

**City of Kalamazoo  
TREE COMMITTEE  
Minutes  
December 5, 2023**

Water Reclamation/Wastewater Treatment Facility  
1415 N. Harrison, Kalamazoo, MI 49007  
Conference Room: WREC D

Members

Present:

Brian LaBelle, Forestry Supervisor, COK  
Anthony Ladd, Public Works Division Manager, COK  
Tom Palumbo, Senior Civil Engineer, COK (interim member)  
Gail Walter, Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC)  
Patrick McVerry, Director - Parks & Recreation, COK

Absent:

Erik Injerd, Forester, Consumers Energy  
George Waring, Senior Civil Engineer, COK

City Staff: Maria Smith, Recording Secretary

Guests:

Thomas Dewhirst -Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC)  
Adam Barnier, Senior Civil Engineer, COK  
Caleb Thompson – Consumers Energy  
Jeff Klyce - Public

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Ladd called the Tree Committee Meeting to order on December 5, 2023, at 2:04 p.m.

**B. ROLL CALL**

Chair Ladd completed roll call and determined the aforementioned members were present.

**C. INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS**

Chair Ladd introduced the following guest: Caleb Thompson

**D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA (December 5, 2023)**

Committee Member Labelle, supported by Committee Member Palumbo, moved approval of December 5, 2023 Tree Committee Agenda. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

**E. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (October 3, 2023)**

Committee Member Labelle, supported by Committee Member Walter, moved approval of the October 3, 2023, Tree Committee Minutes. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

**F. NEW BUSINESS**

**a. Inkster Bridge – Tree Removals – COK – George Waring**

Chair Ladd opened discussion for the 4 tree removals at Inkster bridge.

Chair Ladd explained the Inkster Bridge Project is starting March 2024 with the demo and rebuilding of Inkster Bridge. The water main near the bridge is going to be too close to the new structure and if a repair is needed it's against COK water standards. It was decided that the water main will need to be relocated and trees need to be removed to facilitate the rerouting of the water main.

Committee Member Labelle suggested removing the trees because its hard to keep them alive after construction.

Chair Ladd explained that other trees have been removed in the area along Bronson Blvd. due to utilities and ice storms. Whichever way the water main is routed there will be trees in the way.

Committee Member Walter mentioned that there's a spicket in the middle of the tree triangle left of the hickory tree that looks like a faucet.

Chair Ladd stated that there's no immediate plans for tree replacement. The COK would propose a 3:1 replacement for every tree that is removed due to this project. There's no identifiable planting space in this immediate area. There are parks and greenspace to the north where trees can be placed.

Committee Member Walter asked if there would be any space left to plant after the work is done.

Committee Member Labelle answered stating he wouldn't suggest planting a tree on top of water main and it's not ideal because of possible main breaks. If a tree is planted there it would have to be a smaller plant that would not impact the water main.

Chair Ladd explained that there's a 3:1 replacement for each tree removed so there could possibly be 12 replacements.

Committee Member Walter gave a suggestion as to a space to plant a shorter tree on the other side of Inkster where others had previously been taken down to place a power line a couple years ago.

Chair Ladd had a concern about the slope and making sure there's an appropriate species that wouldn't grow up into power lines.

Committee Member Palumbo asked if there's any way the east end (beginning) of the

water main could be moved south towards the bridge.

Chair Ladd replied that he's unsure but believes that's where it is for a reason. He also stated that the new abutments will be running north/south so the water main can't be moved further south.

Chair Ladd explained they may have to cut deep for a wider trench.

Committee Member Labelle mentioned that there is one multi stem oak tree. Having to cut roots on a slope of the hill is not a good strategy because the trees will fall across Bronson. Labelle suggested a 3:1 replacement on Inkster Ave. and they could find 12 spots on Inkster.

**Committee Member Labelle, supported by Committee Member Palumbo, made a motion to remove 4 trees and plant 12 trees. 3 of the trees would be red buds in the triangle and the rest of the trees would go on Inkster Ave. He suggested multi stem which covers more area up top and not much root growth. They won't grow tall enough to cause a safety issue. These would get planted after the water main gets built. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

b. **Prairie Avenue/Blakeslee Tree Work – COK – Brian Labelle/Anthony Ladd**

Chair Ladd opened discussion for the removal of numerous trees at Prairie Avenue and Blakeslee.

Chair Ladd introduced the subject as a Public Safety issue raised by Public Services, stakeholders, and Public safety to improve visibility by pushing the tree line back along the corridor. Prairie and Blakeslee on the west side of the road are water properties owned by the COK Public Services. Prairie has had a history of illegal activities which led to enforcement steps, security cameras, and signage.

Committee Member Labelle mentioned they want a clear view off Prairie to see farther into the woods to Berkley to improve safety. The project would involve removing dead trees and undesirable species so there's a view into the woods and past the ravine from the roadside.

Committee Member Labelle explained that they want to clear trees to be able to create a better manageable green space with sunlight to grow and save species like hackberry, red buds, red oak, and sugar maple trees. They intend to clear out undesirables such as poison ivy, spongy moth, broad leaf, bittersweet, black locust, and black walnut.

Committee Member Dewhirst raised a concern about the fact that the other side of the road is owned by Housing Bank. If we're trying to address a public safety issue, we must address both sides of the road. He stated illegal dumping is the major problem which has

been previously addressed with a front-end loader demolishing and moving everything in its way.

Committee Member Dewhirst asked what does it improve removing all those trees? How does it improve public safety?

Chair Ladd responded that this proposal would be part of the solution.

Committee Member Dewhirst interjected stating that wildlife cameras had been placed at the bottom of Prairie to address dumping but it's not very effective because the memory isn't being pulled or reviewed very often.

Committed Member Dewhirst stated the proposed clearing and tree removal reasoning is because there's existing cameras connected to the City system at the bottom of Prairie and planned camera installation at the top of the area. Removing the trees will help Public Safety if something happens to be able to access the cameras real time. With the new system they will be able to identify cars and those walking and see from both ends.

Committee Member Dewhirst interjected stating that the street curves and more cameras are needed to see the dumping area and everything that goes on in between those areas.

Chair Ladd interjected stating that with both cameras there would be a clear line of sight.

Committed Member Dewhirst responded stating that he walks this area often and they won't have a plain line of sight with 2 cameras and that's a public safety thing.

Committee Member interjected stating they would be able to identify cars real time on the recording.

Committed Member Dewhirst responded asking if the intent is real time monitoring.

Committee Member confirmed that is the intent and that Public Safety would be directly linked to the recording.

Committee Member Dewhirst added that The City's responsibility is being addressed but asked about diminishing dump ability.

Chair Ladd responded that the City is only directly involved with the right of way and City owned properties.

Committee Member Dewhirst expressed that the neighborhood residents won't be happy because it's being done without getting input from the residents who live there.

Chair Ladd reiterated that there have been conversations with stakeholders in the neighborhood and this is one of the steps towards improving safety in the area.

Committee Member Walter questioned the reason behind removing so many walnut trees.

Committee Member Labelle responded explaining that he had to think about the best trees to save.

Committee Member asked if there is a plan to plant after removal?

Chair Ladd replied planting would seem a little counterintuitive unless it's the right species in the right location where it won't interfere with the other objectives. He said he's willing to consider replacement and compensation in the conversation.

Committee Member Labelle mentioned that streetlights were put up and they tried to push back the road to open the space, but open space meant more dumping.

Committee Member asked if the minimum number of trees to be removed is 70.

Committee Member Labelle replied saying he could alter the number if there's clearance for cameras to see. He further explained that he wanted to get it started to help the other trees that are overcrowded and dead.

Chair Ladd stated they could remove the trees that need to be removed, get that total, and then talk about replacement and compensation. Keeping in mind their goal to salvage species type or diameter and maintaining the line of sight.

Committee Member Labelle replied that there's a chance they won't have to remove all the trees. They could do a thinning, but it depends on the camera having a clear line of sight.

Chair Ladd suggested making a motion to authorize work understanding this is the worst-case scenario. After the work is authorized have an after-action report to come up with an actual total.

Committee Member Labelle stated he'd go through with a contractor and review the area.

Chair Ladd interjected stating it would take good note taking while work is going on to capture the tree data.

Committee Member stated that it would have to be continued management to keep the invasives from blocking the site.

Committed Member Walter asked if the plan is to chemically treat bittersweet.

Committee Member Labelle responded saying no it would probably be a lot of mechanical.

Committee Member Walter made a motion that the project start with the first phase – removing dead plants, invasive species, and whatever is covered with bittersweet and assess the cameras and reassess the need to do more from that point on.

Chair Ladd replied that there would be a challenge navigating around live trees. Suggested trying to do as little as possible but there would be a logistical problem. Says it would be very difficult and labor intensive. He thinks it would require some tree removal. Chair Ladd stated he would not be comfortable with staying true to that motion.

**Committee Member Labelle supported by Committee Member Palumbo made a motion to carry out removals of Black Walnut and Black Locust 8in and below keeping catalpa, hackberry, hornbeam, red oak, and sugar maple. Once the job is done come back and talk about replanting or further maintenance. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.**

## **G. OLD BUSINESS**

### **a. 716 W. Kilgore Road – Determination of Tree Removal – Update:**

Chair Ladd explained a determination regarding the proposed removal of 2 trees at 716 W. Kilgore Road. Chair Ladd made a previous motion to have the traffic engineer do a sight distance analysis. The traffic engineer's response letter explained there was adequate sight distance at the location and with the green space, curb, sidewalk, and the location of the trees from the road, there was room to maneuver at the back of the property. The assessment established that the trees didn't pose the sight distance issue that was brought before the committee.

**Recommended: No Action. No response has been received from the resident since the letter has been sent out.**

## **H. ACTION ITEMS**

Chair Ladd reports on the following:

- a. Action Item from 9/1/20 - 448 Burdick St - Gospel Mission
  - Sent email to Clay Stull with AVB on 7/15/22, with no response. He is still working on this one.
- b. Action Item from 10/6/20 - Blakeslee Tank – COK

- The tree has not been removed and the trees have not been planted.  
**COMPLETED**
- c. Action Item from 10/28/20 - MDOT I-94 Project
  - Project still in progress.
- d. Action Item from 4/6/21 - Parkview Avenue Project - Tree Removals – COK
  - Replacement tree to be planted this fall.
- e. Action Item from 11/2/21 – Austrins Family Dentistry – 437 Stone St. –
  - tree has been removed. Brian to contact them and get tree planted.
- f. Action Item from 11/2/21 - KNHS Home Ownership – 1010 N. Rose Street –
  - houses have not been built yet but the trees have been removed. Brian to follow up.  
**COMPLETED.**
- g. Action Item from 2/23/22 – Stadium Drive Culvert – Tree Removals and Replantings – COK
  - Brian LaBelle reports: Completed (Brian asked that this Action Item be not removed from this list yet)
- h. Action Item from 3/11/22 – 105 Walbridge Street – Trim Trees - Adams Outdoor
  - The trees were removed. Locations for plantings have been submitted. Brian reports they have contacted Mulders and Adams Outdoor and given them 20 planting sites. They should be planted fall 2023 in downtown vicinity.
- i. Action Item from 7/5/22 – 3101 E Michigan, Water Station Reconstruction Project – Tree Removals and Replanting - COK, Anna Crandall
  - Trees to be planted this fall or in the spring of 2024.
- j. Action Item from 7/5/22 – Angling Road Project – Tree Removals and Replanting – COK, Tom Palumbo. **COMPLETED.**
- k. Action Item from 8/2/2022 – 114, 118, and 120 Burr Oak – Tree Removals and Replanting – KNHS – Matt Milcarek
  - Trees to be planted this fall.
- l. Action Item from 8/2/2022 – 1601 and 1616 E Main Commercial Corridor Project – Tree Plantings - OCBA Landscape Architects – Rachel Hughes-Nilsson.
  - Project not started.
- m. Action Item from 12/7/21 - Verberg Park and Kalamazoo River – Chad Robinson, Wood Environmental – Tree Removals and Replantings.
  - 90 trees planted. Park will be open to the public in November. **COMPLETED.**

- n. Action Item from 10/4/22 - Station 3 (Balch & Park) – 4 Tree Removals and Replanting of 8 Bald Cypress – COK – Brock VanDyken
- o. Action Item from 10/4/22 - Station 11 – 1 Removal and Replanting of 4 Red Pines on site. – COK - Brock VanDyken
- p. Action Item from 10/4/22 - 1720 N. Church St – 1 Removal and Replanting 6 trees – COK – James Baker. **COMPLETED**

**I. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**J. COMMITTEE COMMENTS**

Committee Member Labelle commented: The planting project is in full swing. Out of 500 trees, 200 are already in the ground in the areas north of Kalamazoo and farthest west; Douglas, Stuart and W. Main Hill neighborhoods as well as Forbes and Ada streets.

Chair Ladd commented: Tree grant award from USDA Forestry. There's a meeting this month. The request was for \$8 million. We were awarded and told we would be receiving \$1million. We're trying to decide what to include in the new \$1million scope and there's more information coming.

**K. ADJOURNMENT**

**Committee Member Walter made a motion to adjourn the Tree Committee meeting, supported by Committee Member ? . With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:18 P.M.**

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Recording Secretary

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Staff Liaison