

MINUTES
TREE COMMITTEE
March 9, 2022

The Town of Bel Air Tree Committee meeting took place via the *GoToMeeting* virtual platform on March 9, 2022, at 4:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mike Simini, Chair
Wayne Merkel, Vice Chair
Graham Becker
Frank Lopez
Marion McCarron

IN ATTENDANCE: Kevin Bianca, Town Commissioner
Rowan Glidden, Senior Planner
Jane Sudbrink, Recording Secretary

I. Administrative Matters

A. American Legion Post 55 Tree Removal

The meeting began at 4:35 p.m. Mr. Glidden asked that Commander Hank Allen, a guest, speak first. He introduced himself as the commander for the Sgt. Alfred B. Hilton Memorial American Legion Post 55 at 115 N. Bond St. He briefly explained the services of the American legion, which are primarily to serve the needs of veterans. Commander Allen said that he volunteered to come in to speak to the committee regarding the recent removal of two trees from the front yard of the building. He expressed regret that he did not seek the permission of the committee, nor did he follow proper protocols prior to their removal. Commander Allen presented photos of the trees and explained why he had them removed. First, the trees' roots were not only impacting the sidewalk, but they had grown above ground resulting in a safety hazard. Second, utility lines are in the front yard. The gas line was located three feet from the side of one tree. Multiple roots had grown near this line. BGE replaced the gas line in October 2021, but the tree's roots would have continued to disrupt the gas line. The sewer and water lines were also affected. The roots of one of the trees continued to tap the sewer line, creating plumbing issues. This same tree was very near the water line, and Commander Allen feared that the pressure of its roots would eventually burst the water pipes. He also mentioned that the overhead power line to the building was in one of the trees. BGE had cut branches previously and stated that the tree was too close to the power line.

Commander Allen determined it was an urgent matter, so he contracted out the service to an arborist, and the trees were removed carefully. He noted that a 3-to-4-inch-wide root was found very near the sewer line and growing underneath the building. He also said that the matter was urgent because the post recently received a grant to install a flagpole, an important part of the legion's mandate. With the trees down, the post now has an area to put up the flagpole.

Mr. Glidden said he looked at the site on the GIS system. The trees were considered street/public trees. He said that the significant issues Commander Allen outlined justified the removal of the trees. He said

that he would like replacement trees planted. Commander Allen said that there is space for other trees to be planted along the street but away from the utility lines. Mr. Glidden stated that an area south of the building would be ideal to plant the replacement trees. He suggested three to four smaller trees that will not grow so large as to interfere with overhead lines. He said that he and the committee would work with the commander to determine what species of tree to plant.

Mr. Becker suggested installing a root mat, also called a root containment net, when planting the trees. The inexpensive mat will prevent roots from growing toward utility lines.

At Mr. Glidden's request, Commander Allen will send him the name of the arborist to ensure that it was a certified arborist and that the company obtained a street tree permit. Mr. Glidden confirmed for the committee that he was aware that the tree removal would occur, but he did not know it actually happened until after the fact. Commander Allen had been in contact with Jesse Bane regarding the tree removal, but the tree committee was not notified.

Mr. Bianca had already talked to Mr. Bane, and they came up with a mitigation requirement. Mr. Glidden said this scenario will fall under the small lot section of the town code in the forest conservation section. In summary, Mr. Glidden will get back with Commander Allen regarding the necessary mitigation steps: the best location to plant the trees, the species, and the recommended number.

B. Review of the February 9, 2022, Minutes

Mr. Simini mentioned a discrepancy on page 2, under *New Business*. The committee elected to delete the following sentence: "Mr. Simini also noted that Harford County has an Arbor Day tree giveaway, though the trees are larger." Mr. Simini said that the trees given away by Harford County are the same ones the committee gives away at the Farmer's Market. The larger trees mentioned are being planted at the landfill. Mr. Merkel moved to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. McCarron seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.

II. Old Business

A. Tree City USA 2021

Mr. Glidden said he is still waiting on the proclamation, which should be soon. He is waiting to hear from his contact, Anne Gilbert.

B. PLANT Award 2021

Mr. Glidden has not received any information on this award. Anne Gilbert is also his contact.

C. Arbor Day Activity

Mr. Simini confirmed that the date is April 9, 2022, 8 a.m. to noon at the Bel Air Farmer's Market. Mr. Simini did not have a definite date for tree bagging yet. He said he typically picks up the trees during the third week in March. He will try to collect them as early as possible that week to accommodate everyone's schedules. Mr. Simini confirmed that he will be picking up 360 trees. Mr. Becker said that if the need arises, Bartlett Tree Experts could donate trees for this event or in the future.

Mr. Glidden sent the draft Arbor Day proclamation to Michael Krantz. Mr. Bianca confirmed that he will check with Mr. Krantz tomorrow to determine at which meeting the commissioners will present the proclamation. Because the tree committee does not meet in April, Mr. Glidden wanted to get this information out to the committee as soon as possible, so that members may be present at the meeting to receive the proclamation.

D. Homestead-Wakefield Elementary

Mr. Glidden said that the planning commission will be meeting on April 7 to discuss the Homestead-Wakefield project. There are 74 specimen trees on the site, though no champion trees. The site for the project includes both school buildings. The Homestead building and Bel Air Middle School are on the same lot; the Wakefield building is on a separate lot. The site is 61 acres. HCPS will have to apply for an administrative variance to remove any of the 74 trees, as well as provide a final forest conservation plan. The proposal included a request to delay mitigation requirements, but Mr. Glidden countered that he asked for those requirements be addressed now. An area was approved for clearing in order to provide space to install portable classrooms. Mr. Glidden was disappointed that the proposal asked to remove 28 of the specimen trees, though most of these removals are unavoidable. One tree could have been saved, but it has already been taken down. Consequently, Mr. Glidden said he could issue a zoning violation notice. Furthermore, he stressed no more trees can be removed without showing the town the plans. Extra mitigation may be required because of that tree removal.

Mr. Lopez asked about the possibility of installing an outdoor classroom, as mentioned in last month's meeting. Mr. Glidden said that he mentioned this to the design consultants. He is hopeful that they will take it under consideration. They did not seem averse to it. He noted that Bel Air Middle School may be renovated in the future, and the outdoor classroom could be discussed then too. He pointed out that the storm water facility and the stream restoration project behind the site can act as outdoor classrooms too.

III. New Business

No new items were discussed.

IV. Adjournment

Ms. McCarron made the motion to adjourn. Mr. Merkel seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 5:36 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for May 11, in person.