

FAQ: Clarifying the Work of the Advisory Committee to Develop a Tree Ordinance and Tree Management Plan

June 10, 2014

1. When was the Tree Advisory Committee established and why?

In November of last year, the Mayor and Board of Trustees voted unanimously to form an Advisory Committee to Develop a Tree Ordinance and Tree Management Plan. In January of this year, the Village Board voted unanimously to appoint volunteers to that committee.

The Tree Advisory Committee is charged with composing and recommending to the Village two documents: (1) an organized, efficient and informed plan to manage the care of village-owned trees on our streets and in our public parks; and (2) a Tree Ordinance (tree law) that establishes a permanent Tree Commission that will implement the plan over the long term.

2. Is the Tree Advisory Committee a permanent fixture in village government?

No. The Tree Advisory Committee will be disbanded once the Tree Ordinance and Tree Management Plan have been prepared to the satisfaction of the Mayor and Board of Trustees.

If, following public hearing, the Mayor and Board of Trustees, enact the ordinance establishing a Tree Commission, the Tree Management Plan will be refined and implemented by volunteers appointed that new, permanent commission. The Tree Commission will work in cooperation with resident volunteers, Village staff and professionals implementing the Tree Management Plan.

3. What has the Tree Advisory Committee been doing?

The Committee has held 7 meetings to date and composed a preliminary draft of the Tree Management Plan. This plan was presented to the public and the Board of Trustees on April 15. We received very encouraging and positive feedback from the Trustees and all in attendance. We are now working to compose the language of the Tree Ordinance that will establish a Tree Commission. We welcome continued public feedback and suggestions, which can be emailed to the village clerk at vcscclerk@bestweb.net or shared in person during upcoming workshops and hearings which will be properly noticed once scheduled.

4. Will the Tree Ordinance erode private property rights?

No. The Tree Ordinance will not erode private property rights. The Tree Ordinance will address ONLY street trees and park trees – i.e., trees on public property.

5. Why is this work needed?

A plan is needed direly to ensure that the street and park trees we all enjoy are kept healthy and attractive. Take Main Street for example. On Main Street alone there are nearly a dozen trees in the latter stages of dying. Many of the largest and most beautiful trees on our best traveled road appear healthy but will begin to rapidly decline in the next 5-10 years because they are being strangled by roots cramped in planting boxes that are too small and/or poorly maintained; several are already showing signs of this decline. By mid-summer planting boxes are often overgrown with weeds and full of dog waste. In several cases the wrong species of tree was planted in the wrong place. When trees are too big for their location, sidewalks often heave and the utility company prunes the trees heavily, compromising the health of the tree and leaving the Village with an unattractive tree. All of these problems could have been avoided, cheaply and easily, if there had been a good overarching care plan in place. Lacking a plan, we instead have a major financial and aesthetic problem that no Village official or staff member currently has the time or horticultural or arboricultural knowledge to properly solve.

6. What difference will a Tree Commission make?

We need a Tree Commission. We need a group of knowledge people who themselves have professional expertise, or who have access to professional expertise, and who WANT to pay attention to public trees. We need folks who WANT to volunteer their time to write grants, look at the big picture and set in motion a long term, rational plan for fixing problems and improving and beautifying our streets and parks. The Village has very limited money and time to spend on public trees. A Tree Commission costs us *nothing*—it will be entirely run by volunteers—but it will bring to our Village grant money, invaluable cost-savings, efficiencies, and creative thinking to tackle tree improvements in accordance with an overarching vision that makes sense.

7. What is the relationship between the Tree Advisory Committee and the new plantings of trees on Main Street?

Although the Tree Advisory Committee was appointed to develop an ordinance and management plan, a handful of its members have joined fellow residents, elected officials and Village staff to help plant new trees on our Main Street this spring. This spring's planting was made possible by generous donations of funds from Village residents. The planning and planting for these trees was a successful collaboration among Village staff, Trustee Hawkins (the Mayor's appointment for work on Village-trees) and dedicated & knowledgeable resident volunteers, including members of the Tree Advisory Committee, all with the support and authorization of Mayor Falloon.