to JCP & L?

Council Member Koronkiewicz answered that there is a contact name with JCP & L. She will locate the name of the contact and invite this contact person to a Shade Tree Commission meeting.

Chrmn. Truppo will reach out to a contact she knew from the Department of Forestry for help and advice on this matter. Other towns may also be looking into how to stop JCP & L from tree removals.

Mrs. Drew recalled that Council Member Treloar had sent her information a year ago regarding JCP & L. Mrs. Drew will forward this information on to Commissioners by email.

Council Member Koronkiewicz suggested a new look could be given to the permit process for residents removing trees on their private properties. For instance, maybe residents should agree to plant new trees to replace the ones to be removed. Council Member Koronkiewicz brought up the question of whether Mr. Torello is requiring an escrow as often as he should.

Chrmn. Truppo concluded that she will try and obtain the total number of tree removal requests from either Mr. Torello or Margie Lowe and focus on how many requests were approved and how many were turned down. Also, what was the reason for the tree being removed. A report could be done. Commissioners agreed with this suggestion.

Vice Chrmn. Chmura felt that if the Commission really wanted to make the tree ordinance stronger, they should ask the Borough to consider hiring a full-time city arborist. It's better to have someone on the Borough staff with full training and credentials regarding trees.

Vice Charm. Chmura pointed out that Mr. Torello, of the DPW, and had some tree credentials. However, as DPW Director, he has many other responsibilities beyond trees. Hiring a part-time forester would probably be the best move. The Shade Tree Commission could then be the voice of educating the public about trees.

Chrmn. Truppo asked Council Member Koronkiewicz what steps could be taken for the Borough to obtain a contract with a qualified arborist, as opposed to an arborist on a per diem basis. Perhaps, the STC could contribute part of its budget to help fund such an arborist.

Council Member Koronkiewicz suggested that the Commission take the first step of collecting data on the Borough's tree permits. A meeting could be held with Mr. Torello. Among the topics to be discussed, Mr. Torello could explain why certain permits are turned down. The escrow situation could also be reviewed. Council Member Koronkiewicz offered to look into taking these first steps.

Regarding any changes to the tree ordinance, Chrmn. Truppo told Mrs. Drew that she would rather have a trained arborist review tree removal permits, rather than Borough volunteers or employees.

Mr. Tortorella agreed with Chrmn. Truppo's point. Although he could sympathize with Mrs.

Drew's unhappiness with the recent tree removals on Inwood Rd., he didn't think Commissioners should expand their roles any further in these instances. They don't have the credentials or expertise.

Commissioners discussed inviting Mr. Torello to attend a STC meeting on a quarterly or biannual basis to give an update on tree permits.

Chrmn. Truppo stated that she will ask Mr. Torello to attend a minimum of two STC meetings a year. If a tree issue arises, an ad-hoc meeting could be held with Mr. Torello in attendance.

#### CEUs

Chrmn. Truppo reported that the Commission is in good shape with its Continuing Education Units for 2020.

New STC Meeting Schedule for 2021

Chrmn. Truppo reported that the Shade Tree Commission will now be meeting on the fourth Thursday night of the month. It will be so noted on the 2021 Chatham Borough Calendar that will be coming out soon. The only exception will be in November, where the meeting will be on the Third Thursday of the month because of Thanksgiving.

Chrmn. Truppo and Vice Chrmn. Chmura will work on revising the STC website for the new year.

At 8:17 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The next Chatham Borough Shade Tree Commission Meeting will be on Thursday, January 28, 2021, 7:30 p.m. It will be a virtual meeting.

Respectfully submitted:

Liz Holler  
Recording Secretary