

WESTPORT TREE BOARD

Meeting Minutes

February 15, 2013

Present: Pam Klomberg, Judy James, Tracey Hammer, John Broadbin, Don Bergmann of the RTM, Jarrett Liotta of the Westport News

Next meeting: March 2013 – Exact date and time to be determined

I. Announcements

Pam Klomberg announced the following:

- That this was the second meeting of the newly revitalized Tree Board.
- That she had prepared an agenda for today's meeting. (The agenda was then distributed to attendees).
- That she has been attending state task force meetings for the purpose of acquiring information to guide the establishment of Westport's urban forest management template and for the purpose of recommending best practices.
- That there is a March 6th vote by the Board of Finance to approve a preliminary budget and that she is waiting to be updated by the First Selectman as to his intentions regarding tree-related budget items.
- That she and Silvia Erskine are scheduled to meet with the First Selectman next week to present a proposal for trees on Main Street.

II. Discussion

Pam Klomberg provided an overview of each agenda item as follows:

- The Norwalk Regional Tree Festival is scheduled for May 11, 2013 and there is a need to decide what to have at the Tree Board table.
- In relation to the loss of the Main Street trees, there is a need to decide whether to pursue or respond to the explanation provided by the Department of Public Works and Tree Warden to the Tree Board's December 17, 2012 letter requesting an explanation as to why and how the trees came to be removed.
- There is a desire amongst board members to develop the Tree Board's website and Facebook page.
- There is a need to increase the board membership.
- There is a need to advocate for tree-related funding requests in the upcoming budget cycle.

The agenda items were further discussed as follows:

- With respect to the issue of additional board members, Pam Klomberg thought that the Tree Festival might help with populating the board. Pam believes that the board needs people with specific skill sets.

- With respect to the upcoming budget vote, John Broadbin announced that the First Selectman had submitted a budget to the Board of Finance and had taken the Department of Public Works' recommendations as to tree-related items, which included an increase in tree-related funding over last year. The DPW recommended funding for a full-time tree warden. John explained that there are separate line items for tree warden hours, tree warden transportation, and contract services including tree removals and pruning. The DPW had recommended doubling the current tree warden hours, and the First Selectman increased that further to \$260,000, of which about \$90,000 is for contract services. John stated that he would not consider this a major change, but a first step. Don Bergmann stated that he would like to know how Westport compares to surrounding towns.
- John Broadbin recommended that Pam Klomberg obtain a copy of the First Selectman's proposal from Pat Scully, and consider what realistically can be done with the amount sought. John believes that if the Tree Board wants to advocate for a master plan for urban forest management, then it must develop a plan that is realistic and then get the RTM to buy into it. He feels it is a worthwhile civic endeavor but not necessarily a popular one.
- In relation to a master plan, Pam Klomberg indicated that Westport's current need is for a new tree warden and asked for opinion as to an inventory. John Broadbin stated that an inventory is an analysis tool and should not be done without an end goal but only if you are going to be able to do something with the information that it provides. He believes that it is a matter of when, or in which budget cycle. The issue of liability concerns in connection with an inventory was discussed and Don Bergmann wanted to know whether a legal opinion should be sought from the town attorney.
- Pam Klomberg indicated that she had collected inventory proposals from various companies. John Broadbin noted that consultation with experts could be an appropriate use of funding within the contract services line item. He felt that this might be the first step in creating or building a case for an inventory.
- Don Bergmann stated that a line item can be strong or weak and a lot depends upon how supportive the First Selectman is of an item, since it is his budget and his request to the RTM. Don suggested that the board figure out how the First Selectman intends to interact with the Board of Finance on this item and offered to get Diane Cady involved.
- With respect to the Main Street tree removals, Don Bergmann stated that that the Downtown Merchants Association is not going to replace the Main Street trees that they removed, and that they are not responsible for doing so. John Broadbin stated that he does not understand why the Tree Board cares about the process that led to the removals, or why the procedures that were followed would be the board's concern.
- The old stamp that used to be used by the Planning and Zoning Commission to inform applicants of the need to obtain the Tree Warden's approval prior to removing trees subject to the warden's jurisdiction was raised, and it was decided that the board must get the P&Z to reinstate use of the stamp, which will involve a letter to the P&Z and a copy to the Conservation Commission and First Selectman.
- Pam Klomberg will determine how to support the First Selectman's budget requests for tree-related items during the budget voting cycle.
- Pam Klomberg suggested that further consideration be given to how to respond to the documents and information provided by the DPW and tree warden in response to our December request for information.
- In terms of ideas about what to have at the Tree Board table at the tree festival, Judy James suggested that the opportunity to participate be offered to a science teacher or school group who

might prepare a project for the table. Pam Klomberg indicated that she would connect with school officials to see about assigning this as a project to a school group or teacher.

- Judy James agreed to serve as the content manager for the Tree Board's website and online presence.
- Pam Klomberg indicated that she wanted to meet in person with the town's website support staff before Judy James supplied new content to the staff to add to the Tree Board website.
- All agreed that by March 1st the Tree Board should have an updated online presence in the form of an updated town website and a new Facebook page.

III. Roundtable

- Pam Klomberg asked the reporter from the Westport News, Jarrett Liotta, if he had any suggestions, advice, or comments. Mr. Liotta responded that his advice would be for the board to be as open as possible, since a powerful tool is public opinion, and he recommended getting the schools, parents, teachers, and zoning board involved in the Tree Board's mission, by endearing ourselves to the PTA, the kids, and the town's science programs and Earth Day and Green Club activities. Mr. Liotta also requested a copy of the DPW response to the board's request for information regarding the Main Street tree removals.

IV. Action Items

It was unanimously decided that:

- The minutes from the December 7, 2012 meeting were approved but the reading of the minutes was waived.
- The members will choose a date for another meeting to be held in March 2013.