

Town of Bel Air Government
MINUTES
TREE COMMITTEE
May 12, 2021

The Town of Bel Air Tree Committee meeting took place via the *GoToMeeting* virtual platform on May 12, 2021 at 4:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mike Simini, Chair
Wayne Merkel, Vice Chair
Graham Becker
Marion McCarron
Frank Lopez

IN ATTENDANCE: Kevin Bianca, Town Commissioner
Rowan Glidden, Senior Planner

Mr. Simini opened the meeting at 4:33 p.m.

I. Administrative Matters

A. Review of Minutes

Mr. Simini asked for review of the March 10, 2021 minutes. There were no corrections.

Ms. McCarron moved to accept the minutes. Mr. Merkel seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

II. Old Business

A. Arbor Day

Mr. Simini reported that Arbor Day at the Bel Air Farmers Market was successful. All give-a-way trees were bagged in advance. There were seven species, all tagged with photos and planting instructions. All 300 were given away by 9:40 a.m. Mr. Becker and Mr. Bianca stated they heard very positive feedback on this event.

Mr. Glidden noted that Tree City USA street signs were purchased and received. The Town will decide where to place these.

B. Majors Oak fertilization

Mr. Glidden stated that Majors Oak was fertilized on March 16th by AAA Tree Experts. AAA Tree Experts will send a proposal to trim the tree, since it has some dead limbs.

C. Street Tree selection list update

Mr. Glidden asked for any additional recommendations. Tree planting is currently being scheduled. It is under contract with Ivy Hill. However, Miss Utility is behind schedule in marking the sites to be planted. Mr. Becker offered to help expedite this process.

D. Champion Tree measurement

Mr. Merkel reported that the previous big tree publication included 51 trees. Nine have died and have been removed. These include: Chinese Elm at 322 Giles St.; Norway Maple at 319 Maitland; one Northern Red Oak at Rockfield Manor.

He trying to make arrangements to get owners' permissions to measure trees. The Bel Air United Methodist Church may have up to 11 trees. Boy Scouts recently identified these trees with a plaque, a description, and a map. He saw other potential big trees on the property.

Harford County Forestry Board's Big Tree program director John Bennett stated they will assist in measuring. June is the possible start date. Mr. Merkel has access to measuring tools.

Mr. Lopez said that he talked with Forestry Board to see if Tree Committee members and State will work together to measure trees located in Town limits. Mr. Bianca would like to be on hand to observe and learn.

Mr. Merkel noted that the State Forestry measured some trees in town around 2015. Do they need to be measured again? Large trees do not grow that fast. He asked for committee guidance.

Mr. Lopez suggested that current measurements should be in any publications.

Mr. Merkel noted that Beech trees at 715 S. Shamrock are no longer alive. There is a Pignut Hickory on the site. He also noted big trees at Rockfield property.

Mr. Becker noted that he needed to leave meeting. Mr. Glidden asked Mr. Becker to look at some trees on the Town Hall property to advise if they can be relocated when the Town Hall construction begins. Mr. Becker agreed. He left the meeting at 4:55 p.m.

E. 26 N. Hickory Avenue- American Sycamore Tree

Mr. Glidden has no further news from the property developer. The site will be multi-family residential.

Mr. Bianca suggested that Patti Parker, Public Relations Specialist, be looped into the process when the tree comes down. People may have questions about why the tree was removed since its damage is not obvious.

III. New Business

Mr. Glidden introduced Ms. Tracey Waite, of the Harford County Climate Action Committee (HCCA), who was invited to attend the meeting by Mr. Bianca.

Harford County Climate Action Committee are starting a project called “The Bel Air Five.” HCCA is planning a native plant sale on Rockfield Manor in September. (The group will be planting a native garden there this weekend.)

She hopes the Tree Committee will want to support the project and be listed on their brochure.

There has been a huge population growth in the world compared to 1950. This population has caused a loss of wild land, habitat and biodiversity. The bird population in North America has declined by a third since 1970.

Dr. Doug Tallamy of University of Delaware has researched and written extensively about this issue and how to address it locally.

Ms. Waite said that the books taught her not to just plant for appearance. Not planting natives essentially starves birds.

The goal of their project is to educate neighbors about native planting and trees. It is meant to be informative, not offensive. They think that educating people about butterflies and their host species is one approach. When sighted, photos of these butterflies can be uploaded to Maryland Biodiversity Project.

They want to publish a brochure and apply for funding. To research, she has met with local master gardeners, University of Maryland experts and Bel Air’s Appearance & Beautification Committee. She will also meet with Town Commissioners. Her group would also like to have this information on Town of Bel Air website.

Mr. Lopez says he has a 0.25-acre lot and the house occupies most of it. He has planted over 40 species of native plants. These have really attracted butterflies. He supports this idea.

Mr. Bianca expressed his support. Mr. Lopez suggested including photos of native gardens that will support habitat.

Ms. Waite noted that just planting 1 – 2 native plants can be effective. Mr. Lopez said that some home projects can be geared for children.

Mr. Merkel moved that the Tree Committee support the Bel Air Five project. Ms. McCarron

seconded. All in favor.

Mr. Glidden asked for comments about the stakeholder meeting at Alice Anne Park. Mr. Bianca stated that Mr. Merkel attended as well as various community members.

Mr. Merkel said the park was originally planted densely for shade. Now the trees have grown. There is little to no grass. He thinks some trees, up to 25%, could be removed or crown-thinned to let in sunlight. Adding a deep layer of topsoil is not recommended.

Mr. Glidden stated that the Planning Department has long-range plans for the park. The capital budget is tight now. Any interim improvements would be welcome.

Mr. Glidden reports that the Town received the State's PLANT certificate in recognition of Bel Air's efforts to plant and maintain trees. Also, the Town may soon fly one of the Tree City USA flags that the Town has in its possession.

Mr. Merkel has recently taken photos of trees in bloom around Town that the Tree Committee had planted.

Mr. Glidden reported that the Sears building at the Mall will be demolished. A shopping center will replace it. The parcel's landscaping will be upgraded, including addition of street trees on Tollgate Road. This will add to canopy cover. Additional retail projects are in the works.

Mr. Lopez suggests more walkability in the area. Mr. Glidden agrees and notes the nearby access to the MA & PA Trail.

Another upcoming project is the narrowing of Thomas Street between Hayes and Kelly, thus improving pedestrian access to Kelly Fields and the Boulton Street area.

Mr. Glidden reported that the Bald Cypress at Plumtree Park has not done well. It has been replaced once.

The next meeting of the Tree Committee will be on June 9th.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Merkel moved to adjourn. Ms. McCarron seconded the motion. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 5:52 p.m.