



New Jersey Community Forestry Council
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
December 8, 2022; 10:00 AM

The December bi-monthly meeting of the New Jersey Community Forestry Council (“Council”) was called to order by Chairperson Brash at 10:00 a.m. and the Open Public Meetings Act notice was read. The notice was also available in the meeting packet. The roll call was taken by Ms. Dudas.

Members Present: Bill Brash, Kristin Ace, Lisa Simms, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Dr. Melanie McDermott, Pam Zipse, Wayne Dubin, Steve Chisholm, Carl Bowles and Mark Beamish; Vinh Lang and Neil Blitz.

Excused: Barry Emens and Matthew Simons

Absent: Lori Jenssen

NJ Forest Service Staff Present: State Forester John Sacco (left early), Technical & Operational Advisor Terri Slack, Assistant Regional Forester Brian McDonald, Forester Levon Bigelow, Grants Administrator Patricia Shapella, Forestry Technician Emily Farschon and Forestry Assistant Sherry Dudas. Quorum was met upon completion of roll call.

Approval of Meeting Minutes for 7/14/2022 Mtg

The July meeting minutes were reviewed. Mr. Chisholm moved to approve; Mr. Dubin seconded. Chairman Brash called for a vote on the minutes as sent with typographical/formatting errors corrected. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes.

State Forester’s Report

Mr. Sacco welcomed back Forester Levon Bigelow and Forestry Assistant Sherry Dudas; Forestry staff is also trying to get Emily Farschon hired as an Urban and Community Forestry (“UCF”) employee. Mr. Sacco deemed the October Shade Tree conference a success; sixty participants completed CORE training there. Prospective new Council members expressed interest in joining; they will need to be contacted to see if they still have an interest in serving. Current and 2023 grants are expected to be fully funded.

The November 7th meeting with the consultants went well and good feedback on the guidelines plan was given. Inventories will be covered in the next funding cycle, which was discussed with this group. Staff posited some of the concepts that Sustainable Forestry Initiative (“SFI”) advanced and good dialogue ensued, including on what minimum requirements for inventories would be. Mr. Bigelow has been sequestered in order to write the guidelines. Mr. Sacco committed to having a draft by the end of January for review and commenting.

Regarding the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (“RGGI”) funding, there are different tranches of funding. One Mr. Sacco has been involved with is for about \$15 million. Staff is reviewing proposals now for that, and there's a large community forestry-type tree planting component for which 16 entities applied. Mr. Sacco reports that the \$15 million grant is going to be allocated the beginning of next year. At the federal level, staff worked through the infrastructure law funding that will become available. The monies secured will be put toward forest health, thinning and carbon sequestration. There's an inflation reduction act and rumors about a huge amount of money that is going to be available for UCF. Federal partners are working hard on UCF's behalf, and he felt that UCF's best strategic move is to build capacity to help communities be able to administer these new funding programs. In the No Net Loss program, UCF has approximately \$1,000,000; that's represented by three or four projects at different stages. Staff hopes to give Council a more complete status update at the January meeting.

Mr. Sacco is retiring in late December and Todd Wyckoff, Chief, is filling in for him until re-organization announcements occur. Assistant Regional Forester Brian McDonald is assisting during this time of transition, as is Mike Hart (the supervisor of Private Lands). Mr. Sacco expressed his pleasure in working with Council and its members expressed their desire for him to enjoy his retirement and thanked him for his 34 years of service. He further advised that Carrie Sargeant has been reassigned; therefore, Mr. McDonald is the point of contact for Council. Soon after the new year, reorganization decisions will be made and conveyed. Mr. McDonald is now the liaison for the federal grant as well.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman reported that Dr. Grabosky was honored by the Society of Municipal Arborists with an honorary membership. Donna Drewes, longtime Council member, has resigned after serving for almost 30 years on the Council. New potential volunteers submitted applications in the fall; the Council has several vacancies to fill. The Chairman welcomed back returning staff and also reiterated the hope that Ms. Farschon can also be hired to serve in an employee capacity as well.

New Business:

Mr. Bigelow reported that the number of total approved CFMPs increased by one, since in November, the Forestry Management Plan subcommittee reviewed and approved the new plan of Monmouth Beach Borough. UCF now has 253 total approved CFMPs. The program has five open Green Communities grants and two not quite executed. Regarding Stewardship grants, there are 46 open, a total of almost \$1.4 million. Most of those are 2021 stewardship grants. Staff has 23 applications in for 2022 stewardship grants.

Fiscal reporting for the License Plate program was discussed. Community forestry management plans expiring at the end of 2023 have been extended for one more year since the new guidelines are not ready yet. The municipalities that have been extended twice are now extended one more year.

Ms. Farschon updated the Council on accreditation estimates: there are 253 active plans and 163 people were CORE-trained in 2022. Accreditation statuses and make sure they have CEUs set for the year and then the AAR, the annual accomplishment report is due February 15th, 2023.

2023 Meeting Schedule

The meeting schedule as proposed was accepted with the following changes: the March meeting will be March 9, 2023 and both the March and December meetings will be hybrid meetings, with the in-person attendees meeting at the Forest Resource Education Center in Jackson. The other meetings will be virtual only. The March meeting will recognize the retiring Council members. Ms. Zipse moved to approve the 2023 meeting schedule with amendments and Ms. Ace seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Term expirations

The Council member list was provided for in Council's packets and Ms. Dudas called attention to the seats that appear to have been expired and may not have been extended. The Chairman thought that Mr. Sacco had extended expired terms when the bylaws were amended to reflect January-to-December terms. Council advised that a review of past minutes be done.

Ms. Zipse initiated a discussion of terms and the bylaws and Ms. Slack reported that the bylaws state that Council members shouldn't serve more than two consecutive terms, but they do not say members shall not serve; therefore, it was generally agreed members can serve more than two consecutive terms. Ms. Zipse advised that there are three standing seats: Rutgers, Urban Forestry; NJ Tree Foundation and the Shade Tree Federation ("STF") and further advised reaching out to Richard Wolowicz, who is now the executive director of the STF, regarding replacing Ms. Drewes. Chairman Brash agreed to do so. Chairman Brash affirmed that all members who have an obligation to do something in January understands what that obligation is, whether it is to serve another term, or if they choose not to serve another term, they need to send a letter to the state forester and copy Mr. Wyckoff.

Fiscal Report

Ms. Shapella presented the fiscal report for the time period of July to December 2nd, which was in Council's packets. License Plate plus No Net Loss revenues total \$239,197. The reappropriation money represents state funds that will be carried over for next year; those are pre-encumbered funds that are locked up for UCF to use for grants. The budget authorized amount is \$4,625,072 less pre-encumbered, encumbered, and expended fund of \$3,386,744 reflects total uncommitted funds of \$1,238,328. These funds are simply unencumbered and do not have any strings attached at this point. Funding for current programs is secure for this and next year; however, once the new guidelines are in place there may not be enough money to fund projects.

Program Report

Legislative Issues

Ms. Slack reported that there is a lot that's been introduced, but not a lot being promulgated. Mr. Dubin reported that the Vegetation Management Act wasn't moving other than the assembly chair, Wayne D'Angelo, would like to move this bill if the opportunity presented itself.

Management Plan Review Subcommittee

Ms. Zipse reported that one plan, from Monmouth Beach, was reviewed and approved. She also sought thoughts on what the response should be when a municipality seeks a grant to do a management plan, or looking for a consultant to do a plan right now. Staff does not have a date for when the guidelines will be completed, but is hoping as early as possible in 2023. Since staff doesn't have a deadline yet, Mr. McDonald recommends communities have a plan prepared under the old guidelines, which is preferable to not having a plan at all. He acknowledged that it's not a great situation to be writing, reviewing, etc. plans under the old guidelines when staff is in the process of writing new ones. Staff realizes there is going to be a learning curve when the new guidelines go into effect and some potential training that will need to occur. Communities that have never had a plan can receive a green communities grant for that plan. Communities can also write a new plan, but we don't have the funding for that plan at the moment. And for the new plans, that grant is still \$3000. Chair Brash acknowledged that there will be bottlenecks of plans that come due and staff and Council will not have the capacity to be reviewing additional plans. The Program can't handle the prospect that if every community decided as soon as the new guidelines come out that they wanted a new plan, there are not enough consultants to write those plans. The recommendation is to wait until a community's plan expires and then write a new plan.

Community Forestry Management Plan Guidelines

Chair Brash reported on the November meeting with consultants to solicit comments. Several Council members and UCF staff were present and the SFI Guidance document was analyzed. Mr. Bigelow was charged with the task of harmonizing the current UCF working draft of the guidelines with chosen portions of the SFI Guidance, then he will rely heavily on the guidelines committee to complete the task.

Some really challenging issues were raised, particularly with respect to rural communities that have extensive wooded areas where it really does not make sense to have the same kind of inventory requirements that you would for street trees. Discussion ensued regarding municipalities' priorities determining what their inventory requirements will be.

Discussion on how tree crews in municipalities can be properly trained for tree care

Kristin Ace led the discussion on how municipal employees working on municipal trees can be trained for proper tree care. She has seen firsthand the benefits of proper training for tree care and queried whether the state can create guidelines to which the towns must adhere. Mr. Blitz raised a concern that a state requirement would create another unfunded mandate. Ms. Zipse added that the system already in place, CORE training, requires volunteers and municipal employees be trained so that that seed of knowledge is there; CORE training raises awareness and then, armed with that awareness, tree advocates can convince their respective communities on the value of tree care training. Chair Brash also acknowledged the value of the input of a Shade Tree Commissions and Committees and further affirmed that the education of Department of Public Works staff is important, but it has to be a locally driven effort. The new guidelines will also help get the word into the tree care community regarding the importance of training and technical assistance from whomever is their technical provider. Mr. McDonald added that every community is just a little bit different than others and a lot of times it just really comes down to the people that are in those places. In some cases, a Commission is what's necessary and in other cases that might not be so. He suggested that the best action for the Council or the UCF program is education and outreach to emphasize the importance of keeping up-to-date on the latest training and education; that is partially why the program helps to sponsor the Shade Tree Federation conference every year.

Carl Bowles added that, as a former supervisor of public works departments, it is often very difficult to provide consistent training and education, as the roster of PW employees changes over time. Ms. McDermott added that she is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of requests she is getting for her input on federal initiatives and if the forestry community needs core support for operational staff at both the federal and state levels. She would love to provide that input, but is not aware currently of how to do that. Dr. Grabosky added that there are The Committee for the Advancement of Arboriculture and the New Jersey Board of Tree Experts, which are deployable resources in NJ. It may be useful to talk about creating specific DPW-type programming and then figure out the funding structure to provide scholarships to DPW for training.

For the January meeting, furthering the conversation about DPW education and training and Mr. Bigelow's guidelines updates will be items on the agenda.

Unfinished Business

Ms. Dudas committed to working on correspondence matters listed as unfinished business on the agenda.

Mr. Blitz congratulated Ms. Zipse on the success of the Shade Tree Conference. Ms. Zipse agreed the conference was a success and further reported that the Shade Tree Federation offered its third Tree Talk, which is part of a series of 45-minute virtual, unstructured talks on tree subjects; next year the Federation plans to offer the talks four times.

Dr. Grabosky announced that Rutgers is in the process of advertising for a non-tenure track, full-time teaching faculty member for forestry topics. That person will be teaching 4-6 classes, freeing Dr. Grabosky up for other tasks. Ms. Zipse is going to be joining the staff of the New Jersey Tree Foundation, and Rutgers has approved the search for her replacement. Dr. Grabosky stated that Mr. Sacco confirmed that the DEP was funding a 3-year, non-tenure track extension forestry person to rewrite the DEP's best management practices for forestry; the sooner this position is filled, the sooner the state will have updated BMPs.

Public Comment: None.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 12:14pm.