

Watchung Environmental Commission

Minutes

May 27, 2014

Present: Sondra Epstein, Jean Forlano, Pam Lewis, Don Pote, Arlene McCoy, Rob Gibbs (part time)

Absent: Karen Pennett, Andy & Jim Stout

Guests: Cameron Black

Elite Homebuilding, LLC: David A. Checchio, attorney; Suzan Powers realty rep; Walt Kipp, arborist

The meeting was called to order by Jean Forlano at 7:30 pm.

Elite Homebuilding requested a hearing with the WEC as a result of their tree removal permit being denied. This has put Elite in a "stop work" situation. The tree in question is a columnar Sugar Maple, considered by WEC as a "specimen" or "historic" tree. Elite contends that if the tree is not removed it would require a redesign of the house or else (remove) shifting the house somewhere else on the property. This would cause a significant financial hardship as a result of re-engineering, additional grading, and addition of retaining walls. Elite also indicated a significant financial (?) loss due to "diminished curb appeal". Lastly, they argue that there are no assurances that any of the resulting regrading near the subject tree wouldn't cause significant root damage, leading to the tree's eventual demise.

Arlene agreed that Elite's current plan for the house placement is "optimal" and any change would incur added costs. A suggestion was made that a plan be developed by Elite for a proposed replacement of the tree in question with a multiple number of specimen and other types of trees to compensate for this exceptional tree's girth. This would be in addition to the other tree replacements previously agreed to. Elite agreed that they would submit plan for our consideration.

Minutes

- April 28, 2014 minutes were approved as written

Tree Matters

- 561 Valley Road: 5/7/14 New House, owner putting in a pool, patio, and retaining walls. 22 Trees to be removed: 8 dead, 14 to be replaced:: 1 @ 4 ½ ", 13 @ 2 ½ " A Landscaping architect will do the plans I asked to be included in the plan at least 4 bee pollinating trees.

Planning Board

- No issues to report

Correspondence

- No correspondence

Miscellaneous

- **“Queen of the Sun”**

A new date of June 11, for showing of “Queen of the Sun” at Watchung Hills High School has been chosen as a result of its previous cancellation .

C. Black

Cameron reported that the Watchung Reservation Rubbish Roundup date has been set for May 4 was completed with substantial rubbish collected. However, a significant effort would still be required for a complete removal.

Next regular meeting: Tuesday, June 23 . With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Pote, acting secretary