Members present: Stacy Cassata, Julie Holland, Carole Nossek, Kit Hartford, Kristen Parsons

Absent: Eric Beverly, Danny Oliverio and Ayo Bryant

Guests present: Deb Downie, Jen Lacker, Shaun Mastonianni, Margaret Jones, Kathy Weinberger

1) Call to Order-Co Chair Stacy Cassata called meeting to order at 5:00PM
2) Pledge of Allegiance
3) Approval of minutes by Julie Holland 2nd by Carole Nossek, All in favor
4) New Business

a) Correspondence

*Letter from resident Jen Lacker regarding Willow St Island in Mystic, with concerns having another tree planted in Island. Resident is working with neighbors on Willow St to form a committee to support a future landscaped garden.

*Letter from resident Shaun Mastonianni regarding Willow St Island in Mystic asking to present plan of future garden on Willow St Island to committee.

*Letter from Maura Robie, Eastern CT Conservation District regarding asking for assistance in locating areas in Stonington for future rain and or pollinating gardens.

b) Discussion of Budget 2022-2023

The committee discussed the allocation of funds of $7,5000 for the fiscal year. Committee member Julie Holland presented a draft budget that she reported to be a very conservative budget to maintain the gardens and pots they currently responsible for. Holland suggested to committee to leave room in budget to create another garden and or add new trees in the Spring of 2023. Holland also asked to leave at least $100-$200 in the budget when repairs need to be made to gardens or replace pots that were stolen, damaged or vandalized. Committee discussed the importance of fundraising to continue to support tree plantings and projects to keep moving forward.

c) Willow St Island Mystic

Resident Shaun Mastonianni presented a plan to relandscape the Island on Willow St in Mystic to the committee. Shaun designed and planted the Route 1 Island project and presented to the committee that he would like to go with same design and use the same low growing plantings. Shaun estimated the plantings would be under $1,300 but would need the towns support to prep
the area for planting. Shaun mentioned that residents of Willow St would be willing to weed the area and help maintain it. Committee member Julie Holland said she is in support of a project in Mystic but wanted to make sure there is a plan in place to maintain the area for years to come. Holland mentioned that the Route 1 Island project costs the committee around $500-$600 to mulch it each year, and any maintenance of future gardens usually comes out of their budget. Mastroianni mentioned that he would request a meeting with town officials to discuss the project. Committee members all agreed they would support the project but need to know what they would be responsible for in installing this garden and maintenance for years to come. Holland asked a representative of the committee be present in any future meeting with town officials regarding this project and can report back to committee for discussion in Sept. Committee members thanked Shaun and his husband Antonio Mastroianni for maintaining the route 1 island and mentioned the committee gets many compliments on the garden.

d) Tree Warden Report

Tree Warden Margaret Jones along with deputy Tree warden Kathy Weinberger reported on the severe loss of trees in the Town of Stonington due to insects, disease, age, and drought. The tree warden Tree removal and trimming budget for 2021 was $50,000 and which she reported all was spent but their budget to add new trees is only $1,000-$2,000. Margaret Jones thanked the committee for its recent donation of $2,000 toward new trees in Stonington and are excited to partner with the committee on educating the public on the Importance of planting Native trees and protecting some of our older trees. Margaret told the committee that she is working on a grand list of tree planting locations in Stonington that would include neighborhoods, parks and downtown locations. Holland thanked Margaret and Kathy for their service to the town. Holland suggested that the committee could do a tree fundraiser that would list future tree plantings planned in Stonington that the public would be invited to donate too. Holland said she could work on a write up in the next Stonington Magazine publication for the Fall.

*Full Tree Warden Report attached to minutes.

e) Future Fundraisers

Stacy Cassata reported the rain barrel fundraiser was a success but there were delays in some resident’s rain barrels coming in. Stacy reported over $370 was raised. Stacy welcomed if any committee member would like to run it again this year.

Kristin Parsons mentioned she would like to do another apparel fundraiser but would like to work on a different design.

Carole Nossek discussed ideas on running a tree fundraiser.

f) Open Officer Position

Tabled

g) Old Business
   1) Discussion of By-Laws
      Tabled
2) Future Tree Planting

Discussion of Tree planting in the Fall

3) Korean Memorial

Holland reported the new garden is looking beautiful but just needs to be weeded.

d) clean ups

No organized clean ups planned. Committee members have been picking up trash as they water downtown and weed each week.

h) Comments from the Public

No comments

i) Meeting Adjourn 5:55PM

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Holland

Committee Member
Tree Warden Report to Stonington Beautification Committee

July 18, 2022

Thank you to the Beautification Committee for recognizing the importance of trees and plants in our town, neighborhoods and environment, and for the recent $2000 commitment to fund trees for Stonington in 2022.

In 2021, our budget for tree removal and trimming was $50,000, and we spent 100%. Most jobs require hiring an outside contractor/tree service. This does not include trees removed by EverSource—thousands of dollars of tree work covered by EverSource contractors. In contrast, the town typically budgets $1000-2000 for new trees (and we spend it all).

Most of the TW time and effort is in response to calls and complaints about trees: dead, dying, perceived or (rarely) actual nuisance. We work closely with the Town Highway Department, and with EverSource to authorize the pruning or removal of certain trees near power lines. In the past 2-3 years, dozens, if not hundreds, of dead trees have been removed in Stonington, mostly dead Oak and Ash trees, victims of drought, Gypsy Moth and Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) infestations. These include several of the town’s oldest and biggest trees. Beech trees are next, BLD (Beech Leaf Disease) is a fungus that is currently spreading throughout our region. RI has a law protecting old trees (including beeches) from removal by developers. A huge Copper Beech was recently removed on Liberty Street to make way for hotel expansion.

Looking ahead and in consideration of climate change, resilience/sustainability and an updated conservation plan, it is important for P&Z and other town commissions and departments to work together to protect trees and other natural and cultural assets.

Locations where many street trees have been removed:

Stonington- Flander’s and Pelligrino roads, Al Harvey (especially North of 184), Wolf Neck, North Anguilla, So Anguilla, Barnes Rd., North Main St. Pawcatuck- Donahue Park, Greenhaven, Lathrop and Mayflower aves., Moss St., W. Broad St, including several memorial trees (most have now been replaced). Mystic- Willow St., Jackson Ave
Most rural areas have nearby trees that will fill gaps left by tree removal. Where desirable (neighborhood requests, ecological role—cooling/shade, water retention), plan to plant/replant large native shade trees—American Sycamore, various oaks, Black Gum as well as smaller, hardy trees that will tolerate urban conditions (Sassafrass, Birch, Red bud).

Education- Discuss benefits of trees and other plants ways to be a greener, more resilient, beautiful town (reduce mowing to conserve fuel—create meadows, protect and enhance habitats that support pollinators).

The Town recently planted Sweet Gum, Hackberry and Sorrel trees in Pawcatuck (including several memorial trees). All of these are native trees that support pollinators. Want to plant another columnar Sweet Gum along W.Broad (next to Hoof’s, across the street from others, to replace a dead Bradford Pear that was removed). Generally want to avoid planting too many of one species, but adding a Sweet Gum will provide visual balance to existing planting and will not interfere with buildings or business signs. At other locations, TBD and case-by-case, the goal is to plant native trees that are suited to each specific site and also support pollinators and native insects (as most all native trees do). Not eager to remove existing healthy trees (including in downtown Pawcatuck), but recommend gradually phasing out/replacing Bradford pear, Zelkova and others.


School Street/Willow Street triangle- Recommend removing every other bollard, perhaps relocating them to triangle planting by the Shell Station (Rte 1 and North Water St.). Also, find a new home for the stone bench, maybe in Donahue Park or elsewhere in Mystic. TW supports proposed plan for low growing, drought tolerant plants, possibly also incorporating a sculptural element (stone planter). I recommend planting native plants for pollinators, not invasives.

Welcome ideas from the Beautification Committee to identify streets, specific locations, and neighborhoods that would be receptive to tree planting and habitat improvement.