

Borough of Somerville
Environmental Commission
Minutes of April 8, 2014 Meeting

Meeting was called to order at 7:45 PM by Chair Gina Stravic

Roll Call: Gina Stravic, Katherine Hughes, Harry James, Jr.
Larry Cleveland, , & Granville Brady, Jr., Thompson Mitchell, Counsel Liaison.

Excused: Vijay Tulsiani, Timothy Hayes, Tara St. Angelo

1. **Minutes of the March, 2014 meeting was approved.**
2. **Communications—None**
3. **Old Business**

- a. **Sewer plans** no additional report
- b. **DSA Tree replacement plans-** Katherine presented the EC's recommendation to the Planning Board. DSA presented alternative plan for replacing the trees on Main Street. EC's recommendation was to use the Honey Locust while the DSA was firmly committed to the Japanese Lilac. Katherine reported that the Planning Board was split with half of the members favoring the EC recommendation and other half favoring the DSA plan. The acting head of DPW formerly with Jersey City weighed in on the issue with his recommendation that the Japanese Lilac worked well for his city.

A lively discussion ensued. Larry reiterated that the DSA did not plan to replace all the trees at once. Katherine commented that the Borough might have difficulty finding mature Japanese lilacs with a 3.5 " dimension if the present trees were to be replaced. Katherine also brought up whether the Japanese lilac would be appropriate in front of the JSM property given the height of the apartments and the small stature of Japanese lilac trees.

The EC discussed the ambiguity of the present tree ordinances that govern all street trees in the Borough *except* for the trees downtown where the ordinance gives the DSA control over the landscape.

Larry suggested that the EC meet with the DSA members to walk through Main Street. Prior to the requested meeting, Gran suggested the EC should develop criteria to address the factors that contribute to the removal of a tree as opposed to other ways to mitigate the encroachment of the tree roots as a potential safety hazard. Harry suggested that the EC looks at safety concerns and that removal of a tree to allow for more sidewalk use by restaurateurs to add tables outdoors is not a valid reason to remove/replace a tree. The outcome of the meeting(s) with the DSA could be a position paper presented by the EC to deal with future issues of tree removal, replacement and safety downtown. The idea of having a Borough-wide tree policy was discussed. Gran suggested that the EC look at the potential liability of the town if a shade tree commission was instituted.

- c. **ANJEC grant** application was approved by Council and sent to the state.
 - d. Gina reported that the letter addressing the wholesale **removal of trees on Demand Place** with a request to replace the trees was submitted to Council with no response to date.
 - e. **Sustainable NJ subcommittee** with Tim and Roberta met to work on finalizing submission by June.
 - f. **Garden Club grant**-trees were not yet planted at Gazebo
 - g. **Homeowner Free Tree Offer**—more requests were fielded by homeowners than we have trees available. More trees may be available by April 30 if we can find a way to transport them from Jackson, NJ to Somerville.
- 4. New Business**
- a. County Planning Board meeting was held on March 31—County is trying to promote collaboration between towns. Mike Kerwin has offered to speak to EC about how the town and county could better utilize resources to sustain the environment. He will be asked to attend next meeting.
 - b. Ridewise contacted Gina but they have not followed up to date.
 - c. Earth Day cleanup is set for April 26 with Arbor Day tree planting to occur that day.
- 5. Planning Board**-BOE plans to expand parking lot at Vanderveer and will present a courtesy review to Planning Board. Public bodies do not need Planning Board approvals
- 6. Council**—Thompson was asked about resolution to allow DPW to enter New Cemetery to clean up debris on their property.

7. Adjournment—Meeting Adjourned at 9:15 PM

Respectfully submitted

Granville Y. Brady, Jr.

Granville Y. Brady, Jr., Secretary

CC: Kevin Sluka, Mayor & Council as distributed