

Petersham Forest and Shade Tree Committee Meeting
July 9, 2014, 6:30-8:00pm
Petersham Country Store

Attendees:

Melissa LeVangie (chair), James Baird, Sheila Youd, Tamara Castagnaro, Abigail Castagnaro, Clarisse Hart, Bob Clark (guest: Petersham Conservation Commission); Minutes by Clarisse Hart.

Overview

The group elected officers; and discussed updates on cordwood drawing tickets and wood cutting, Mass Highway cuttings on 122/32, wood banking and a Petersham Wood Policy, upcoming tree hearings, and a canvas bag sustainability/fundraising idea. Next meeting will be Thursday, July 17 at 6:30pm at the Country Store.

Summary of Action Steps

- **Abigail** is now the treasurer! Congratulations. She will
 - Work with Melissa and the town accountant to determine whether there is an existing, unused fund that could be used for tree planting \$.
- **Bob** will
 - Ask the Highway Dept to work directly with Melissa as a first point of consult on cuts
 - Send Melissa info on wood banking -- plus the name of his DCR contact on this issue (Sean someone?) -- and find out the status/timeline of the proposal for a federally funded study of wood banking in MA.
 - Send Melissa the name of the forester working on the McFarland @ Tom Swamp Road (Manahar property) harvest.
 - Send Melissa whatever info he can about DCR chainsaw trainings.
- **Clarisse** is now the secretary! Congratulations. She will
 - Amend the June minutes as requested.
 - Circulate a Doodle poll for cordwood cutting in July.
 - Follow up in late July with the town treasurer/accountant about an interim approach for collecting cordwood drawing funds (unless Abbie would like to take this over).
- **Melissa** will
 - Investigate adding 8th and 9th voting members to this committee.
 - Schedule a field trip for PTC members to learn how the Tree Warden makes decisions about town trees.
 - Schedule a Tuesday to look at downed limbs on telephone wires with Bob Clark.
 - Email the group the house # for the 50" oak on Hardwick Road.
- **Sheila** will remind Jim Baird of the next meeting.
- **Tamara** is now the vice-chair! Congratulations. She will:
 - Post the 7/17 meeting and agenda online.
- **All committee members** will:
 - Review the June and July minutes for edits/approval at the next meeting.
 - Browse the newly approved Petersham [Open Space & Recreation Plan](#).
 - Be on the look-out for troubled trees in town, and places that could benefit from a new tree planting.
 - Brainstorm additional ideas for fundraisers, education efforts.
- Tasks not assigned to a specific person:

- Research other towns' wood banking policies.
- Tabled business for next meeting
 - Invasives: helping landowners with HWA
 - Further discussion of wood banking/wood policy
 - Discussion of Melissa's Tree Warden focus in town
 - Approve/edit minutes from June meeting

Meeting Minutes

- **At 6:35pm, Melissa called the meeting to order.**

Bob noted a correction to the June meeting minutes: on page 2, South Road should be corrected to South *Street*.

Bob noted that the 2014 [Petersham Open Space & Recreation Plan](#) has been approved and uploaded to the town website. This document contains several points of interest for this committee, including a set of goals for invasive species removal.

Agenda Item 1: Discuss & Elect Officers/Members

Election Slate

Treasurer: Abigail Castagnaro
Secretary: Clarisse Hart
Vice-Chair: Tamara Castagnaro

Jim motioned to approve the slate. **Sheila** seconded. **All ayes. Officers elected.**

Membership

Bob suggested it might be helpful to add a voting member from the Petersham Conservation Commission. Both the Con Comm and Planning Board have jurisdiction over the town's Shade Tree Act. Voting member Steve Herzog is a member of the Planning Board.

- **Melissa will explore adding an 8th (Bob Clark, chair of Conservation Commission) and 9th (TBD) voting member to this committee.**

Agenda Item 2: Cordwood Drawing Tickets

Financial Logistics

Clarisse explained that two logistical steps are required before we can legally collect money on behalf of the town and put it into a tree planting fund: 1) Committee members must be "bonded" by the town's insurance company. Paperwork for a "blanket bond" to cover all committee members has been submitted through the town Administrator. 2) A new fund/account must be created by the town treasurer, who suggests that a revolving account be created by a vote at the next Special Town Meeting in September.

- **Clarisse and Melissa will follow up in late July with the town treasurer/accountant about an interim approach for collecting funds.** Until this is sorted, we cannot take any additional donations for cordwood drawing tickets.

Bob asked if there is already an existing, unused account, established during the previous iterations of the tree committee.

- **Melissa will look into it. (Or Abbie? As treasurer?) She will also ensure that any revolving fund established is specifically earmarked for tree planting.**

Funding Invasive Species Work

Jim asked if the funds we collect can be used for control of invasive species. **Melissa** said that these funds will be used for tree planting in town, and that given the limited scope of our funds, our strategy

will be to partner with others – like the Highway Department – on community education and other strategies for invasives. **Bob** added there is a goal in the Open Space plan to work cooperatively with large landowners in town (Harvard Forest, TTOR, Mass Audubon, etc.) on this issue.

Jim asked how we will help landowners handle the invasion of hemlock woolly adelgid. **Melissa added this to New Business for the next meeting.**

Other Problematic Trees

- **Jim** noted that many trees around town in are in bad shape, including outside the Petersham Historical Society. **Tamara** noted two trees on the Common, in front of the Woolsey property, that are a problem.
- **Melissa** said she would like to take this committee on a field trip to show how the tree warden looks at and makes decisions about trees. There was unanimous agreement on this idea.

Cutting Cordwood

- Storms last week prevented us from cutting on July 2. Some wood was cut July 7 with a skeleton crew. The goal is to cut one cord into 12” pieces, and one cord into 18” pieces for the other, using a gas-powered splitter, and delivering via dump truck.
 - **Clarisse will circulate a new Doodle poll for cordwood cutting in July.**

Agenda Item 3: Mass. Highway Cutting on Rtes 122/32A

Background

- **Melissa** explained that the Highway Department has complete jurisdiction over certain roads, although the Tree Warden can make recommendations. The Conservation Commission can actually stop the cutting if it poses a threat to a wetland.

Last month, the police chief (or was it the highway dept chief?) told Melissa of Mass Highway’s plans to cut dead or dying trees along 122/32A. Cutting began in early July, on Rte 122 beyond Connor’s Pond, and harvest included more than simply dead and dying trees. Bob Clark, in his capacity as Conservation Commission chair, asked that they stop, which they did.

- **Bob** explained that several years ago, there was extensive cutting on 122/32, and after a conversation, Tim Myers and Al Stegman agreed that moving forward the Highway Dept would work with the Conservation Commission before going ahead with these kinds of cuts. For the recent cuts, they didn’t notify the ConComm; they assumed that because the town’s police chief had asked them to do the cuts, the ConComm had already been consulted.

Next steps

- **Bob** said that moving forward, **he’d be happy to ask the Highway Department** to work directly with the Tree Warden (Melissa) as a first point of consult on these kinds of cuts. **Melissa** said that would be great.

Agenda Item 4: Wood Policy

[reference: [Monson Wood Policy doc](#)]

Wood Banking

- **Abigail** did extensive web searching to find other Massachusetts wood policies; the Monson document was the only one available.
- **Bob** suggested we research “wood banking,” which is a strategy used successfully in a number of towns in Eastern MA.
 - **Bob will send Melissa info on wood banking, plus the name of his DCR contact on this issue (Sean someone?), and he will find out the status/timeline of the proposal for a federally funded study of wood banking in MA.**

Wood Policy: Objectives and Barriers

- **Melissa** explained that this policy needs to:
 - Ensure equal access to town wood, especially among people in need, and people who do not have the ability to cut their own wood.
 - Protect the town from liability during cutting/transport of wood (Mass. General Law protects the town if the cutting is done on private land and no \$ is exchanged).
 - Prevent the Highway Department from needing to do a lot of extra work to cut and process the wood.
 - Encourage/incentivize volunteerism and participation, because this work requires a lot of hands-on effort.
 - Move the wood quickly, lest it become a fire hazard.
- **Bob** noted that DCR conducts trainings on using a chainsaw [CHart note: [like this one?](#)]. **He will find out more about these trainings.**
- For wood-banking, **Bob** explained that in other communities, professional wood-cutters can donate a cord and get a tax write-off. Landowners planning a harvest on their property can work with the forester to set aside some of the slash appropriate for firewood.
- **Melissa** would like this committee to provide a draft wood policy to the Selectboard in the near-term. **She tabled further discussion until the next meeting.**

Agenda Item 5: New Business

Tree Hearings

- As Tree Warden, **Melissa** regularly receives emails and phone calls about problem trees in town. On Tuesdays, she sets up appointments to review them.
- The tree warden has the ability to cite for removal any town trees that pose imminent threat to life or property without a hearing. If the tree does not pose such a threat, a process must be followed: at least 2 forms of written communication posted for 2 weeks (usually a legal notice in the newspaper, plus a post on the town’s website, and a hard copy flyer at the post office and town hall). Anyone can file an objection, which would be heard at a selectboard meeting. Only after a positive decision from the selectboard can the tree be scheduled to be removed.
- Recent trees on the docket for cutting/hearings include:
 - At McFarland @ Tom Swamp Road (Manahar property): proposed landing site for a harvest
 - one 14.5” red maple with a cavity at the fork and only half a crown. Marked with grey striped and pink flagging tape.
 - 2-stemmed red oak. Main stem (45”) would remain, smaller stem (12.5”) will have a tree hearing for removal.
 - 24” red maple is a road hazard & will be removed. Has orange flag.
 - **Bob said he can tell Melissa the name of the forester working on this harvest.**

- Old Hardwick Road
 - At #58: one stem removed, the other will have hearing for removal
 - Two trees almost dead, standing, flagged for removal.
 - 56.8" dead sugar maple, for removal
 - 32.9" dead white ash, for removal
- 170 Old Barre Road
 - Tree hearing: 50-foot tall red/black oak with a twin stem. Significant cavity with rot on one stem, leaning onto private property. Other stem over the road.
- Hardwick Road
 - Pink flagging, 50" diameter oak. As a tree committee, we can take a field trip or view this independently; significant decay but requires a level 3 inspection. If it fails, it will crush the house.
 - **Melissa will get a house number and email the group.**

Other Problem Trees

- **Bob** mentioned a series of broken limbs weighing down telephone lines on his road. **Melissa will make an appointment to go see this on a Tuesday this month.**
- **Melissa** reported back on the broken oak tree at the cemetery on Flat Rock Road. It is unsightly but does not pose a threat to graves or stone walls. She would need a crane or bucket truck to access it. She can get a quote if the cemetery commission would like to pursue this further.

Special Funding Idea

- **Melissa** described a fundraiser/sustainability effort by the town of Manchester, VT, where the town banned plastic bags and then began selling (soliciting donations for) canvas bags for \$5, with sponsorship from local businesses, which offer discounts for use of the bag. Great Barrington, Mass., just passed a plastic bag ban. Could Petersham do this in partnership with surrounding towns (New Salem, Barre...)? We'd have to start with community awareness and education. Something for the group to think about over the next few meetings.

The next meeting will be next Thursday, July 17, at 6:30pm at the Country Store.

- **At 7:55pm, Clarisse moved to adjourn the meeting. Tamara seconded. All ayes. Meeting adjourned.**