

LEONIA SHADE TREE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES FOR MARCH 13, 2024

Present were Commissioners Christine Healy-Samis, Imanta Bergmanis, Arnold Trachenberg, Sandy Pancrazi, Ann Brown Sullivan, Laura-Lindsey Sewell and Mark Spiegel. Council Liaison Diane Scarangella was also present.

Absent were Julie Ulbrich, Vivian DeMarco and John Villereal (DPW).

Statement of Compliance with Sunshine Law

Public Portion: Open to comments/questions from Leonia residents (none present)

Minutes of February 2024 were approved.

Council Liaison Report presented by Diane Scarangella

Shade Tree capital budget of \$4,500 for 2024 was approved.

Monday, March 18th there will be a Council work session for municipal budget

Proposals for municipal composting

Resolution for Landscaper & Tree Removal Company permits

Pickle Ball Court at Dudley Allen Park is being considered/evaluated – matching grant available

March 25th, 7:30 PM public meeting at Leonia Senior Center to discuss 2024 municipal budget.

Goal is to increase taxes by less than 3%.

Arnold Trachtenberg:

Fire Department opens hydrants before connecting hose. Water comes back onto sidewalk.

This is a problem in front of Broad Ave storefronts.

Maybe install “pavers” with holes to absorb water.

Chairpersons Report:

In-ground planting areas such as in front of “French Nails.” Who will plant & take responsibility?

Approach merchants.

Community Garden group (Jing & Olga) for Boro Hall planters

Diane – concrete planters are not heavy enough for safety.

ACS removed planters during Broad Avenue renovations. Unclear as to next step.

There are approximately 11-12 Broad Avenue planters.

Signage & wording – stipulation language – look to Boro for recommendations for funding and how to take care of plantings.

Leonیا Chamber of Commerce should take up this issue. Merchants meeting on March 13th.

Idea to install QR Codes on planters to identify plant species.

Tree Cutting:

Christie Heights Street – large oak with large canopy. Neighbor cutting over garage. What is process for cutting trees, and what is “best practices?”

If on or near property line, common sense suggests that one should discuss with neighbor first. Not on the night before etc.

If tree removal within 5 feet of property line, must notify neighbor with certified letter at least 5 days prior. Requires consent. Failure is a violation of Boro Code and penalty is a fine.

Mark – issue with neighbor’s tree uplifting his sister’s driveway. Neighbor has agreed to permit removal but will not pay or share expense. Sister’s insurance company has threatened to cancel policy due to dangerous conditions (tripping risk). Must repair by April 2024. Trees are healthy, but heaving driveway. Per ordinance, trees are healthy and JP won’t issue waiver. Says it is up to the Shade Tree Commission to provide recommendation. Imanta & Christine to discuss issue with Boro Administrator at meeting this week.

Pruning: should notify owner in writing or verbally? What is “best practices?”

Leonia ordinance doesn’t have anything regarding pruning. Should add language following “best practices.”

Hazardous conditions – what are the risk factors – target issues?

As Chuck Moren (DPW Tree Expert). What do they do in Ridgewood, Paramus & Teaneck.

Pollarding – not in ordinance, and not prohibited. Is appropriate for some tree species. What are “best practices?” Per Tim Zagacki of Cherokee, after 16% of canopy of tree removed, tree will die.

Tree Plantings – Broad Avenue between Highwood & Oakdene – 33 trees total. Approximately 5-6 were removed leaving 27 remaining. Tree cost from Cerbo is \$450 per tree. During Spring Planting, the LSTC will take responsibility to plant 5-6 shade trees.

Downtown Planting Sites – separate carve-out part of contract. Requires sold remediation, 2” caliper trees. Total of 8-10 trees to be planted. Must plant “mindfully.” Diversity of trees but to create a “standard” look.

Arnold Trachtenberg to take on coordination of this effort (instead of Planning Board Liaison w/Mark). Numerous empty tree pits on Broad Avenue

Maybe business could sponsor (and advertise).

Biggest issue with tree health are cars & salt during winter. Should discuss with Chuck Moren and Tony Cerbo regarding best (most hearty) trees to plant in these locations.

Tree Contractors:

NJ Tree License Organization – determine best practices for industry

Are contractors “in good standing” with organization? Contractor must provide their reference number.

There is a difference between a tree “operator” and a tree “expert.” Leonia ordinance requires a tree “expert” to evaluate health of a tree.

JP in Building Department to receive a copy of the tree company’s NJ license and to check every application that contractor submits to Boro prior to tree removal.

Total number of “tree waivers” in 2023 was significant!

Julie Diemer wants to remove tree.

Shade Tree Committee can’t access private property.

Homeowners can access Boro website to report a concern. If a town tree, concern goes to DPW. If private property, must be assessed by a tree “expert.” Chuck Moren can provide this service for a \$75 fee.

Leonia Day – Saturday may 4th from 12 noon to 4 PM. The Shade Tree Commission will have a table. May give out T-Shirts this year. Need volunteers to man table.

Marissa – New Boro Administrator. Is meeting with several community groups this week to open lines of communication.

Digital Marketing – sign on library lawn is being managed by the Boro. Groups can request 2 notes per month.

Electronic TV Bulletin – located at Senior Center. Will be used for notifications.

Discuss planning new tree between Library & new Police Station (N/E corner) to replace Sycamore for Spring Planting. Ann Brown Sullivan to discuss with Sue Boyd from Library Board.

Grand Avenue property (256-66 Grand Avenue) adjacent to Station Parkway. Need to take photos and inventory of existing trees. Will require protective fencing around trees to remain. Developer want to remove ALL trees on property.

Building Department is the “gatekeeper” and must enforce the ordinance. Zoning Officer

Plans for redeveloping property must be provided to the Shade Tree Commission to review application 30-days prior to approval.

Mark – to provide Marissa with a summary letter – trees that are more than 8” caliper are covered by Ordinance. Building Department - copy of ordinance. Mike Digideo, president of the Planning Board is aware. *(am a bity fuzzy on total conversation here)*

Townhouses are being proposed. There is an issue of flood plain and water mitigation for run-off on Station Parkway & Maple Street.

New NJ Legislation recently passed regarding mitigation issues. Boro lawyer is reviewing legislation to determine how law is to be implemented locally
Must determine right-of-ways – town vs private property along Station Parkway.

Pine Hill Drive – DPW removed 10-12 trees along border of Rte. 80. Tree of Heaven that are food source for spotted lantern flies.

Cluster of 8” caliper trees were removed. Neighbors complained due to increased noise from highway. However, there is break in the sound-barrier at this location.
Can make a nice walking area at this location (Green Acres space) and add more evergreens?
Could also cultivate this area.

Per Arthur, the “green belt” ends at 463 Pine.
2 pine trees are still standing near 498 Pine Hill Road.

Communication: How to notify residents that “something has been planned and is going to happen?” Need to provide advance notice/warning.

Feral cat habitats being left in the area by a resident have been removed. Suspect it is the same person putting similar habitats in Highwood Hills.

END OF MEETING

Submitted by: Mark D. Spiegel