

**Barre City Tree Stewardship Committee - Meeting Minutes
August 5, 2019**

Committee Members Present: Conor Teal, Amanda Garland, Nate Ebert, Nicko Rubin

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager, Steven MacKenzie; Director of Public Works and Engineering, Bill Ahearn

Staff Absent: Jeff Bergeron

Visitors: Amy Galford (Prospective Committee Member)

1. Call to order – 6:04 pm by Member Amanda Garland

2. Changes to agenda? None.

3. Introductions of Committee and Visitors:

- Amy Galford: Shared her background in Biology and currently works at the State of Vermont: Department of Environmental Conservation, Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division. Found an interest in tree stewardship from researching their benefits in water systems protection and their many benefits in urban settings. She sought out a property with trees and space to plant more when moving to Barre City a few years ago. Responded to the request by the Barre City government for volunteer committee members and decided her closest interests aligned with the Tree Stewardship Committee.

4. Report from City (#1) - Report from Bill Ahearn:

- Planning Tree Trimming

Concern: How to distinguish removals from prudent pruning?

Bill said there is a goal to avoid chopping trees harshly, but staff have been box cutting trees out of time efficiency and would like a better method in place. Would like to set expectations for the public in managing trees in public right-of-ways, including sidewalks. Currently, there's a category for Hedges and for Conifers. Can't have too much extension over sidewalks since there needs to be room to plow. Asking Committee to help with public awareness and training on pruning, in order to avoid quick, harsh trimming of trees by his staff (many trees to attend to, so there is less emphasis on aesthetics and healthy limb cuts).

He is recommending a tree management program to be in place to help the public work with their own trees to assist the city staff. When street sweepers are effected then that is when the major cutting happens. No single event will make any particular tree positioned optimally, takes years to maneuver tree limbs. Bill has been working on an outline of such a program and, when complete, will present it to the Tree Committee for feedback, editing, and additions.

Another issue: more than 5 miles (80-120 acres) of "paper streets" in Barre City (streets that are planned and on maps, but have not yet been built) and those trees have been lacking attention and are prone to breaking. There is tens of thousands of board feet of dead wood to remove. His team is currently focusing on hazards and removals. Looking for structured management to help prevent hazards, maintain aesthetics, find cost estimates per tree removal, retain healthy trees. Worried of negligence where damage might happen.

-Nate: Overwhelming amount of trees that are hazardous, but recommends getting official arborists to evaluate trees that receive calls from the public based on the fear of damage to houses. Reduces need of over-cutting if they can be officially distinguished.

- Bill: Agreed, and could possible carry the cost of ~30 trees per year. But still needs to reach 150/year.
- Nate: If making a city-wide plan for tree care, he would recommend a staff member to become risk-assessment certified.
- Steven and Bill: Prefer it be on a contractor basis, too much for City staff to take on. 450 statutory-exempt lots given to City meant for roads and new residential but they haven't been developed, but trees are going wild in these areas and a liability.
- Nate: Logging companies only come out at a certain high price.
- Bill: Bundle in 5 quadrants, 2 year contract? Structure it to be economically-viable.

ACTION ITEM #1 (B. AHEARN): Develop an outline of pruning program, which includes public outreach and training, priority lists for City-managed trees to be pruned or removed, and seek out pruning training for his staff, when possible.

6. Report from City #2 - Steven MacKenzie:

- Main Street Tree management

What is the plan for the base of the trees? He had the grass coverage trimmed for Heritage Festival and wondered if it's reasonable to just keep the grass instead of the consideration for mulch. Also wonders if the cobblestones should remain, if so, all or remove some? Prefers a firm recommendation and plan going forward from the tree committee to city council.

- Became apparent that many city right-of-way trees need removal, calls weekly. \$7000 for removal. Will ask for \$25,000 next year. Complaints of ten trees that are dead and need to be removed near Elm Woods, along fence near Community Garden. Could be liability to city.
- Eventually wants a plan for any leftover trees from various projects public projects or random instances where they are acquired by the City to go in a priority location list.

ACTION ITEM #2 (TREE COMMITTEE): Develop a priority list for any new trees in public spaces. Develop a clear Main Street Trees Maintenance Plan.

7. Main Street Trees Progress (Mulch Plan):

- Amanda: Wants next steps for Main Street trees progress. Worried that consistent weed-whacking of grass would damage trees, prefers mulch.
- Nate: Agrees with Amanda on using mulch, benefits: having more nutrients into ground, rebuilds soil, protects soil from people/animals, and shields soil from too much sunlight.
- Nicko: Mulch costs around \$25 per yard, will only need 2.5 yards. 2-3" of mulch will be enough.
- Steven: \$5000 in general fund for tree maintenance.
- Conor: Should we reach out again to align businesses with watering trees this summer?
- Amanda: Might be easier to just use Gator Bags (wrap-around bags with slow release of water)?
- Nate: Would be beneficial to have them since they are low maintenance and reusable for other trees and seasons.
- Amanda: Do we have city staff to help with mulching?
- Steven: Maintenance team is spread thin, but Committee should ask Jeff Bergeron for availability.
- Nicko: Could purchase Gator Bags for relatively low cost, but recommends at least getting the mulch first for the recently planted 9 trees.

-Amanda: Central Vermont Career Center students could be interested again in helping to spread mulch in September when they are back in session. She will contact Jeff for budget to purchase items.

-Nate: Would like a routine plan for caring for Main Street trees next March.

-Steven: South Main Street Parking Lot islands need care, overgrown bushes, unsightly. Recommend as a possible project to improve upon and seeks consideration for uniform pruning look on Main Street trees.

-Nate: Would like Fall pruning project, especially since there is money in budget available.

ACTION ITEM #3 (AMANDA): Contact Jeff Bergeron about purchasing mulch and Gator Bags.

ACTION ITEM #4 (Tree Committee): Develop Main Street Tree routine maintenance and care plan.

8. Emerald Ash Borer Plan Progress and task list:

-Amanda: 14 Ash trees on city property listed on one Inventory list. Need to make a management plan, but Committee is under-staffed to create one. Any resources/organizations that could help?

-Amy: Arbor Day Foundation might have resources, likely others locally and she will look research options. Other cities might have already implemented plans that could work in Barre City.

-Bill: Prospect St. has quite a few Ash trees. Cow Pasture has many.

-Nate: Do we have the inventory correct to know where each one is?

-Bill: Set up categories for action. Give City staff advice, tell us how to proceed. Focusing on inventory will likely get him and his staff stuck on finding details on each one when a larger plan is needed first.

ACTION ITEM #5 (Amy and Nate): Research organizations with resources available for helping develop an effective EAB Contingency Plan. Share options with Committee at next meeting.

9. Volunteer Recruitment:

-Amanda: Setup event for recruitment? Will place on agenda for next meeting to plan a recruitment event.

-Steven: He will ask a neighbor who may be interested in volunteering with the Committee in some capacity.

11. Set Agenda for next month:

- Management Plan Progress.
- Main Streets maintenance, (Will have at least nine Gator Bags and mulch ordered)
- Pruning Schedule for Fall.
- Volunteer Recruitment Event Discussion.
- Come back with a few EAB plans to evaluate.

7. Adjourn.

- Motion to adjourn at 7:01 pm by A. Garland and seconded by C. Teal, passed unanimously.