

**WINNETKA ENVIRONMENTAL AND FORESTRY COMMISSION
SPECIAL VIRTUAL MEETING
MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 24, 2020**

A record of a legally convened special meeting of the Environmental and Forestry Commission of the Village of Winnetka, which was held virtually via Zoom, Thursday, September 24, 2020, at 7:00 p.m.

Call to Order:

Chairperson Dowding called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.; Voting Members present: Chairperson Chuck Dowding, Liz Kunkle, Chris Foley, David Varca, Barry Sylvester, and Ted Wynnychenko. Voting Members absent: Rosann Park-Jones. A quorum of presently appointed members was present. Ex-officio Members present: none. Village Council Representative present: Jack Coladarsi. Student Representative present: Scarlett Harper. Student Representative absent: Marcus Buccellato. Staff Representatives present: Jim Bernahl, Assistant Director of Public Works & Engineering, Andrew Lueck, Assistant Village Forester, Brendon Mendoza, Public Works Analyst and David Schoon, Director of Community Development. Public present: Two members of the public were virtually present via phone.

1) Introduction & Chair's Remarks:

Chairperson Dowding called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and welcomed all Commission members and the public. Staff Representative Mendoza took roll call. Chairperson Dowding read the below declaration regarding in-person meetings and stated the rules of procedure for the virtual meeting.

Oral Declaration Regarding In-Person Meetings

Chairman Dowding stated pursuant to recently adopted amendments to the Illinois Open Meetings Act included in Public Act 101-0640, public bodies may, in certain circumstances, hold entirely virtual public meetings without a quorum physically present in any one location. On March 17, 2020, President Rintz issued a Declaration of Emergency pursuant to the authority granted by the Village Code, the Illinois Municipal Code, and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency Act to address the health threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 29, 2020, Governor Pritzker issued a Disaster Proclamation that declared in-person attendance at public meetings of more than ten people at the regular public meeting location to be infeasible, in accordance the Open Meetings Act, as amended by Public Act. 101-0640. On June 16, 2020, Village President Rintz executed a written determination that given the on-going emergency associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings of the Village's Village Council are not practical or prudent at this time and until further notice. In accordance with the Governor's Disaster Proclamation and the Village President's Declaration of Emergency and Determination regarding meetings of the Village Council, I, as Chair of the Environmental & Forestry Commission hereby determine that in-person meetings of the Environmental & Forestry Commission are not practical or prudent at this time and until further notice.

2) New Business:

a) Village Streetscape Plan Discussion:

Assistant Director Public Works & Engineering Jim Bernahl introduced the discussion of the public trees for the Village Streetscape Plan Phase 3 Project. Assistant Director Public Works & Engineering Jim Bernahl provided a background of the Village's Streetscape Plan. Assistant Director Public Works & Engineering Jim Bernahl stated the focus of Lincoln Avenue North of Elm including the Northwest and Northeast corners of the intersection.

Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated that another walkthrough was conducted earlier in the week so plans have changed since the agenda packet was sent and talked through each tree listed from the agenda packet.

Tree #1 American Elm – This tree will be impacted by the work being completed, has root structure issues and planned to be removed.

Tree #2 Ginkgo – This tree is in good condition and will be transplanted.

Tree #3 Honey Locust - Significant dieback in crown, likely related to below ground issue, this tree is planned to be removed.

Trees #4, 5 ,6 Kentucky Coffee Trees– These trees were originally planned to be removed, but after discussion think the sidewalk can be bumped out another foot or so leading to less impact on the trees' roots. These three (3) trees will try to be saved during construction.

Tree #7 Honey Locust– Decay at base and along stem, root structure issues including significant conflict with infrastructure and is planned to be removed.

Tree #8 Silver Maple – Significant stem decay and broken top, and is planned to be removed.

Tree #9 Honey Locust – This tree is in good condition, but its roots will be impacted from construction and is planned to be removed.

Tree #10 Silver Maple – Significant stem decay with moderate crown dieback and is planned to be removed.

Tree #11 Hybrid Elm – This tree is planned to be preserved and not removed.

Tree #12 Hybrid Elm - This tree is planned to be preserved and not removed.

Tree #13 Silver Maple – Significant stem decay with significant crown dieback and is planned to be removed.

Tree #14 Green Ash – Undesirable species due to Emerald Ash Borer and moderate crown dieback, planned to be removed.

Tree #15 Honey Locust – Moderate crown dieback, root structure issues including significant conflict with infrastructure and is planned to be removed.

Tree #16 Honey Locust – This tree is in good condition and is planned to be removed due to root impacts from construction.

Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated of the 26 trees, initially 15 were marked for removal, however, now only 10 of those trees will be removed and of those 10 trees 2 are in good condition, and one will be transplanted.

Assistant Village Forester Lueck discussed the tree size considerations and mentioned that the trees planted are limited based on root ball diameter needs as there is limited space for each tree to be planted. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated that for the long-term tree survivability that they need adequate growing space and water in the first few years especially. He discussed the construction activities near the root zones as there is a lot of work activities taking place next to root zones and trees and the reasoning for the locations. Assistant Village Forester Lueck mentioned that replacement tree species were selected in consideration of growth and future infrastructure issues.

Chairperson Dowding stated he would like each Commissioner to provide comments and feedback.

Commissioner Varca stated his only comment with the revised proposal that the Village is being very thoughtful to try and preserve the streetscape and the trees and encouraged that it appears that there is only a loss of two (2) trees.

Commissioner Foley stated he is pleased that it is only about a net loss of two (2) trees and seems to be a very thorough and comprehensive approach to the trees for this plan.

Commissioner Sylvester stated it was a very good presentation and glad to be saving trees. Commissioner Sylvester asked about the bump outs around the trees and asked how far they go out into the street. Jodi Mariano, Landscape Architect of Teska Associates stated that the bump out would be about 12 inches into the road, making a wider sidewalk, benefitting the trees as utilities are able to be placed in locations that trees do not exist.

Student Representative Harper stated the presentation was great and glad that there are more trees to be preserved. She stated Winnetka is a tree town and even though there is only a loss of two (2) major trees, that we are still replacing a lot of these trees with much smaller trees that have much smaller canopies, and the trees being replanted will take a long time to reach similar canopies. Jodi Mariano stated the size of the tree grates are 4x8 and the four (4) foot wide pit allows to have additional sidewalk for pedestrians and if a tree pit was made to accommodate a larger tree, there would be a lesser chance of survivability, and also lost space for sidewalks. Jodi Mariano also mentioned that trees in this area today are limited in species today, and are trying to introduce new trees that diversify the trees and benefit the environment.

Commissioner Wynnchenko stated he would defer to the Village Foresters as the plan sounds reasonable and it is clear that not a lot of trees are being cut down and is a well thought out plan, and sad to lose a few of the bigger trees, but understands the give and take along with concerns.

Commissioner Kunkle stated she appreciated the presentation. Commissioner Kunkle mentioned that she attended a webinar last spring regarding protecting tree canopies through policies and ordinances, and one (1) of the takeaways was that we need to remember that trees are part of our infrastructure and not separate and important as we move forward that we are a Tree City USA and we need to be mindful of that.

Commissioner Kunkle also mentioned that she understands that if a tree is diseased or not healthy that it needs to be removed, but for the healthy trees even though there is not the ability to replace the trees to be removed in the same diameter, but asked if we could commit to replacing them in other places in the Village so that the Village does not lose tree canopy overall. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated there are places throughout the Village that could have a tree planted and will take that into consideration.

Commissioner Kunkle asked if there is a general range of age for the trees planted. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated that is a difficult question to answer due to various factors, but estimated that the trees range from a few years old to decades.

Chairperson Dowding had a procedural question that if the Village was a private homeowner and wished to take a tree down, would inconvenience be a reason to remove a tree. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated that it depends on the situation and other factors. Assistant Public Works Director, Bernahl stated the Village is not as flexible with healthy Village owned parkway trees compared to private trees.

Chairperson Dowding asked if and how the larger trees were taken into account for the Streetscape Plan. Jodi Mariano stated that the Streetscape Plan was designed to protect trees as possible. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated that Tree #1 - American Elm, has issues at the base and has outgrown its space, and there is moderate dieback and decay in the canopy, but is hard to tell from the photo. Jodi Mariano stated once more information is received from their engineering department it will help with determining impact to the tree.

Chairperson Dowding asked about Tree #15 Honey Locust and Tree #16 Honey Locust. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated there are issues at the base of Tree #15 and has outgrown its space and causing significant conflict with infrastructure, along with decay at its base. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated Tree #16 is in good condition however it is getting close to outgrowing its space. Assistant Public Works Director, Bernahl stated it is anticipated for the Elm Street Bridge to be replaced in the next few years including the approach slab and when excavation work takes place for that project, that the tree will need to be removed due to safety issues and this tree may be removed now as part of the Streetscape Project or at the time of the Elm Street Bridge Project. Jodi Mariano stated that the pavers around the tree will be replaced in a to be determined form. Chairperson Dowding asked if the pavers around the tree would be replaced during the Elm Street Bridge Project, Assistant Public Works Director Bernahl stated this is still to be determined. Chairperson Dowding asked for the Village to attempt to save the two (2) large trees if possible.

Student Representative Harper stated for Tree #1 American Elm, that she is in support of saving this tree for a few more years if possible, as she stated she spoke with a few people who work in the area and are baffled that the tree is being taken down as they enjoy the tree. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated they will try to save the tree as possible, but also that the tree is not in good condition and will likely need to be removed in the near future.

Chairperson Dowding asked about Tree #12 Hybrid Elm . Jodi Mariano stated Tree #12 has pavement issues, and need to ensure that sidewalks are safe and pitched properly, and will be able to understand better once engineering is able to review.

Chairperson Dowding asked if the businesses were asked about the impacted trees. Jodi Mariano mentioned back in 2016 when the masterplan was created, it included a survey of over a 1000 comments, of the comments received 25% wanted wider sidewalks for outside dining, 20% wanted more landscaping, 10% better parking visibility and signage, and 10% wanted lighting. Jodi Mariano stated that the map from the presentation was part of package that Teska Associates was working on with Village Staff to share with business and it was being prepared about the time the pandemic first took place and did not have a chance to discuss it with the businesses.

Chairperson Dowding asked if there were any alternatives that included larger bump outs or larger trees or considerations. Jodi Mariano stated the downtown master plan had more bump outs, but due to the feedback received that there was a desire to reduce the number of bump outs to have more parking.

Trustee Representative Coladarci stated he and other trustees were part of the pushback for what it appeared to be removal of trees due to engineering purposes and very happy to see that the Village was able to review the trees and modify the tree removal list to remove less trees.

Student Representative Harper stated she informally talked with a few people who own businesses or work at the business in the discussed area and seem like they definitely enjoy the large trees and feel as if there is nothing they could do about the fact that they were coming down, and thought it would be good to mention.

3) Public Comment:

Winnetka Resident, Teri Cross, spoke via phone and stated most of her concerns were addressed after hearing the discussion. Teri wanted to say mention preserving trees if at all possible, and that she thinks it would give a few years to establish the new trees while the original is planned to be removed, and stated she has different properties in Winnetka and has tried to keep trees for as long as she can, but knows she can plant a new tree while the old one is planned to be removed. She mentioned that the tree near Café Aroma looked ok to her, but if the Arborist stated it is not well, then it not well. Teri also stated she appreciates the diversity of trees to be planted incase there is another major tree disease that takes place so it does not impact all of the trees. Staff Representative Mendoza mentioned that Teri also sent an email for public comment earlier, and asked if she would like him to still read it, Teri stated her questions were already addressed but asked the reasoning behind columnar trees and not trees with large canopies. Assistant Forester stated they are not all columnar, but plants more narrow trees to avoid conflicts with the buildings.

Staff Representative Mendoza read the comments received via email (attached) from Elisha Gray, Winnetka Resident. Assistant Village Forester Lueck stated regarding the first question, that the area mentioned is not a part of the discussion currently as it has not been evaluated yet, regarding the second question that the Katsura trees do look great in yards when they have a lot of room to grow, but do not grow well in business areas.

Village Trustee Robert Dearborn, spoke via phone and stated this was a great discussion and glad the EFC had this discussion. He stated he thinks the group is in agreement to try to save trees when possible, and mentioned the discussion was productive and glad it took place.

4) Adjournment:

There being no further business, Chairperson Dowding asked for a motion to adjourn which was moved by Commissioner Wynnichenko and seconded by Commissioner Varca. A vote was taken, and the motion unanimously passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

AYES: Foley, Varca, Wynnichenko, Kunkle, Sylvester

NAYS: None