

Watchung Environmental Commission – Zoom Meeting*
Monday, December 4, 2023 – 7:30 PM

1. Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.
Present: Rachel Funcheon, Andy Stout, Doug Speeney, Coraleine Kitt, Denise Soppas,
Absent: Karen Pennett, Renata Reis
2. Minutes for Oct. 23, 2023 Teleconference were approved.
3. Reports
 - a. Trees
 - Inspections/Tree Report: There were 8 inspections, with 104 trees to be removed and 0 replacements. Five trees were topped at 27 Stanie Glen. Engineer was recently given authority to levy fines.
 - Replanting letter to residents: Hasn't been implemented yet.
 - b. Planning Board: no report
 - c. Recycling: Styrofoam recycling collection has been going very well.
 - d. Green Team: Electronics recycling truck was at the pop-up Farmers Market on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Currently, the Green Team is working on Sustainable Jersey and will pursue a creative team, which will earn SJ points for Watchung and be beneficial to the town.
4. Unfinished Business
 - a. Best Lake update
 - Status of plantings: Doug trimmed invasives. One plant and its surrounding fence was run over. The bird box has been mysteriously shortened in height – it used to be 5.5 feet, but is now 4 feet. Not sure what happened.
 - Sign: Rachel submitted all content for the sign in early Nov. Vendor needs deposit before starting work on the sign. Rachel will follow up with Bill Hance regarding the invoice for the deposit of 50% of the full cost of the sign.
 - b. Boy Scout project: The bird house project has been approved by Mayor and Council. The project must be completed by Scout's birthday in mid-January. EC discussed possibly protecting the bird boxes with fencing or boulders.
 - c. River-friendly certification: This is waiting on completion of the sign and birdboxes.
 - d. FreeCycle event: Rachel called New Providence for additional information about their FreeCycle Fest. She talked to the director of activities and got many details about the event and how we might do it in Watchung. Will have further discussions about holding a FreeCycle event here in 2024.
 - e. Year-end analysis for Mayor: Commission discussed requiring more enforcement of Tree Ordinance and other notes for the Mayor such as hazardous trees, replanting, topping, access to arborist, etc. The Commission also

discussed building on its successes with the riparian zone, seedling giveaway, and Styrofoam recycling.

5. New Business

a. BOA applications

- 705 Johnston Drive: Requesting variance due to lost mail and packages, and vehicles knocking down mailbox. Two pillars were built on right of way. EC found no environmental concerns with this application.
- Brandywine: Requesting variance to install freestanding clock in front of property in RR zone. EC found no environmental concerns.

b. Plaque for Salem Oak: Rachel spoke with DEP State Park Historian in Somerville about getting a plaque to commemorate Salem Oak seedling that EC planted last spring by Watchung Lake. Tree was a gift of the state for NJDEP's 50th birthday and the 50th birthday of Earth Day. State is not doing anything to provide towns with plaques. EC discussed having one made.

6. Special Announcements, Correspondence

- a. Karen received an award for her longstanding service to the Planning Board.
- b. Rachel read a card sent to the EC from Andy Stout that expressed her appreciation for the EC's support during the difficult time of Jim's passing.

7. The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2024

December 2023/January & February 2024 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 7

Tree Removal permits approved: 7

Trees to be removed : 158

Trees to be replaced : 0

D.Soppas & K.Pennett

185 Bonnie Burn Road– 4 dead trees approved - no replacements

- Inspection done 12/10/23.
- Will cut down on own.
- Suggested to let them fall on their own. Concern some near driveway and will use as firewood.
- Inspection done on Sunday, homeowners are friends of mine, going over anyway to pick up S. Toscano to go to a holiday event.

611 Ridge Road: 18 dead trees – approved - no replacements

- Inspection done 12/15/23.
- Recommended an additional tree, ash to come down, may have been part of original 18.
- Recommended 1 on neighbor's property. Tree very close to tree coming down and the neighbor's tree dead.
- This property was inspected for a permit several years ago.

80 High Oaks: 88 trees new construction – approved 1/25/24 - no replacements

- First inspection did not approve - questions for Engineer

- 1/25/24 reviewed maps with Engineer. Property owners doing a lot of grading for water runoff. Some trees under new water/utility lines ok'd application no replacements.
- Inspection done 1/19/24.
- Trees varied in size 6" to 55."
- Current house to be taken down new one put in.
- Trees not marked well, however map good.
- Concern: steep slope in back, retention basin being put in.
- Engineer was at the site the day before. Want to go over why some of the trees have been requested to be removed.

861 Johnston Drive: 23 dead trees – approved, no replacements

- Inspection done 1/3/24.
- No licensed tree service listed – permit submitted by homeowner.
- More dead trees on property but homeowner plans to let them come down naturally since there is no apparent hazard.
- FYI – in the past, this property had 60 trees removed and replaced. Reinspection completed by Arlene Mcoy in 2018.

60 Carrar Drive: 6 dead trees – approved no replacements

- Inspection done 1/4/24.
- Action Tree Service
- 3 Ash, 1 Sassafras, 2 young Maples (unknown reason for Maples dying).

40 Hill Hollow – 6 trees dead/dangerous - no replacements

Inspection 1/25/24 mostly back of house. Trees in wooded area. Ground mostly covered with large black stones.

Some Ashes, one tree large Y – dead, one double stem, one stem down, other rotting, one leaning over pool & house.

Concerned about slope, requested to leave stump and roots.

Home owner informed me at bottom of hill drainage ditch.

99 Oak Ridge Road – 13 Ashes – no replacements

Inspections 2/5/24, all ashes one ash already fell hit backyard fence.

Permit changed from 12 to 13 trees. Home owner was not sure if tree was on his property or neighbor's. He asked if the town would send someone out to determine property line. I said wasn't sure so he would have to call town. I recommended he call his neighbor. Told him I would change the permit from 12 to 13.