



**City of Hartford Tree Advisory Commission**  
**Minutes of Meeting- August 3, 2022**

In attendance: Jack Hale (Chair), Charmaine Craig (vice-chair), Chris Hayes (Commissioner), Owen Deutsch (Commissioner, Director of Planning designee)

Guests: Patrick Doyle (Executive Director- KNOX), Susan Masino (Trinity College- Professor of Applied Science/Old-Growth Forest Network- County Coordinator), Edith Pestana (Environmental Justice Program Administrator- DEEP), Cecelia Drayton (Director of Sustainability- City of Hartford Mayor's Office), Rich Hallett (U.S. Forest Service- Research Ecologist), Robert Fahey (UCONN Associate Professor), Chris Goodwin (Urban Farming Program Manager- KNOX), Debby Reelitz (concerned citizen), Mary Pelletier (Park Watershed), Barbara Robbins (KNOX), Joan Maloof (Founder and Executive Director- Old-Growth Forest Network)

The meeting, held via Webex, was called to order at approximately 11:30 AM. Attendees made introductions.

**Minutes-** The minutes of the July 6, 2022 meeting were presented and approved.

**City Forester's Status-** Chair Hale reported that City Forester Heather Dionne is expected to be on leave until at least the second week of September, with her role upon returning still to be determined. Tree operations will continue to be triaged in the meantime, with guidance of the forestry crew by Parks Superintendent Mark Dowd.

From an update by DPW Parks Superintendent Mark Dowd relayed by Chair Hale, in the past month, forestry crew have been continuing to respond to 311 calls, performed tree removals in Keney Park, Batterson Park, Elizabeth Park and Bushnell Park, and responded to six after-hours emergencies. The Treekeeper software is also continuously being updated. Chair Hale complimented the work of Superintendent Dowd and the forestry crew.

Mary Pelletier of Park Watershed asked who were the official members of the Tree Advisory Commission. Chair Hale listed the voting and non-voting members of the Commission.

**Tree Trimming Hiring Update-** There was no update to relay from Parks Superintendent Dowd as to whether the City Tree Trimmer position opening had any applicants. Chair Hale reported that one City tree trimmer had reportedly accepted a position with another city, and remarked that relatively low compensation was a challenge for hiring and retention.

**Urban Silviculture Research and Urban Forest Monitoring Project Update-** Rich Hallett of the U.S. Forest Service presented on the Northeast Urban Silviculture Network. Hallett stated that the research goals of the Forest Service had been met with some skepticism, but that tree harvesting is not the only goal of the Forest Service, and that the intention of the research was to study the adaptation of rural silvicultural practices to urban areas. Hallett stated that the canopy gaps in Keney Park to be studied will

be fenced in fall/winter, with the plant study beginning in spring 2023. Four gaps will be studied over the course of decades.

Mary Pelletier asked why this forest management will occur in the northern section of Keney Park if other sections of the park have more invasive plants and require more intervention. Hallett responded that significant effort was not being made in the maintenance of healthier, older forests, and the prevention of further spread of invasive was the priority. Pelletier asked if more distressed forest areas would be studied and invasive barberry removed. Chair Hale responded that invasive species were an issue, but that this was not part of the scope of this research project.

Debby Reelitz expressed concern about harm to the forest, and that she would rather see research done by an organization not involved in harvesting, such as the Old-Growth Forest Network. Chair Hale stated that the purpose of the Commission was to preserve trees, and that no trees were proposed for harvesting. Reelitz remarked that details of the research proposal were not known yet. Hallett stated that the Forest Service was participating in a field station network, and that it works with cities as partners and has no jurisdiction over land itself, basing its goals on those of the landowners. Hallett commented that their intention was to learn about forest ecology as scientists, and that although the Forest Service was initially focused on harvesting, in the Northeast it now follows a multiple use management doctrine primarily focused on recreation and sustainable forest management. Prof. Massino remarked that the Old-Growth Forest Network doesn't typically organize research studies, and that it will be easier to have a more robust discussion about the proposed research when more documents are available for review. Massino also said that mental health was the primary goal when Keney Park was created, that dead trees are important to the ecosystem, and that too much fencing was a concern. She suggested removing barberry and planting oaks in those places, controlling the deer population, and that regeneration will naturally occur. Prof. Fahey reiterated that harvesting was not a goal of the research, which was to plant seedlings in existing canopy gaps to study oak regeneration, and stated that he has not observed much natural oak regeneration in Keney Park, that fencing was needed to avoid deer browsing, and that he was unable to comment on deer management otherwise.

Chair Hale highlighted the need to answer a question about the selection of gaps for planting, which would be relatively small (about a quarter acre) with 300 seedlings planted in each. Chair Hale asked if it was better to have the gaps, and related signage, clustered or scattered throughout the park. Pelletier suggested Ridgefield Street and Waverly Street as areas which would be more visible and available to the community, and that efforts should also be made to remove barberry, but that she was not as concerned about fencing. Chair Hale responded that one aspect of the site selection was that sites needed to be located away from roadways, and that barberry was mostly along roadways, but that removal wouldn't fit in the research protocol. Hale also reported that he had talked with Herb Virgo, Executive Director of the Keney Park Sustainability Project, about the park's Sustainability Study and its connection with local residents, and had suggested locating two study sites near the park's wood processing area as a public entry point, and that that discussion was ongoing.

Prof. Fahey presented on the Forest Monitoring Project, which involves studying the composition and structure of urban forest patches in collaboration with UCONN and DEEP. The intent of the research is to extend urban forest monitoring to smaller cities, and to study conditions in Connecticut urban forest patches, their maintenance and management, and how their conditions are related to their use by local

communities. The initial study focus is on the Hartford metropolitan area, to be expanded to other cities. A sampling grid will be set up in the northeast portion of Keney Park near the golf course, consisting of ten small plots, without any manipulation of the forest otherwise, and minimal monumentation. Fahey also reported that two new faculty will be hired at UCONN focusing on forest ecology, and that they will be expected to be involved in this research. Chair Hale commented that it was fortunate for the City to be a participant in these research projects, and that they would have a positive impact on the City's forests.

Vice-Chair Craig observed that the research would take place on city property, and asked what approvals would be needed for signage and fencing. She suggested that the Forestry Service coordinate with City departments and the Office of Sustainability Office. Pelletier commented that the shift from studying streets trees to forests was familiar to Park Watershed, that mature forests were critical to migratory birds, and asked if other wildlife or groundcover will be studied in addition to trees. Chair Hale responded that the Sustainability Study would have more information, and Fahey commented that the research will involve observation of all relevant vegetation and ecology within the study sites.

**Climate Action Plan Update** -Director of Sustainability Drayton reported that the Office of Sustainability will be updating the City's Climate Action Plan from 2017, including an update of 132 strategy items. Chair Hale commented that the Commission's priorities regarding the landscaping strategy items have changed since 2017, and that those updates will be discussed more with the Office of Sustainability. Drayton stated that the plan update will include an advisory board and community feedback.

**Protecting Trees during Special Events**- Chair Hale commented on the parking of cars on lawns and root zones of notable trees during special events, and that the soil compaction was problematic. Hale had reviewed what was involved in the permitting of those events, and stated that more discussion was needed of possible solutions. Prof. Masino remarked that a similar problem had been experienced at Trinity College, and that signage had been effective. Pelletier asked if the City aerates the soil around roots after special events, and if volunteers could assist in that role.

**Spring Planting Update**- Patrick Doyle (KNOX) reported that no trees had been planted since the last Commission meeting, but that KNOX was prioritizing the watering of existing trees, and that replacement trees were prepared for fall planting. Chair Hale inquired why only some new plantings have TreeGators. Doyle responded that it was an internal communication issue, and that in some places it was challenging keeping the TreeGator bags attached to trees.

**Program Update- Brainard Airport Tree Removal**- Chair Hale reported that tree removal was proceeding for 30 acres in the airport flight path, consisting of topping and removals using heavy equipment. Because of the weight of the equipment, the work will be done using a crane on the airport side of the dike. Chair Hale remarked that most of those trees would be assumed to regrow, due to their species and those trees previously being cut and regrown. Hale stated that the work was planned to take place in winter, and that the Stantec consultants managing the project could be asked to give a presentation to the Commission.

**Other updates**- Chair Hale stated that the next meeting of the Commission will take place September 7, 2022, and that he had requested that Prof. Masino present on the effort to designate part of Keney Park as an old growth forest. The next meeting will also include a discussion of the issue of car parking on tree roots and aeration as a possible solution. Vice-Chair Craig remarked that Mary Zeman (Bushnell Park Foundation) should be included in those discussions, and Chair Hale reported that he had spoken with her the previous day, and that event sponsors should also be contacted.

Chair Hale adjourned the meeting at approximately 1 PM.

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