

**City of Kalamazoo
TREE COMMITTEE
SPECIAL SESSION
Minutes
October 28, 2020**

Zoom Webinar

Members

Present: Brian LaBelle, Forester, COK
Anthony Ladd, Public Works Division Manager, COK
Patrick McVerry, Deputy Director - Parks & Recreation, COK
Deborah Nichols, Forester, Consumers Energy
Chris Patchell, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB)
Steve Skalski, Asst. City Engineer, Water Dept., COK
Brian Vogl, Forester, Consumers Energy
Gail Walters, Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC)

City Staff: Karen Rutherford, Recording Secretary

A. CALL TO ORDER

Committee Chair Ladd called the Special Session Zoom Webinar meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Committee Chair Ladd completed roll call and determined the aforementioned members were present. He welcomed Gail Walters to her introductory meeting of the Tree Committee. She is replacing Phil Dietrich who recently resign.

C. INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

None.

D. NEW BUSINESS

MDOT I-94 Project

Committee Chair Ladd explained this meeting is brought to the Tree Committee by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) for an upcoming project at the I-94, Portage, and Kilgore intersection for a wider improvement project for the interstate. He explained this project will include adding lanes and making intersection improvements at this intersection. Through the design process, as they prepared for the construction next year, they identified several trees that will need to be removed. The trees that need removed are in conflict with the sound barriers along the interstate. The barriers need to be removed due to widening of the interstate or replaced and upgraded to better insulate the noise coming from the interstate. The trees are part of a grading easement on City property where the City will be able to capture the cost of those removals. Documents were provided to the Committee for each of the easements the state is proposing to the City,

along with the costs associated with each easement. Committee Chair Ladd stated the trees are being removed to reduce noise pollution which is a bonus to the public and at the same time we are receiving a substantial return in monetary value for the removal of the trees. He stated due to the deadline, this special session was needed to keep the project on schedule.

Committee Member Labelle stated nearly all the trees that need removed are cottonwoods. There are some very small brush-like elms and maple. He stated the area where most of the trees are located is near the railroad tracks and is swampy. Committee Chair Ladd stated there are a total of 17 trees that need removed.

Committee Chair Ladd displayed on screen the third-party market study submitted to us by MDOT. He noted the value of what is being proposed captures the amount for the retribution of the trees. MDOT submitted separate documents for each of the locations including the affected areas being mapped out and the value associated with the specific location.

Committee Member Patchell asked if the funds we receive for the removal will be used to replant the trees in the same general area. Committee Chair Ladd responded they had internal discussion to ensure the funds would be used for forestry initiatives and trees would be replaced in the general area. A discussion followed.

Committee Chair Ladd recommended making a motion to replace the trees 3 to 1.

Committee Member Skalski asked if the City would be doing the planting or would it be done by MDOT. Committee Chair Ladd responded MDOT would not be doing the replanting, but it would be either the City crews or a contractor managed by the City.

Committee Member Walter asked since the City now has a Natural Features Protection Overlay, if the overlay map is superimposed on this area, are the trees destined to be impacted protected under the Natural Feature's Protection? Committee Member Skalski stated he looked at the overly map on GIS and stated this area is outside the Natural Features Protection Overlay.

Committee Member Patchell noted when selecting trees to be replanted in this area, the trees need to be durable and sound from the salt coming from the freeway area and to keep in mind the importance of tree survival. Committee Member Nichols stated the white pine is not conducive to this area due to salt. Committee Member LaBelle stated scotch pines or cedars would be a good choice knowing how wet the soil is. Committee Member Nichols stated black hills spruce or red pine for evergreens will be good choices to handle the salt.

Committee Member Nichols stated we should not limit ourselves to trees only, but to consider native shrubs that grow to 30 feet tall or taller and can handle the conditions. Committee Member Walter suggested high bush cranberry. They like wet soil, grow tall, and provide a great habitat.

Committee Member Patchell supported by Committee Member LaBelle, made a

motion to allow the removal of the trees and replace three for one with a variety of shrubs as well as trees providing habitat, sound, and environmental protection. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

F. COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Committee Chair Ladd stated there was no New Business or updates to Old Business for the regularly scheduled November 3, 2020 Tree Committee meeting and the meeting has been cancelled.

Committee Chair Ladd stated we successfully awarded a tree planning contract for this year. We have identified over one hundred sites and the contractor should be starting in the next week or so. Committee Member Patchell asked if they could get a map of where the trees will be planted. Committee Chair Ladd responded he would do that.

Committee Member Walter asked if they could get a map of the area where MDOT would be removing the trees so she could go out and take a look at the area. Committee Chair Ladd stated there are several parcels we could highlight on the GIS map indicating which properties they are. Some areas may not be accessible. Committee Member Skalski stated much of the area is at Emerald Park, at the end of Pennway Street and Dorchester Avenue. You can access most all of it on the north side corridor. The south side of the highway will be difficult to access.

G. ADJOURNMENT

Committee Member Skalski supported by Committee Member LaBelle, made a motion to adjourn the Tree Committee meeting. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.

Submitted by: Karen Ruthenford Date: 1-12-21
Recording Secretary

Approved by: [Signature] Date: 1/13/21
Staff Liaison