

**SHADE TREE COMMISSION  
MINUTES – May 5, 2021**

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 pm

**Location:** Virtual Meeting – *Zoom*

**Members Present:** Edgar David, John Casani, Vince Marrocco, Mark Eberle

**Township Liaison:** Mike Richino

**Minutes:** Angela Caramenico

**Also Present:** Joyce Keller, Board of Supervisors; Susan Mudambi, Liaison to Park & Open Space Board.

**Welcome to Mark Eberle – Alternate member to STC**

Edgar called the meeting to order and welcomed new Alternate member Mark Eberle to the Shade Tree Commission. Mark introduced himself to the Commission, stating he has been a Whitpain Township resident for over 25 years and is a Resource Planner Specialist with the National Park Service.

Edgar questioned the voting procedure when there is no quorum or when there is a quorum with one or two members absent from a meeting. Mike explained that the Board of Supervisors approved the addition of alternates to various Boards and Commissions to help make sure there would always be a quorum. Mike further explained that Mark, as an alternate, is welcome to attend all meetings and functions but does not have voting rights unless a member of the Commission is absent. He continued that since there are only three members in attendance tonight and two are absent, Mark would be able to vote on all issues this night.

Edgar also welcomed Angela Caramenico who will be taking the meeting minutes.

**Debriefing from 2021 FREE Tree Give Away**

Mike stated he received positive feedback on the tree giveaway except for two comments, one being that we ran out of redwood trees and the other being that people had to sit in their cars for hours waiting for trees which causes a lot of carbon to be burned from the cars. Mike continued that all trees were given away and he expressed his thanks to the Blue Bell Rotary Club, John Casani, who assisted with blowing the driveway and also to the Shade Tree Commission. If the need arises for the same format as this year, police assistance would be needed to help move the cars more quickly.

Mike noted the Tree Authority's invoice is being processed for payment and added that this year was significantly over budget.

A discussion ensued regarding cutting down or eliminating the bare root plants because some Commission members felt they are very hard to handle and can have a low success rate. A suggestion was also made that if the root plants are eliminated, more potted plants would be needed and only two trees per household would be permitted. It was agreed that this issue would be revisited at the next Commission's meeting for further discussion.

**Free Street Tree Planting Program**

Edgar explained that this is a program where Township residents can fill out a form to apply for a free street tree that a designated contractor would plant for the resident, guarantee it and with the intent that the tree provides future shade to street corridors. Edgar noted that John has been running the program for several years. John stated he received the 4<sup>th</sup> applicant yesterday and the goal is to have 20. John referred to an ad

that previously ran in the Township Wire and it was his hope it would be put in there again. Edgar asked that a link to the form be added to the information in the Wire.

### **Turnpike Corridor Restoration**

(Jolly Road, North Wales Road, Township Line Rd at Turnpike)

Edgar explained that 30 acres of woodlands was lost when the Turnpike was expanded and there is a diligent effort to reforest the area with one acre already completed at Jolly Road. He noted that the dedication tree is not doing well. John advised that there is a 12 month guarantee on the trees and he would reach out to Cedar Ridge regarding the dedication tree at Jolly Road. Edgar stated he would reach out to Steve Gantz regarding the other trees.

Edgar noted that North Wales Road is another other site being considered for reforestation, and the estimate for design came in at \$55,000. Edgar will forward this information to Mike. Edgar stated that the project is shovel ready and hopefully there will be some grant opportunities for this project.

### **Township Parks**

Edgar stated that after the last meeting, he and Celia put together some draft comments regarding the proposed plan for Mermaid Park and forwarded them to the Shade Tree Commission members for their input. At this time, he would like to review those comments so they can be presented to the Mermaid Planning Committee prior to their meeting on 5/6/21. Edgar advised that the comments would be to reinforce the Shade Tree Commission's goals of a passive approach and more restoration oriented and active use of existing buildings.

John agreed with most of the comments in the letter, however, he did not agree with the suggestion to move the dog park and he is a proponent of some type of indoor facility particularly in one corner lot of Mermaid. It was John's opinion that the letter did not represent the entire Shade Tree Commission.

Mike stated that he had two issues for the Commission: Issue 1) Mike made a proposal on behalf of Kurt Baker, Parks and Recreation Director. Mike explained that the township received a large grant to build an inclusive nature-based playground in Steuer Woods at Center Square Park. He stated that this project was started 2017, got a DCNR grant, the master site development plan was completed in 2019, again with Bouche and James hired to do design construction documents and bid documents, etc. for Phase 1a and Phase 1.

Mike explained that Phase 1a included tree removal, reforestation, pruning, invasive removal and Phase 1 included the driveway, parking lot, rest room, main trail and pod 1 of 5 nature-based pods. Due to various reasons including the consultants' legal troubles and Covid 19, the project was put on hold. As of this time, through a series of events such as the emerald ash bore issue, hurricanes, etc. there are now some safety concerns and a very much increased cost to put these playgrounds into Steuer Woods Park.

Mike stated that Kurt's proposal, which he already proposed to the Board of Supervisors, is to move this project to the back area at Mermaid at the other side of the stream from the tennis courts. He added that the big oak trees would not have to be removed for this project, rather the playground would be built around them. Mike noted that Mermaid was not an option when this project commenced. He continued that this proposal did receive support from staff, the Board of Supervisors, and DCNR, and the hope is to now get public support from the Shade Tree Commission, the Park and Open Space Board, the Mermaid Lake Committee and the Inclusive Playground Committee to publicly support this plan and move this inclusive playground project to Mermaid Lake Park.

Issue 2) Regarding the conversation about removing the dog park and putting proposed indoor facility in this location, Mike pointed out that the indoor facility will not fit in that area so it becomes a non-factor.

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the dog park, including whether to move it or not and/or to put an indoor facility in its location. Joyce asked if it would be possible to use one of the pods for an indoor facility, and Mike replied in the negative stating the pods are too small to house an indoor facility.

Mike explained the proposed indoor facility would potentially house 2 gyms, a community room, bathrooms, and would need 100 parking spaces. At present there are less than 40 spaces at the dog park. He added that if an indoor facility is what is decided by the master plan, then a feasibility study would have to be done to determine the size of it. Mike pointed out that the dog parking lot is 10.2 acres, and the triangle over Arch is over 30.1 acres, which is 3 times the size of the dog parking lot. After further discussion, it was agreed to drop the idea of moving the building to the dog park area and remove that recommendation from the original comment letter.

A motion was made by Edgar David, seconded by Mark Eberle, that if a public indoor recreation building is being considered, then the Shade Tree Commission recommends that it be built on the triangle portion rather than on Mermaid Lake proper including the parking. The motion passed with 3 votes in favor and one abstention from John Casani. John stated that he wanted to see the letter with the edits before voting on it.

Mark will send out the revised comment letter to the Shade Tree Commission as well as to the Mermaid Planning Committee.

A question was raised concerning emergency Commission meetings, and Mike explained that an emergency meeting can be held, but that it has to be treated as a regular meeting with proper advertisement, be open to the public, and with no zoom votes or email votes.

### **Relocation of the playground project from Steuer Woods to Mermaid**

A discussion ensued about the request made on behalf of Kurt Baker by Mike Richino to relocate the proposed pod park from Steuer Woods to Mermaid Park. Edgar mentioned the historic trees in that area and Mike explained that the request is not to remove the trees but to incorporate the pods around the trees as a nature based inclusive park. Although in favor of the project, Edgar noted his concern about root disturbance and Vince concurred.

Mike further explained that a grant was awarded for a nature based inclusive project at Steuer Woods, but now the Township would like to petition DCNR for a change to move the project to Mermaid, as this was not an option at the time of the original grant petition.

After some discussion of possible other sites for the pod park including Wentz Run Park or the park side of Arch Road, it was agreed that the move to Mermaid would be best to meet all the grant criteria.

A motion was made by Edgar David, seconded by Vince Marrocco, all voting “aye”, to support the move of the pod park from the Sturgis Woods Park location to a more appropriate location at Mermaid that would respect the historic trees in that area. Motion passed 4-0.

### **Review of Meeting Minutes of April 7<sup>th</sup>**

A motion was made by Vince Marrocco, seconded by Edgar David, all voting “aye” to approve the April 4<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes as presented. Motion passed 4-0.

### **Current Development Projects for Review**

795 Jolly Road Townhouses at Arborcrest

Edgar asked that this topic be placed on next month's agenda for further discussion.

### **Centre Square Planting**

Edgar asked that this topic be placed on next month's agenda for further discussion.

### **Whitpain Township Heritage Tree Registry**

Edgar noted that the previous registry was done as a photo album and was done on homeowners' properties. There is interest to revisit this issue but in order to do an update of the registry, permission will be needed from all the homeowners involved in order to get updated photos.

Edgar asked that this topic be placed on next month's agenda for further discussion.

### **Tree Ordinances**

Mike spoke with Jason Lubar who will be making recommendations of who should be on the Ordinance Review Committee, including representatives from the Shade Tree Commission, the Park and Open Space Board, Greg Klucharich and others. A meeting will be held once Morris Arboretum is ready. Edgar noted that Celia and Vince expressed an interest in serving on that committee. Mike will keep everyone updated.

### **Deer Management for Canopy Health**

Edgar advised that he, along with Celia and Mark are working on a thesis on the deer status in Whitpain township and they also added the public and health safety impact to make it more comprehensive. Edgar noted that he spoke to the Whitpain police chief who stated that in the last five years there were 885 deer incidents or 170 per year. Due to these high numbers, he expressed his support of deer management.

Mike noted that the Deer Management Committee is being changed to the Deer and Goose Management Committee and he will be asking for representatives from the STC to be on that Committee.

### **Whitpain Wire Topics for 2021**

Three topics were recommended for the next Whitpain Wire:

- Free Street Tree Planting
- Watering your new free trees
- Lantern Fly

### **Open Floor**

Mike noted that the Township through the efforts of Greg Klucharich is trying to secure grant funding to replant the buffer at Blue Bell Springs on Route 202.

### **STC Future Meeting Schedule for 2021**

**All meetings will be the first Wednesday of the month at 5:30 pm.** The next scheduled meeting is **Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

July: **No meeting**

August: **No meeting**

September 8<sup>th</sup>

October 6<sup>th</sup>

November: **No meeting**

December 1st

### **Adjournment:**

By a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:04 pm