

Swissvale Shade Tree Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes, May 11, 2016

Members present: Melissa Jenereski, Gib Miller, Kurt Summersgill, Terry Ward, Matt Mercurio, Heather Lyle

Others present: Jared Manzo, Urban Forestry Manager, NMRWA; Councilman Darrell Rapp; invited guest Celine Colbert, Forester, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)

The meeting began at approximately 7:05 p.m.

Old Business:

The Swissvale Shade Tree Ordinance has been approved by Borough Council, and the Shade Tree Advisory Committee members are approved, as well. The committee currently is working on updating a tree inventory for Swissvale, and on getting a web page designated for the committee.

New Business:

Celine Colbert provided information on applying for grants to fund tree inventories, or pruning/planting grants. She stressed the competitive nature of applying for grants; DCNR relies on federal funding, last year approving only 3 planting grants and 1 tree inventory grant for southwestern PA. No pruning grants were approved, and no grants exist to improve tree pits. However, Celine acts as a grant reviewer and can help the committee write a good grant application for next year. Grant applications are due in September, unless state budget issues delay the date. DCNR partners with TreeVitalize in this region to run the grants. There is one round of grants per year.

According to Celine, the ideal process is to have a tree inventory, then make a plan to prioritize care (a pruning cycle) for the trees in the worst condition. A planting cycle would help ensure a diversity of species, so that the borough maintains trees of various ages, sizes, and types. This helps to avoid infestations such as the ash borer, and maintains the tree canopy in Swissvale. The inventory should record tree sizes by measuring tree diameters, and note tree conditions, species, etc. An inventory will allow the Borough to fill in bare spots with new plantings, and to better distribute large and small trees. Generally, smaller trees of 2-3 inch diameters do better as new plantings. The trees need follow-up care, such as watering and mulching, and tree pits need to be large enough to accommodate growth. Celine will develop a sample calendar for Borough tree maintenance, such as when to prune or plant certain kinds of trees.

Celine said that TreeVitalize likes communities to partner with colleges to create tree inventory internships for students in environmental sciences, biology and other relevant subject areas. A grant pays for the summer internship. PSU, main campus, has a forestry program, and Cal. U of PA has biology and environmental science majors. New software from the USDA Forestry Service, called i-Tree, makes data collection easier, and can be used on a tablet or smart phone, and uploaded later. The committee discussed using an older, existing tree inventory instead, as it's in the more familiar Excel format. Committee members could use the spreadsheet to find trees that previously had been rated "poor condition." Matt and Jared will look at the spreadsheet to see if it can be useful. The committee would get a list of the worst trees to Greg Bachy in time for this year's budget proposal.

Celine reported that a new PA Tree Map will be online this summer on the DCNR web site.

Jared updated us re: the proposed 3 borough tree inventory. Wilkinsburg is using its budget to focus on tree pruning this year and won't do an inventory. However, Nine Mile Run Assoc. plans to employ a college intern this summer, to begin work on a tree survey of the watershed area. Wilkinsburg is giving \$1,000 toward the student's stipend, and Edgewood Foundation has been asked to contribute, too.

Darrell reported that the Borough is doing street paving this summer, and the committee asked for a list of streets to be paved. Paving could impact collecting data on street trees, for example, so a list of streets would be helpful.

There was discussion of Peoples Gas line replacement in Swissvale (Lloyd, Westmoreland). The gas company is already digging up sidewalks and excavating yards on Lloyd Ave. Heather expressed concern not only about a tree in her front yard getting root damage, but also about future planting of street trees. Depending on where new gas lines are placed, it may never be safe to plant trees along Lloyd, which has no street trees currently in the Swissvale portion.

Things to Do:

Matt and Jared will review the old tree inventory in Excel to isolate and list the trees rated in poor condition.

Committee members should send Matt a favorite tree commission web site, to help him and Melissa with the committee's web page creation.

Darrell will ask for a list of streets to be paved this summer.

Gib, Darrell and Heather will request a meeting with Greg Bachy re: gas line installations and trees; Heather will set this up, as well as contacting Peoples Gas for more information.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:35 p.m. and the next meeting is scheduled for June 8.

Minutes prepared by Heather Lyle