

2014-07-12 Notes from Climate and Environment Committee "tree subcommittee" meeting

Present: Pat Burda, John Kolakowski, John Fitzgerald, Paul Magnusson, Elizabeth MacDonald, Vicky Taplin

Pat began with an apology for not having been able to attend prior meetings. She recapped what we had done so far from her understanding based on prior conversations with various subcommittee members.

She suggested we should look at neighboring communities to compare their ordinances, as it is possible that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. John F. noted that there is a Univ. of California tree ordinance guide; also others touted as "model" ordinances such as Athens, GA. We agreed that any point of comparison should be a "near urban" community such as ours with smaller lot sizes, large houses and trees.

Pat and Vicky noted statistics that indicate some 90-95% of the tree removal applications have been granted since the ordinance went into effect. Elizabeth said that even though there have only been 15 rejections in last couple years (stat provided by Pat and Vicky), she's not sure that that can be interpreted in any certain way. She noted that the process is having a chilling effect and leading some individuals to not even seek removal permits. Pat and/or Vicky will forward to subcommittee the statistical information (as compiled in a powerpoint slide set).

Pat noted that we have some anecdotal evidence that the tree ordinance is having an impact on developers (some won't buy a property if it requires a tree removal application process).

Elizabeth provided information on a recent survey she conducted of the group of petitioners. There are perhaps 50 households in her group. Recent survey, with 2/3 of her group responding, indicates that a total of 10 trees would be taken down.

Paul clarified and emphasized that they just want ability to remove trees on size and location. Discretion cannot be left in the hands of others.

Pat suggests that the petitioners' group (or subcommittee rep?) should come to Town Council with some set of high-level proposals for amending the ordinance. The council could vote to enact one or more proposals in some fashion and direct the Town's legal staff to revise the ordinance(s) as appropriate. For example, three possibilities could be presented:

1. allow removal up to certain percentage of square footage of tree canopy (would make it difficult for developers who want to clear-cut, but not for individuals who want to remove a single tree)
2. option tree removal idea of petitioners
3. amend existing ordinance to redefine idea of "hazardous" to include some trees that are of a certain size and/or location

Pat summarized what she thinks could be next steps that might all help:

1. Tree board improvement (constitution and process)
2. proposals for ordinance revision as identified above
3. Option of hiring your own arborist to present support for removal

John K. will look to schedule a next meeting for August via Doodle Poll. As the next Council meeting is in September, it is hoped that the next subcommittee meeting could result in a proposal that could be suggested to the Council then.