



## **SHADE TREE COMMISSION MINUTES – September 8, 2021**

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, September 8, 2021, at 5:30 pm

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

**Members Present:** Edgar David, John Casani, Celia Cameron, and Andrew P. Meehan.

**Alternate Members:** Mark Eberle, Nilza Lozada and Timothy Knowles

**Board of Supervisors Liaison:** Joyce Keller

**Township Liaison:** Mike Richino

**Minutes:** Angela Caramenico

### **Introductions and New Members**

Edgar called the meeting to order and welcomed two new alternate members of the Shade Tree Commission (STC), Tim Knowles and Nilza Lozada. Each member introduced themselves and gave a brief description of their background and their interest in the Shade Tree Commission. Edgar noted that Vince Marrocco, another member of the Shade Tree Commission and the head of horticulture at the Morris Arboretum, was unable to attend tonight.

Edgar stated that he provided some information to the members which included the STC Mission Statement. He noted the importance that the Statement include all the trees in Whitpain Township and have some input into open space and the tracts in the Township. He asked all the members to review the mission statement.

### **Review Minutes of May 5, 2021**

Mike noted that since one member of the STC is absent, an alternate member can vote in his place. It was decided that Nilza Lozada would be the voting member for this meeting and Tim would be the voting member at the next meeting when needed.

It was moved by Edgar David, seconded by Mark Eberle, to approve the May 5, 2021, Shade Tree Meeting Minutes as presented. Motion passed 3-0, with two abstentions, Celia Cameron and Nilza Lozada, as they were not present for the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **Whitpain Township Tree Canopy**

Edgar stated that restoring the tree canopy in the Township is one of the more critical missions. He referred to a tracker hand out which shows that over the last 10 years, the township has lost about 4-5% of its canopy or 300 acres, which is a significant amount of loss mostly due to the turnpike expansion and the emerald ash bore disease. It was his hope that through programs like the free give away, these actions would help to reverse that process.

### **2022 FREE Tree Give Away**

Edgar explained the tree give away occurs every spring as part of the Earth Day celebration where residents can get free trees which contributes to the long-term growth in the township. It is also part of the Tree City USA and Whitpain Township has been one of its longest members.

Edgar referred to the list of proposed plants for the 2022 giveaway, which represents 450 different plants, including canopy and flowering trees. The list also reflects all native species as well as container plants.

He noted that the STC moved away from bare root trees due to their expense and they are more difficult to maintain.

Mike concurred with Edgar that this project is about \$1,000 over budget. Mike stated that during budget discussions, he would relay that the STC is requesting an additional \$1,000 for 2022 and the same going forward each year.

It was the hope of the STC that next year's Free Tree Give Away would be back at the park and not a drive through. Earth Day will be Friday, April 22, 2022, and the Free Tree Give Away program would be Sunday, April 24, 2022.

Mark asked if there was any data on deer protection or mulch and if it would be beneficial to eliminate these and put the money towards purchasing more plants. Edgar stated that tree tubes are cost effective and help with deer rub. It was Andy's opinion that both deer protection and mulch are essential and beneficial. The STC agreed to stay with the deer protection and the mulch, to cut back on the bare root trees and keep the proposed number of trees for the 2022 Give Away to 450 trees.

### **Free Street Tree Planting Program**

John Casani gave an update on the program. He stated that to date there are only 1-2 applications for the fall planting, as spring usually brings in the most applications. He asked that members spread the word of this worthwhile program.

Nilza recognized the benefits of this program but noted that she never heard of the program. She stated that all ash trees were planted on her street over 30 years ago and unfortunately about 95% of those trees died because of ash bore disease. She suggested that builders plant different species so that if one tree gets sick, it won't affect all the other trees and avoid what happened to her neighborhood. John noted that the application for the free street planting program is on the township's website and added that it is a single resident program. Edgar explained that currently the STC is budgeted for 20 street trees per year, and so far this year the township is up to 12-14 trees. Edgar recommended that Nilza sign up for the Whitpain Wire which provides a lot of Township information including the Free Street Program.

Mark stated that he also trying to get trees in his neighborhood due to loss of trees from the recent hurricanes. He also suggested that the non-native London plane tree be taken off the list and replaced with another native tree. Edgar commented that the American Sycamores are great native trees but they succumb to anthracnose, whereas the London plane tree is the non-native equivalent but without the anthracnose problem. Andy concurred with Edgar that the London Plane tree is very similar to the Sycamore and that anthracnose is a big problem which is difficult and expensive to treat. It was Andy's opinion to stay away from the Sycamore. John and Andy will review the tree list with Mark and try to come up with another reasonable native substitute.

This item will be added to the October agenda for further discussion.

### **Turnpike Corridor Reforestation Township Gateway Plantings**

Funding needed for North Wales Road Planting, Gateway to Whitpain

Edgar advised that funding is needed for the North Wales Road Planting, also referred to as the Gateway to Whitpain, as North Wales Road is a gateway to Whitpain Township. Edgar stated this project would be an opportunity not only to reforest the corridor of the turnpike but also enhance the gateway into Whitpain Township. The design estimate is \$55,000 and the hope is to find some grant opportunities for this project. He advised the grant funding is the biggest challenge and perhaps a request for funding can be brought to the Board of Supervisors.

In response to Nilza's question about a Township grant writer, Mike responded that the Township does not have a grant writer. He added that Travis DeCaro is the Township's Project Manager and he will handle the grant if we get one, but he is not a grant writer. Edgar added that the grants needed would specifically fund the materials as well as the implementation.

Edgar concurred with Mike that the landscaper is to walk the area again in September before the warranty on the plants expires. Edgar stated that he will contact the landscaper and follow up with him.

### **Township Parks**

Mermaid – Mike stated that there will be a Mermaid Planning Committee meeting via zoom on Monday.

Centre Square Park – Mike stated that he is working with the Engineering Department to get a price for an updated base plan, as we have the original as built but there have been several changes since then. Mike added that once that cost is established, he will put in the budget for next year. The budget is usually prepared by October, then the Board of Supervisors reviews it over a series of three public meetings before final adoption.

Edgar noted that on behalf of the STC, he lobbied hard that the pod park's move from Centre Square to Mermaid be put in an area where the golf course is and create and design an integration with nature. In response to Nilza's question about the pods, Mike explained that the Township received a grant to build a nature based inclusive playground which originally was going in Steuer Woods but then it made more sense to be moved to Mermaid. He continued that each pod is a different play area.

Erbs Mill Park – John Casani reported that the Township broke ground and will be putting in a playground set in Erbs Mill Park. Mike noted that there will also be a pavilion there.

John stated that someone asked him to sign a petition for Erbs Mill that there just be a dust stone trail and not a 6 ft blacktop walking trail. Mike explained that gradually all dust stone trails will be paved because of accessibility and maintenance. He added that 6 ft is the standard and narrowest that can be used for a stroller and that part of the master plan does include canopy. In response to Joyce's question about cost and payment, Mike stated that all Erb Mill costs are budgeted through the Township.

Joyce noted that Wentz Run Park would also provide a lot of opportunities for tree plantings and Edgar stated that it will be considered in the future.

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

Reeds – preserving the back for open space

Blue Bell Springs- Planting on buffer of blue bell springs. Joyce noted that this will take some time before it is done due to various reasons including the road has to be done by Padot, homeowners' approval, and rights of way will be needed.

In response to Nilza's question, Mike explained that a homeowner can do it on their own, but the township cannot offer them any compensation for doing so. Mark questioned if there were any obligations put on the developer and Joyce stated she feels that PennDOT should pay for what was removed or give us a fund so we can do it ourselves. Joyce will bring this issue up to the Board of Supervisors. She added that if infrastructure bill goes through, the township will ask for grant money, and we are looking into this. This item will be added to the October agenda.

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

Edgar asked Nilza if she would be willing to take photos of all the heritage trees and document them and she agreed to do so and requested a list of the trees.

A discussion ensued about the great white oak tree at Narcissa Road which is a 280 year-old registry tree. Edgar stated that recently the tree suffered a significant fracture, split up the middle and is in a very disturbed condition. Morris Arboretum studied the tree and confirmed that the tree is in very poor condition and offered the following options: 1) take it down; 2) lighten the canopy of the tree to reduce the weight of the tree by putting up a prop under one branch as it is leaning; and 3) if nothing done by the homeowner, it will fall over. Mike stated he has been communicating with the homeowner since the July storm and the homeowners are concerned that the tree will fall on them. He added that the township's Public Works Director and Assistant Director, Tom Farzetta and Lee Miller, went out to look at the tree and stated the tree is about 6-12" outside of the township's right of way. However, since it is so close to the township's right of way, Public Works, through their funding, is willing to help the homeowner. Mike stated he is reluctant to use township funds to lighten the canopy because if it still falls, we will have liability.

Andy also looked at the tree, and it is his opinion that the tree needs to be removed and we should not accept any liability of trying to lighten the canopy. He estimated that it would cost between \$10,000-\$12,000 to remove the tree. Mike suggested going to the homeowners and saying since this is heritage tree and so close to the township's right of way, the township would be willing want to help out maybe split the cost to take it down.

A motion was made by Celia Cameron, seconded by Edgar David, all voting "Aye", that the Shade Tree Commission formally recommend the removal of the white oak tree on Narcissa Road. The motion passed 5-0. None opposed.

Mark suggested that the homeowner work with John to maybe get a tree through the free street program. John stated he was intrigued by Andy's suggestion that a portion of that tree can be left for wildlife habitat. Mike stated he would speak with the homeowner about these options.

### **Tree Ordinances**

Ordinance Review Committee - Mike stated that he needs two volunteers from the Shade Tree Commission to be on the Ordinance Review Committee. It was agreed that Vince and Mark would be the Shade Tree representatives on the Ordinance Review Committee.

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

Edgar noted that he provided a handout on deer management – Paper by STC: Regional Perspective, Ecological and Human Health and Safety Impacts.

Deer and Wildlife Management Committee- As far as the Committee, Edgar stated they met via zoom a few weeks ago with a representative from Delaware Valley Deer Management Group, who are largely bow hunters and have done programs for the Wissahickon trail and several other sites in the surrounding area. In response to Joyce's question, Edgar responded that the program is all hunting. It was Joyce's concern that this would present a hurdle because of the density of the houses. Mike noted that they only need 50 yards to hunt without the homeowner's consent. In response to Nilza's question, Mike clarified that nothing is being done yet but just informing the Committee to review options and make recommendations of what they propose to be done or not done and then the Board of Supervisors will make the final decision.

Nilza questioned the pros and cons about the use of birth control. Edgar explained that it is extremely expensive and not overly effective.

Edgar stated that the Committee is advocating deer management and possibly work out something with the Delaware Valley Deer Management Group.

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

Deer Management – Edgar will email Dave Mrochko

**Open Floor**

No issues at this time.

**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, October 6th.**

October 6<sup>th</sup>

November: **No meeting**

December 1st

**Adjournment:**

By a unanimous vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm