



CITY OF MOUNT VERNON

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Tree Advisory Board (TAB)
MEETING MINUTES
November 18, 2021, 4pm

A REGULAR MEETING

of the Tree Advisory Board was held on Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 4:05pm via Zoom.

Attendance:

Voting members: Eveline Feldmann, Chair • Marlene H. Wertheim, Vice Chair • Henry May • Marlon Molina

Absent: Vincent DeVito

Others: Jennifer Mastrogiorgio • Janee Bedford • Tanesia Walters • Elias S. Gootzeit

Guest: Damani Bush

A video record of the virtual meeting is being made by the Administrative Clerk to DPW, Jennifer Mastrogiorgio, that is accessible at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=443157377203921>

AGENDA

Approval of minutes of November 04, 2021: While waiting for all members to arrive there was a discussion on note taking. There is now the option of having a transcription of the TAB video, which does away with the need for personal notes which have been taken by Elias prior video posting. The Chair announced that the board is, as a result, ready to assume the preparation of a more abbreviated process following the template approved by the members with the help of video and transcript backup. Elias was thanked profusely for having volunteered his help when the board wasn't yet formalized and transitioning to this process. With that he will be presenting his last notes from today to the Chair. Going forward, minutes will also be sent to Deputy City Clerk Walters prior approval. Those who will attend meetings, who are not TAB members, will be the DPW tech staff, legal adviser and Deputy City Clerk. As Molina joined the meeting, he mentioned concerns to the approving of minutes. Molina offered that he would submit his comments by email rather than discuss them in the quorum. The approval of the 11/4/21 minutes was, therefore, postponed until the next meeting on 12/2/21.

Reports: Technology updates and workflow tasks

There was a problem in livestreaming the meeting. Marlon and Jennifer will work on this offline and do a practice runoff. Henry spoke of livestreaming as reflecting the spirit of transparency which is an admirable board goal. Jennifer wasn't sure if the transcription software was now available. Marlon's communication team recommended uploading a YouTube video which can transcribe.

Guest presentation: Storm Preventative Maintenance Program presentation by DPW Commissioner Damani Bush Comm. Bush wanted the TAB to be informed before he met with the Mayor and went public with an announcement. Commissioner Bush just returned from the Public Works Summit, a meeting held in Texas recently, of 40+ DPW Commissioners nationwide who convened to discuss the impact of climate change on DPW operations around the United States. For our City he is seeking to take a proactive rather than a reactive approach by protecting trees and safeguarding residents and property in advance of a storm. Hundreds of trees have been destroyed in recent years causing unnecessary losses and injury. The plan, which was initiated 2 weeks ago, divides the city into 14 zones. Within each zone attention is paid to tree pruning, needed tree removals, sucker growth and stump removals. Bush noted that there are about 100 trees that need to be removed as dangerous.

At the same time data will be collected and a tree map drawn indicating where trees, including tree wells, have to be replaced. This data will enable DPW to secure necessary funds from the City Council and other sources for tree work and equipment. Commissioner Bush describe the existence of 7000 trees that are currently under the purview of the Mount Vernon DPW.

Notification in advance will go out to the residents of the section to be worked on. The TAB points to the important to balance the messaging to the public who can be emotionally attached or get the wrong signal. Provide reason for a taking down of a tree and speak to the importance of maintaining healthy trees and planting new ones. From here Comm. Bush will speak with the Mayor, let her know that he met with the TAB and together they will initiate a press release.

We all agreed that with programs such as this one Mount Vernon is on a right path and is moving into the forefront of municipalities with a focus on trees. The TAB appreciated Comm. Bush and his presentation.

Reports cont'd:

Arbor Day Foundation Environmental Justice Initiative Submission

No word yet said Marlon, after a second email inquiring as to the status.

Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA Application 2021

Once again Elias was praised for having stepped in, this time as forester, and coordinating, last January, the completion of the application to restore Mount Vernon's designation as a Tree City. Marlene noted the TAB is now prepared to assume that role as designated in our approved Rules of Procedure. The Chair will be the contact person and will soon initiate the process of filling out the form for 2022.

Henry was wondering who, after Councilwoman Duarte's term is over, would be overseeing the Dept. DPW. Tanesia Walters responded that the Council Assignments will be done at the first meeting in January. That's when DPW will find out who chairs the Committee.

Unfinished Business: On-going discussion about presentations to Commissioners

The Chair prepared the three info sheets in vertical format and is looking for approval of document copy and layout. Marlon raised the issue of how the TAB will interpret the Tree Ordinance. For example, regarding the TAB responsibilities – What is the process re advising the land use boards, overseeing programs? Molina seeks to involve the legal department to review our presentation. Marlon offered his understanding of the TAB within land-use application review process; Once applications are posted online, Planning Dept. staff would have the first say based on their familiarity with the Tree Ordinance and would flag those for referral to the TAB. Any comments regarding an application would be received as part of a public hearing, which is possibly when the TAB would submit its comments. May referred to how the legal department was instrumental in guiding toward strengthening the language of the ordinance with terms like “shall” and “prohibited”. The Chair responded that all other four TAB members have been closely involved in its development process and the TAB was intended to serve in an integral advisory capacity. The TAB input is intended to contribute specialized expertise that will add to the health of our community and help substantiate the ordinance. This discussion is important and will assist us in more clearly defining our role and the engagement process, along with the input of the city depts. and boards. The approval of the sheets was tabled.

Tree Updates from our Arborist: Vincent was not present to speak to this.

Announcements: Henry wished Eveline a belated happy birthday and she extended same to him.

Good wishes extended to all for the Thanksgiving holiday. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, Dec. 2, 2021

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting concluded at 5:28 p.m.



Eveline Feldmann, Chair

12/02/2021

Date of Approval