



CITY OF MOUNT VERNON

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Tree Advisory Board (TAB)
MEETING NOTES
February 3, 2022, 4pm

A **REGULAR MEETING** of the Tree Advisory Board was held on Thursday, February 3, 2022, 4:05pm via Zoom.

Attendance:

Voting members: Eveline Feldmann, Chair • Marlene H. Wertheim, Vice Chair • Henry May • Vincent DeVito • Marlon Molina • **Non-Voting members:** Tanesia Walters • Jennifer Mastrogiorgio • **Guest:** Shayne Brooks, Sustainability Director and Community Engagement. **Others:** John Montemarano

AGENDA

Approval of Minutes:

The January 20, 2022, Meeting Minutes were approved without any changes. A motion to accept was made by Ms. Wertheim and seconded by Mr. Molina.

TAB Staffing/Workflow/Technology:

The Chair has emailed Corporation Counsel requesting a legal adviser who would be a necessary staff to the Board as we roll out the Tree Ordinance. The Chair may further the request to City Council.

-Shayne Brooks, Director of Sustainability and Community Engagement, DPW

The Chair noted it is important to acknowledge, given the dire predictions for heat and extreme weather events posed by climate change in the coming decades, that protecting, maintaining, and enhancing a healthy urban canopy throughout the neighborhoods of Mount Vernon will be critical to the health and well-being of residents as well as to the City's commercial prosperity and welcomed former Rec Department's Community Outreach Director Shayne Brooks to our environmental workspace as a regular attendee. He is now serving as Mount Vernon's Director of Sustainability and Community Engagement within the DPW. Asked about how he is beginning his new position, he stated that he is focusing on projects that are low-hanging fruit for the city at this time – (1) A 3-tier recycling system in City departments' common areas, (2) A transitioning, with the financial incentive from NYSERDA, of the gas-powered lawn equipment to fully electric. He added that he will be creating a sustainability board.

-Introduction of work tool:

This tool can help us keep track of our work and list tasks thereby increasing our productivity. At the next meeting we will be discussing any recommendations for incorporation in the format.

-Web access for new code 252-Trees:

Regarding the replacement of the 1957 ordinance with the codified amendment of 8/11/21, Ms. Walters stated that the code has been updated with a document scan that can now be found under "new laws." It can also be found under DPW on the TAB page. It is understood that the goal is to have it codified. Ms. Walters will find clarification on an estimated date of completion.

Reports:

- from the Chair: Four communications have been sent out – a thank you to Councilwoman Danielle Browne for her intention to keep our lines of communication open and be a valuable resource to the TAB, congratulatory notes and introduction letters to Shayne Brooks, Council president Derrick Thompson and Councilman Ed Poteat.

- Arborist update:

As of now there is no report available on the condition/reasons of the trees cut down at 153 Douglas Place.

During the recent storm four (4) trees, which were already designated to come down, were lost. Twenty-five (25) trees have been trimmed. Seven dead/dangerous were removed, with seven (7) more to go. There are others that may have to follow. While this work is being done, for at least a month, the working-by-zone will be on hold.

Millington Street Planning Board Site plan review: The TAB has not yet been copied of the application with tree survey and landscaping plan. After Mr. DeVito and Mr. Montemarano meet with the builders to assess the landscape and proposed plans for it, they will report back to the TAB. Mr. DeVito has the impression that there are no trees worthy of preservation, and that the existing growth will be removed from the property. The developer is prepared to either offer replacement trees or to put into the Tree Escrow Fund the value of such trees. DPW would prefer the former. The Chair again requested that the site plan be directed to the TAB. Mr. Molina will inform the Planning Dept that as of now the TAB is to receive all proposal plans at the same time they are forwarded to other agencies. The Chair noted once we have access to the documents, we will deliberate in consultation with Mr. DeVito and then provide our recommendation into the reviewing process. What has to be clarified, Mr. Molina stated, is, according to the Tree Ordinance, who is the recipient of our report – DPW or the referring source.

In response to the many as-of-yet unresolved questions to the processing, tree fees, the escrow acct., planning for trees, Mr. May well observed and articulated the current status of the TAB's efforts – We're still in process. And, that is a positive thing. We have objectives and momentum.

- Community communication:

Inspired by the Tree Ordinance, two neighborhood associations, CHPNA (Chester Hill Park Neighborhood Assoc.) and OHHA (Oakwood Heights Homeowners' Assoc.) are exploring tree planting and other sustainable programs. They serve as a good example of learning how grassroots organizations can contribute to the health and strength of a community environment.

Members were encouraged to read a moving and relevant article that appeared in the N.Y. Times, online on Monday, Jan. 24, printed on Wed., the 26th – “How Do You Mourn A 250-Year-Old Giant.”

Unfinished Business: Implementation of the tree ordinance and TAB integration

- Tree permits procedure/review of documents: Ms. Wertheim reported on its evolving. We're working off of a helpful sheet provided by Jen Mastrogiorgio which, based on the Tree Ordinance guidelines, lists the requirements for obtaining the permit. We will be consulting with the tree surgeon on 2 sections of the ordinance that need clarification so that the permit will better satisfy its purpose. Any recommended changes that follow will be brought to the TAB for approval and a legal review.

- Reporting procedure/discuss reporting categories in SeeClickFix.com:

This app is managed by the Planning Dept., according to Mr. Molina. In an effort to cover all the possible reporting issues, we can add any number of categories to the current limited list, i.e., uprooted tree, tree branches, stumps, potential tree violation, mass tree removal, invasive species alert. Board members are asked to send any suggestions to Mr. Molina who will put together a list to be presented at our next meeting. Our choices would then be presented to legal. Mr. Molina reminded us that anything related to code enforcement is verified by DPW and/or Building Dept.

New Business:

-Arbor Day 2022 Planning: The City Council on Dec. 8, 2022 passed an Arbor Day Resolution, proclaiming Sat., April 30, 2022 as the Arbor Day in the City of Mount Vernon, and urges all citizens to support efforts to care for trees and woodlands in the City of Mount Vernon and to support the City's forestry program. It further resolved that the City urges all citizens in the City of Mount Vernon to plant trees to improve the community and to promote the well-being of present and future generations of its people, as well as the beneficial flora and fauna of this City.

Unspoken at this point is who is in charge of an event, the designated site, the planned program. With awareness of the date fast approaching, we began some brainstorming looking at who, when, where, what.

Last year, in the absence of the TAB, MVCitizenTree, Shayne Brooks/Recreation Dept., the Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon Society and other outside groups fulfilled the role of who. Now that the TAB is in place, we are prepared to play a significant part in the planning along with DPW and other declared depts., to create a dynamic collaboration that will build on last year's successful event – A Public and Educational Tree Planting. Shayne Brooks in his new sustainability role remains a valuable resource. It was agreed that we want to continue the important tradition of involving schools, as we did last year with STEAM Academy, Pennington Elementary and the Denzel

Washington School of the Arts. Principal of DWSA, Dr. Evelyn Collins, has already offered art and music student participation.

Members put out thoughts about location and planting; Planting more than one tree / Doing an entire street where there is a lack of trees on south side / Planting a group of trees in Hartley Park / At the base of each tree would be artwork done by a student / Planting a large 20 foot evergreen on the City Hall Pavilion.

Since DPW is best aware of available tree wells and other open tree locations throughout the city, the Chair asked Mr. DeVito for the next meeting to make a list of sites to consider suitable for an event like this. He and Mr. Montemarano pointed to their past successes at Veteran's Park and Union & Third, where evergreens planted are thriving.

There was some discussion about funding. The status of the Tree Escrow Fund is still unclear and if checks received have been cashed. Mr. Molina added that there is no confirmation that \$35,000 settlement committed by the Stagg Group was ever received. Mr. Montemarano suggested that funds could be generated by soliciting local businesses.

Tree Ordinance education tools: Before a guide can be produced, we have these priorities: Increased access to the code, putting in place application, reviewing, recommending mechanisms and enforcement protocol. The hope is that tree ordinance codification, tree removal permit and an education sheet will be ready when this event takes place.

Announcements:

We will be picking up 645 North Macquesten Parkway again at our next meeting after members have had a chance to study the documents emailed to the board by Deputy Planning Commissioner and Board member.

Next regular meeting will be on Thursday, February 17th, at 4 p.m.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:34 p.m.

<https://www.facebook.com/mountvernonny/videos/3203896809854049/>



February 17, 2022

Eveline Feldmann, Chair

Date of Approval