

Borough of Somerville
Environmental Commission
Minutes of November 11, 2014 Meeting

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

Roll Call: Gina Stravic, Katherine Hughes, Granville Brady, Jr., Larry Cleveland, Timothy Hayes, Thompson Mitchell, Counsel Liaison.

Absent: Harry James, Jr., Vijay Tulsiana, Tara St. Angelo

- 1. Minutes of the October 14 Meeting approved**
- 2. Communications—None reported**
- 3. Old Business**
 - a. Green Team-** Nothing more to report. Somerville qualified for Sustainable NJ
 - b. Community Forestry Program-** State has not responded to Gina’s request for information regarding submission of revision. She will follow up.
 - c. Demond place-** Residents were yet to be contacted about the specific trees to be planted. Mr. Hadley asked for the file so that DPW could begin the tree replacement process. Gran will follow up with Mr. Hadley. It is questionable that all the trees would be replaced in this season but at least we will have a start on getting the project underway.
 - d. Highlands update-**Tara was not present but copied the EC on a letter to the interested party regarding our interest in keeping informed of any changes that might occur in the Highlands Act.
 - e. Girl scouts/ash tree borer-**They are actively at work on their project. Katherine has been involved in guiding them about the types of trees that need to be pruned or removed. Katherine reported that Ash Trees are in danger from an insect that burrows its way into the tree and kills it. The infestation has decimated ash trees in the Midwest and is already in Bridgewater. Somerville has a supply of ash trees on the right of way and the EC agreed with the recommendation that all ash trees should be removed and the wood chipped or burned. The best time to remove them would be in the winter when the insect is dormant.
 - f. Tree seminar for CEU’s-**Gina attended a tree seminar for core credits and reported the salient points brought up. Focus was on proper pruning and tree maintenance. The theme of the workshop was “right tree, right place”. Katherine attended other workshops.
 - g. Leadership Somerset Rain Garden-**Rain garden is finished and will be dedicated at Exchange Field on November 17 at 11:30 AM. The Commission suggested that signage notifying the public about the project and a small fence around the garden might be considered by the sponsor.
 - h. Main Street Tree Pruning-**All of the street trees have been pruned. Several commission members expressed concern about the amount of pruning that could jeopardize the health of the trees. Gran Brady reported that the DSA was concerned that the trees

covered the line of sight from the street to the second stories and the pruning was designed to give maximum exposure to the buildings. According to Katherine, if we have a severe winter and dry summer many of the trees might not survive but nothing could be done at this point. Gina suggested that DPW workers needed to have training in the proper pruning and maintenance of trees. She will look into resources that DPW could use to accomplish this goal economically. The idea of an onsite program was discussed. Gran will meet with Rodney Hadley to suggest this for his staff.

4. **New Business**

- a. **Main Street Tree Task Force-** Larry reported that the task force has surveyed the entire DSA area from Doughty Avenue to Veterans Memorial Drive near the abandoned Pizza Hut. A lengthy discussion ensued about the qualifications of the task force members to determine the health of the trees. Gran reported that the focus was more on whether or not a tree presented a potential safety hazard (eroding the sidewalk) rather than the health of the trees. EC members questioned the Task Force's role in planning and executing a comprehensive tree replacement program. Gran indicated that we were in the very early stages of discussion and that the development of a comprehensive plan was premature and might be outside the scope of this committee. The objective would be to make appropriate recommendations to Council for implementation.

To that end, Gina suggested that a recommendation of the Task Force would be to enlist the expertise of someone or group, e.g., Rutgers to assist in identifying and remedying immediate needs and develop a master plan for landscaping the downtown commercial district. The EC members of the Task Force were charged with encouraging this strategy with the other members of the Task Force.

- b. **Pruning, planting & hazards plan-** Gina questioned the liaison about past budgets to include a maintenance schedule for the borough trees. Thompson indicated that this was not the focus of previous budgets. Gran reiterated that the effort to preserve our trees was not a priority of previous Councils.

5. **Planning Board-** Larry reported that Wolfgang's Restaurant is working feverishly for a December opening at Town Square across from Alphonso's. Also, plans are being put forth to redevelop the corner where Somerville Aluminum was located.

6. **Borough Council-** Council did not agree on a resolution for the Complete Streets Review but Thompson will continue to work for its passage.

The issue of grease clogging the Cadillac Drive neighborhood persists. The sewer ferret will be used to determine if possible where the grease is coming from. Commissioners suggested that it might be a resident that owns a restaurant is throwing grease down the drain.

Thompson also reported that homeowners that use water in the summer for pools and watering lawns will get a break. Sewer bills will be prorated on the homeowner's actual use during the winter months with the summer sewer bills being estimated. The plan does not lower actual water usage that will be paid based upon the water meter reading.

No meeting set for December. Gina will poll members about having a holiday get together.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:50 PM

Respectfully submitted by Granville Y. Brady, Jr., Secretary

