

Tree Advisory Commission (TAC) Borough of Phoenixville Productivity Report for 2009

Commissioners:

Paul Kusko, Chairman; Joan McCracken, Secretary; Tracy Lee Tacket

The year started out promising. Since TAC's re-seating 5 years ago, 2009 was our best year relative to funding, and tree management, as well as very good communication and working relationship with borough staff. We were looking forward to making a big dent in the backlog of tree trimming. On the downside Mother Nature put a dent in our budget. The cool, wet spring and summer helped foster a latent oak infection requiring us to remove many more trees than usual. We learned in December that the position of Streets Department, Superintendent, our staff liaison, was eliminated.

Tree Service Requests:

The TAC received 179 requests for tree service in 2009.

In addition, 205 unfulfilled service requests were carried over from 2005 > 2008.

Total service requests for 2009 = 384.

All trees were inspected by 2 or more TAC members with recommendations made to the Public Works Department via the Superintendent of the Streets Department.

Each property owner submitting a tree service request received a written response stating the TAC's recommendation to the Borough Public Works Dept. Commissioner Joan McCracken sends out these response forms.

Borough Staff are responsible for acting upon the TAC's recommendations. TAC's liaison was the Streets Department Superintendent who was responsible for purchase orders and overseeing the scheduling and work performed by the Borough's tree contractor.

Street Tree Service data reported to TAC:

67 contractor work days

127 street trees were trimmed

34 street trees were removed.

37 stumps removed

11 other related services

A total of 276 tree related services were performed.

Park/Playground Tree Service data reported to TAC:

6 work days

12 park trees were trimmed

4 park trees were removed

1 Stumps removed

A total of 23 tree related services were performed.

223 service requests are being carried forward to 2010.

Methodology

Our methodology in managing tree service is via windshield surveys and response to individual resident requests within the scope of the budgeted dollars. Trees recommended for service are placed into a tree service data base. This data base is updated monthly as trees are recommended and serviced. The database allows the Tree Commission and Streets Department to keep track and note progress of our tree service

mission to the residents. The database also enables us to sort data upon date, location, hazard and other features. We attempt to assess requests relative to any safety hazard they might pose. Hence, some trees may be serviced ahead of a tree listed at an earlier date but is not a safety hazard.

This is not the most efficient approach. The Commission's goal is to move to a proactive tree servicing schedule based upon a multi-year service cycle. This would enable us to do more efficient grid work block by block as well as respond to individual urgent requests.

Tree Service Budget:

We provided information the Borough Administrative staff preparing the 2009 budget. The budget requests presented were based upon data derived from real costs experienced in 2005 – 2008 and the pending service list database.

Total budget for 2009 = \$78,750. We closed the year at 93% of our budget.

- \$5,305.00 planting supplies
- \$150.00 Small Equipment Expense
- \$415.00 Community Education
- \$600 Repair & Maintenance Supplies
- \$72,280.00 Contract Services (Tree Service.)

Planting Trees:

80 Street and Park trees were planted in 2009.

TAC planted 60; Phoenixville Hospital planted 17, and a resident planted 3.

Since its reseating in 2004, the TAC has planted 500 trees. Most of these trees were acquired through the TreeVitalize program.

Our tree planting budget is modest and if we were to buy our trees at wholesale prices (approx \$250.00 per tree) we would have the ability to plant 20 - 25 trees. (We removed 38 trees year.) However, as a result of Phoenixville TAC Commissioners and TAC Volunteers participation in the TreeVitalize Tree Tender programs, the Borough was eligible to buy 51 subsidized bare root trees for \$25.00 each (\$1,275.00). Each tree was subsidized \$25.00 for a total value of \$2,550.

With Mother Nature's generous help, watering the newly planted trees was not a problem in 2009.

PHX Green Streets: We continue our tree planting initiative called "PHX Green Streets." This is in conjunction with the bare root trees. We are inviting borough residents who want street trees at their residences to contact us. If the site is appropriate for a tree we will do our best to accommodate them and we are asking the resident to join us in planting and caring for the tree. We also had a successful community planting day involving students from VFCC. VFCC students planted 50 "Green Streets" and park trees.

Violations:

Incidents occur where a street tree is pruned badly or cut down by a property owner with out permission from the Borough. This is a violation of Borough Code. The TAC has no enforcement authority, so such matters are referred to the Codes Enforcement Department for resolution.

Trees are also impacted with sidewalk replacements and building remodeling. Roots are cut and the tree goes into decline. In time, the borough not only loses a viable tree in the process, but ends up paying to remove it for the property owner.

TAC recommended that a clear policy be implemented with the Codes Dept. relative to issuing building permits where regulated street trees can be impacted. Contractors/property owners applying for permits

should be notified not to cut tree roots and of Code #25-204 (Excavations in Planting Strip; Protection of Trees.) The Borough Tree Inventory Map shows the address locations of all our trees and can be used as a reference in this process.

Vandalism is also a problem. Five newly planted trees were damaged or destroyed on Main Street, Fifth and First Avenues. Half of the trees at Cary Street playground planted in 2005 are gone.

Tree Survey and Inventory:

In 2008 the Borough Tree Inventory was updated producing a new draft of the Borough of Phoenixville Atlas of Street Trees. Our current Urban Forest consists of 2,410 trees. This Atlas will need to be updated in 2010 with additional plantings and removals.

This is a very useful tool in managing our urban forest. We can tie the mapped trees to service calls and plan pruning and planting projects. However we need to train Borough staff in the awareness and use of this data. To make this more usable, the Atlas is available in software format as well as the hardcover version.

Public Relations & Information:

The STC places news articles in the Borough newsletter. We also sought news coverage in the Phoenix Newspaper relative to the VFCC students planting street trees

Arbor Day Proclamation: Mayor Scoda presided over an Arbor Day tree planting and proclamation in Reeves Park with the student volunteers from Valley Forge Christian College.

Nomination for "Tree City:" The Borough was nominated for the Arbor Day Foundation's coveted "Tree City" designation.

Speaking engagements: Paul Kusko spoke about Borough tree projects at TreeVitalize, Tree Tender training programs.

The Borough Web site has a page for Shade Tree related information and events. We hope to prepare more info for posting

When ever possible STC members make contact with property owners relative to regulated tree issues. We leave door knob hangers to let residents know that someone responded to their service request with a site inspection. We respond to concerns by phone and email.

Volunteer Corps: Activity, Training and Education:

The TAC tries to actively engaged community volunteers.

All 3 TAC members have all attended the 9 hour Tree Tender Training courses and continue to promote the program. Approximately twenty (20) volunteers in the 19460 zip code have attended the Tree Tender Training courses.

Leaf Raking Day: For the past 5 fall seasons, Joan McCracken has organized a leaf raking service day to help out seniors and handicapped residents. Seventeen (17) resident's yards were cleared of leaves by 5 volunteer groups this year. Boy Scout Troops 427 and 158, First Presbyterian Church Youth Group, Phoenixville High School Key Club, and the Ulinski Family. The event was covered with a photo in the Phoenix newspaper.

Grants:

In 2009 the TAC submitted an application for a Pennsylvania Community Forests, Tree Improvement Grant for \$3,500.00. Unfortunately we did not get it.

We are taking full advantage of the TreeVitalize grant program managed by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and DCNR

- We have called upon the services of a DCNR Urban Forester to evaluate our planting sites and tree placement.
- We are taking advantage of the bare root, subsidized, tree purchasing program for 2009 with the purchase of 51 trees for \$1,275.00 (a \$ 2,550. value)
- We submitted to be considered for a PennVest Stimulus Tree Improvement grant for 2010.

Table of Organization:

Our relationship in the Borough Table of Organization for 2009 was clear to us. Mr. Cowan, Streets Dept. Superintendent, served as our staff liaison, attended our monthly meetings and acted upon our recommendations. In December we were informed that his position was eliminated.

General Impressions:

Top Concerns by residents: Exposure to tree related liability, lack of a timely response with tree service, and sidewalk issues.

Other top complaints by residents are: When is my tree going to be trimmed and tree is damaging my sidewalk.

TAC Recommendations to Council/Borough Staff:

Allocate adequate funds to put us in a position to institute a pro-management trimming, removal, planting, and maintenance program.

Train borough workers in basic low limb tree pruning skills to handle light trimming requests.

Train and certify a borough worker in herbicide application to rid poison ivy from our trees and parks as well as weeds from our parking lots.

Power Point presentation:

Significant Elms of Phoenixville:

Trees of Reeves Park:

Submitted by:

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