

Petersham Forest & Shade Tree Committee Meeting
August 27, 2014, 6:30pm
Petersham Country Store

Attendees: Melissa LeVangie (chair), Jim Baird, Abbie Castagnaro, Tamara Castagnaro, Bob Clark, Tim Graves, Clarisse Hart, Steve Herzog, Sheila Youd. Minutes by Clarisse Hart.

Overview

The group discussed a first draft of the wood policy, the Hopkinton NH model for wood banking, and new ideas for community outreach - including a wood banking volunteer day, a monthly communique (postcard?) to residents, a to-do list for invasive species education, possible work with local artisans, and an exhibit at the Library.

Summary of Action Steps

- **All committee members will**
 - Review draft wood policy circulated by Melissa in advance of Sept. 8 selectboard meeting.
 - Consider registering for the Oct 24/25 Mass. Tree Steward Training.
 - Put together a few bullet points about invasive species that we feel are very important, that the general public should know.
 - Send Clarisse ideas for tree stories for the local newspapers.
 - Brainstorm: what local artisans work with wood, and might want to create/donate products made from our town trees?
- **Bob will**
 - With Mike Leonard, investigate the trees downed by the July 4 microburst on the Davenport Pond Property. Sawlogs? Cordwood?
- **Clarisse will**
 - Follow up with town admins about creating revolving funds to house tree planting donations AND donations for wood banking expenses.
 - Write a story for local news about fall color and tree health.
- **Melissa will**
 - Create a new draft of the wood policy to circulate to the group & deliver to the selectboard.
 - Consider incorporating these ideas:
 - Add a weather clause to the bullet that says “resident will be given approximately one month” – especially if the wood is in the road.
 - If there are multiple abutters (like on the Common), then the wood goes into the wood bank.
 - Consider planning a field trip to a wood banking site for this committee.
- **Steve will**
 - Research what's required for a vegetation management plan for the town (determine what kind of labor and expenses are involved).
- **Tamara will**
 - Ask the Library if we can create a resource area about Petersham trees and related issues.

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 24, at 6:30 – with a 5:30 field trip on the Common just prior.

Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item 1: Community Outreach

- Would be nice to have a monthly communique (postcard if possible) to educate residents about committee-related issues. Example message: 'Keep your eye out for this invasive species that is flowering this month.'
- We'd want to brand our materials with a logo that folks come to recognize.
- Town-wide mailings can be expensive but the tree warden budget has some money for this.
- Can also post this info in local newspapers, as a press release.

Agenda Item 2: Wood Policy

(Melissa circulated a draft policy.)

- Would like to present a draft to the Selectboard for their meeting on Sept. 8.
 - This is not a policy on pruning, which also will be developed in the future, in line with the PSham Open Space & Recreation Plan.
 - This policy should align with our draft wood banking plan.
 - The final approved version will be posted online at mytowngovernment.org, the [tree warden webpage](#); will be submitted to local newspapers; emailed using the key lists in town; posted in hard copy at the post office, outside town hall, in the town office building, at the library and country store. We will also mail a postcard.
 - Once the policy is approved, then we present it to Stanley Tree (good regional contractors) as well.
- **Melissa will put together a new draft to circulate with this group, to finalize in advance of the Sept 8 meeting.**

Logistics of Downed Wood

- **Melissa** explained that once a tree has been identified as a problem, it gets flagged with pink ribbon for her to review it. If she and Tim (HWD) agree it should be cut down, it's painted with an orange X.
 - This draft policy states that if the abutter wants downed wood, they call Tim to let him know, and also mark what they want (remove the stake after they've taken what they want). If they don't want the wood, they do nothing.
- **Suggestion from Tim: Add a weather clause to the bullet that says "resident will be given approximately one month" – especially if the wood is in the road.**
- **Suggestion from Bob: If there are multiple abutters (like on the Common), then the wood goes into the wood bank.**

Questions & Answers

- Q (**Sheila**): Could Tim slip a postcard under the abutter's door if a tree has been flagged for removal?
 - A (**Melissa**): Once that mark goes on the tree, people notice. It would be a courtesy to go an additional step with a postcard.
- Q (**Steve**): How much time elapses between a tree being marked and coming down?
 - A (**Melissa**): It varies. It's only immediate if it's a hazard or high-risk tree.
- Q (**Sheila**): If a homeowner has questions, who do they contact first?

- A (**Melissa**): Tim.
- Q (**Tim**): How much wood will go into the wood landing area?
 - A (**Melissa**): See wood banking agenda item below.

Agenda Item 3: Wood Banking

- **Suggestion from Bob: it would be fun for this committee to visit one of the places that's doing wood banking.**
- **Melissa** reported on the [Wood for Warmth program](#) Hopkinton, NH, described to her by project leader Mary Congoran. They started it 8 years ago as a community resource for fuel assistance. At the beginning, they were very grass-roots: after they processed the wood, they built a very simple distribution service at the transfer station.
 - Unlike MA, NH doesn't have tree wardens, mandating oversight and protection of town trees, but they DO have an active logging environment. So they reached out to wood purveyors to request one log load of hardwood to be dropped off at a processing space.
 - **Early Lessons Learned**
 - The transfer station is a great location for the wood bank: it has set hours with a staff person; otherwise it's gated.
 - Wood can be stacked on pallettes and covered with corrugated roofing. A dremel tool can grind up the edges so they're safe.
 - Access is an important consideration, especially in winter – how does the snow plow move through the transfer station, to facilitate wood pick-up?
 - Volunteer Days:
 - They do this the Saturday after Veteran's Day every year, from 9am to 2pm. That way, everyone knows when it will be each year.
 - A month before volunteer day, send out a postcard reminder.
 - In advance, identify volunteers who can run saws safely. (5-10 volunteers, identified to the selectboard in advance). (Bob Clark noted that DCR is willing to do chainsaw training for us.)
 - Saw volunteers work from 7 to 9am. The rest of the volunteers show up at 9 with splitters, or to stack wood to bring to the transfer station.
 - The volunteer day of processing and stacking wood is a day of community service – of interest to boy scouts, schools, etc.
 - Great way to build multi-generational relationships in town.
 - Helpful to name the Wood Bank after a community member who is beloved in the town, to encourage engagement, donations, etc.
- **Suggestion from Melissa: Perhaps consider naming our Wood Bank after Horace and Doris Coolidge?** Sheila and Bob agreed.
 - Wood is given out on a voucher system. Voucher requests can be downloaded off the web or retrieved from town hall or the library. Completed requests are submitted to the town administrator, who documents it and gives the voucher. A voucher is good for one vehicle load of wood, no matter what their vehicle is (a sedan or a dump-truck). Every time somebody needs wood, they fill out a new voucher.
 - In Hopkinton, the first year they did it, they gave out 2 cords of wood in a week. Now they have 15 cords of wood and they're out by Feb.
 - On volunteer day, they encourage people who need wood to come get it early.

- Don't get bogged down with the idea that you're trying to provide wood for the whole town. Start small. People are more likely to get involved once you are successful at the small version.
- Mary says she'd be happy to talk to the tree committee, the selectboard, volunteers, etc.

Wood Banking: Community Outreach Ideas

- Petersham Center School students could get involved indirectly with community trees on volunteer day: we could quiz them as we go (what kind of tree is this, what might have happened to it)?
- Also interested might be the Lion's Club, a local rotary club, police, fire – anyone whose mission would align with the ultimate goal of this program, which is fuel assistance.
- Could people who donate cordwood could get a tax write-off? We'd have to work with the selectboard to figure this out (**Tamara** can follow up on this when the time comes). **Bob** suggested that the town could provide a letter for tax purposes. **Melissa** agreed – but only when one is specifically requested.
- It would be nice to have 2 days of volunteering to get the current wood pile down.
- If someone wanted to make a small donation, that money could help off-set direct costs of volunteering (fuel for equipment, etc.). **Tim noted we'd need to set up a separate revolving account for those funds.** We are currently working on setting up the first revolving account for the tree planting fund. **Clarisse will follow up.**
- Melissa announced that Massachusetts has a "serve" program now for its state employees, so that the state can pay Melissa to volunteer one day a month. For her one day a week, she could do cutting for the wood bank. And could encourage other state employees to come along.

Agenda Item 4: Tree Warden & Committee Business

- Melissa is planning a field trip to review trees in town from the eyes of the tree warden, so this group can understand the process.
- **This field trip will be before our next meeting, on Weds, September 24 – meet on the Common at 5:30.**
- [Tree Steward Training](#) – **Oct 24/25 at Harvard Forest: Committee members are encouraged to register.** The training is geared toward community groups – people who are interested in trees but don't have formal education on these issues. Would be great to have several of us go; it will be great for networking and idea exchange, and will also allow us to work together better as a committee. Melissa is leading the pruning session on Saturday. There's content on tree ID, i-Tree, a pest session, a group discussion about issues in community forestry, pruning trees and shrubs, soil constraints, and an iTree work session.

Agenda Item 5: Community Education--Invasive Species

- **Before the next meeting, each committee member should put together a few bullet points about invasive species that we feel are very important, that the general public should know.**
- Ultimately, we want to build a To-Do list for our committee to develop invasive species education in town. Let's establish ourselves as a resource.

- **Steve volunteered to do research on what's required for a vegetation management plan for the town.** He can see what kind of labor and expenses are involved.
 - **Note:** For her new job, **Melissa** is going to be mandated to get her pesticide license and the state will cover the cost.
- **Melissa** wants to enrich the tree warden webpage with resources.
 - Suggestion from **Bob**: [Go-Botany](#) is a great tool for plant ID.
 - We also have Bob Clark's .pdf guides for touring 2 culturally rich forest properties in Petersham (Slab City and Harvard Pond).
 - **Note:** We can give suggestions and recommendations but we can't give prescriptions for what to do with private land. We'd have to refer them to local extension people for that.
- **Tamara will ask the Library if we can create a resource area about trees.**
 - **Clarisse** will ask HF if they can donate books.
 - **Sheila** asked if we might find a tree-centric art item to go with the display.
 - **Bob** suggested we consider creating an exhibit about the Common, past and present. The Historical Society has many old photographs and resources.

Agenda Item 6: New Business

- **Bob will go with forester Mike Leonard to investigate the trees downed by the July 4 microburst on the Davenport Pond Property** (owned and managed by the Cons. Commission).
 - There's one small section near the pond – a nice pine, probably some sawlogs – and a little hardwood. On the eastern side and further in, there are about a dozen large oaks down: some sawlogs and nice cordwood. The cordwood might be perfect for wood banking.
- **Suggestion from Melissa:** Not now, but in the future: between our sugar maple from the Common and these potential sawlogs on the Davenport property: **can we reach out to local artisans who work with wood, or local mills, to develop/create products?**
 - There's a precedent from Maine, where an old elm came down and they took sections of wood to create bowls, etc., out of the tree. All of the proceeds went into the tree planting fund for that town.
 - We could work with the Art Center to identify artisans who are willing to work at cost and donate the products back.
- **Clarisse** is going to start writing articles for the local papers on tree issues. **People should email her ideas.** September story will be about early fall color and tree health.
- **Next meeting is Wednesday, September 24, at 6:30 – with a 5:30 field trip on the Common preceding it.**