

Town of Exeter

TREE COMMITTEE

DRAFT Minutes for 11/12/2024

**1. Preliminaries**

Board Members Present: Eileen Flockhart (Chair), Sally Oxnard, Sara Sankowich, Steve Jones.

Staff Present: Jay Perkins, Kirk Scamman, Greg Bisson.

Select Board Member Present: Niko Papakonstantis

**2. Called to Order at 8:40 AM.**

**3. Old Business**

Minutes from October 8, 2024, were approved without changes.

(Motion to approve made by Steve Jones, seconded by Sally Oxnard.)

**4. New Business**

**a. Moving 2 Elm Trees from Library to Old Court House**

Discussed drought conditions. Has been dry for 3 months. Kirk & Jay do not want to move “stressed” elm trees until either the ground just freezes (likely in December) or spring 2025.

**b. Protecting new plantings during drought**

The new water tank trailer is not yet assembled. DPW is using a small unit, watering with which is slow. All newly planted trees have been watered.

**c. Update on Large Ash Tree Trimmed by Unitil without Prior Consultation with Town, Alongside a Scenic Road (Power Mill Road & Linden Street)**

Sara Sankowich (committee member, trained & experienced in tree management, also Director of Sustainability and Shared Services at Unitil) and Jeffrey Toomey (resident of Scenic Road with the aforementioned ash tree, trained & experienced in tree management) both spoke. Jay Perkins joined in the conversation.

Jeff believes that the ash tree that was markedly pruned “had no structural problems.” Also, as Unitil did not know that Linden Street from the Exeter River out to Kimball Road and Powdermill Road beyond that is all a scenic route, there were several violations of appropriate process. [For scenic roads in Rockingham County, by New Hampshire statute there is supposed to be a review of large trees to be cut or pruned. “Large trees” was not specifically defined in this conversation, but talk revolved around trees ≥30” breast height diameter (BMD). The review of the proposed pruning or cutting of such trees is between the utility – in this case, Unitil – and either the Rockingham Planning

Commission or a designated Town official. Jay, as the Tree Warden for Exeter, would be the designated Town official.]

Sara responded that Unitil was indeed unaware that the stretch of road in question was designated a scenic route. (There are currently no markers.) She promised that Unitil will observe appropriate protocols in the future.

In addition, Sara noted that Unitil staff interviewed the landowner beforehand. The owner thought that it was time for the tree to come down. Furthermore, with her training and experience, she does not agree that the tree was “structurally sound.” She stated that utilities have to evaluate trees in the right of way differently from routine evaluations of trees not in the right of way. They look at risk differently. Their mission is to provide safe power to customers. Through their Hazardous Tree program, they evaluate a stretch of road only every 5 years.

Sara reported that Unitil occasionally uses tree regulators – a chemical (or chemicals) applied to a tree that makes for woodier roots and thicker leaves. They were the first utility company in New Hampshire to do so. Use of such regulators can be controversial with residents since they are chemicals.

Jay noted that at-risk ash trees can be injected by the town to protect them. Sara agreed: “There are steps one can take to take an ash off the list [of trees to be cut down].”

Lastly, Sara reported that Unitil runs a large tree replacement program through their Storm Resilience Program. Jeff thought that one ~30” BDH tree downed or significantly pruned in error of process – such as the one along Powdermill Road – should be compensated with at least twenty-five, 1-2” caliper trees. Sara agreed.

Sara and Sally will coordinate with Kristen Murphy to draw up a packet to be delivered to the folks along the Scenic Road (Powdermill Road and outer Linden Street) offering replacement trees. Sally and Sara offered to be involved in the delivery of these, representing the Town and Unitil, and take questions from residents. The species of trees to be planted will be taken from the list this committee previously approved.

Jay, Sara and Jeff agreed that the process for review of trees along Scenic Roads needs to be improved. Jay will review the RSA for details. In general, a proposed process was suggested:

- Unitil and the Tree Warden for the Town of Exeter will have a meeting on-site with the owner of the property and the abutters.
- If all agree on an action, no public hearing will be held.
- If there is disagreement, there will be a public hearing.

Also, for any Town road that is not a designated Scenic Road, Unitil will meet with the Tree Warden beforehand to review proposed prunings and cuttings.

Sara offered to have a tanker truck water trees throughout the Town. Jay and Kirk declined saying they had already watered new trees.

Lastly, Jay and Kirk displayed a paper sample of a sign they ordered in order to mark Scenic Roads. There are 5 such roads in Town. There will be 10 signs – one at the beginning of each road in each direction. The signs bear the seal of the Town of Exeter, and they indicate the particular RSA authorizing the Scenic Road designation. They will be 2' tall by 1.5' wide.

d. Tree Survey Feedback

At least one committee member had challenges using the app.

e. Completion of Tree City USA reapplication

Eileen will work with Kristen Murphy on the re-application for Tree City USA status.

f. Photographs of Paper Birch Tree on Swasey Parkway

Old photos of the paper birch tree on Swasey Parkway were discussed. Eileen has access to one. The age of the tree is unknown. Eileen will invite Steve Jenkins to meet with her to come up with a proposal for January's meeting on how to collect such photos and the appropriate venue in which to display them.

Adjourned: 9:40 AM

Next Meeting: January 14, 2025, 8:30 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Jones

November 14, 2024