

**MINUTES OF THE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING
VILLAGE OF NORTHFIELD
TUESDAY, February 16, 2021**

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order remotely via Zoom, due to the COVID-19 crisis, by Village President Joan Frazier on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. Village Clerk Stacy Sigman called the roll as follows:

Committee Members Present:

Trustee Tom Terrill
Trustee John Goodwin
Trustee Greg Lungmus
Trustee Charles Orth
Trustee Todd Fowler
Trustee Tom Whittaker

Absent:

President Joan Frazier

Others Present:

Village Manager Stacy Sigman, Director of Administrative Services Melissa Jewett, Community Development Director Steve Gutierrez, Finance Director Kyle Cratty, Village Attorney Everette Hill, Planner Linnea O'Neill and Go Green Northfield residents Betsy Kochvar and Mike Sawyer.

Approval of the January 19, 2021 Report of Proceedings.

Trustee Goodwin made a motion, seconded by Trustee Orth, to approve the January 19, 2021 Report of Proceedings. Approval was unanimous.

Discussion on the VILLAGE OF NORTHFIELD TREE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE

President Frazier indicated the next item was a discussion on the Tree Preservation Code.

Based on feedback from residents, President Frazier requested to assess our existing Tree Preservation code and compare it to how other surrounding communities regulate trees. The tree preservation ordinances of Kenilworth, Glencoe, Glenview, Highland Park, Lake Forest, Northbrook, Winnetka, and Wilmette were reviewed.

In 2002, Northfield residents expressed an interest to preserve trees in the Village. In March 2003, the Village Board adopted the proposed amendments to Chapter 10 (Ord. #03-1182) with a sunset provision requiring a subsequent review of the tree preservation and protection program. In November 2004, the Village Board approved the new requirements permanently.

Community Development Director Gutierrez gave an overview of the Chapter 10 Tree Provisions:

- Requires a caliper inch for caliper inch replacement, or a fee-in-lieu of replacement, for the permitted removal of any ‘protected’ tree
- ‘Protected Trees’ are those that are >6” on naturalized land and >3” in previously landscaped areas and are located in the following areas:
 - (1) Public right-of-way.
 - (2) All trees on a lot proposed for subdivision
 - (3) All trees on a multi-family residential property.
 - (4) In required front or side yard setback on any single-family residential property.
 - (5) All trees on any nonresidential property.
 - (6) All tree(s) on a single-family residential property where the use is nonresidential.
- In the event there is not sufficient space within the site to accommodate the required replacement trees a fee-in-lieu of replacement, of \$175 for every inch not replaced, must be paid.
- Dead, unhealthy, or non-quality trees (such as Buckthorn) trees are exempt.
- During construction trees within the protected areas noted above must be protected from the construction activity.

Community Development Director Gutierrez stated that the primary issues to consider were whether the Village wished to expand their tree protection zone, for single-family lots, beyond the front and side yard setback (most other surrounding communities apply protection to the entire lot); should the size of the tree to be protected be increased (our 3” standard is more onerous than the other communities); what amount the fee-in-lieu of a replacement should be (surrounding communities have a wide range of fees-in-lieu of replacement); and what the replacement ratio itself should be; however our inch for inch requirement is the standard in most communities.

Resident Mike Sawyer stated he was an unabashed tree-hugger and felt that the current tree ordinance worked well but needed to be fine-tuned because it was out of step with other comparable communities. He said that Northfield’s tree protection should be expanded to the entire lot on single-family properties and the in-lieu fee should be increased. He stated that an emphasis should be placed on heritage trees since the loss could take 15-30 years to replace. He believed Northfield should consider the tree replacement requirement to be an inch for inch X 2 like Kenilworth. He also recommended that tree branch or root pruning be mandated to be performed by a certified arborist. He believed the 50/50 program was great but questioned the available funding. He stressed that planting on the parkway was essential. He was an advocate of educating people on the fun facts about trees, as well as setting up a tree fund where members could contribute to the planting of trees. He thought many of these items could be implemented with minimum costs.

Trustee Terrill stressed that there be a committee that could review cases so residents can appeal as there are often exceptions to the rules surrounding trees. There should be a tree committee to study this issue.

President Frazier asked Planner Linnea O’Neill why the Code only protected trees on the required front or side yard setback instead of the entire lot. Linnea stated that at that time it was a compromise between both protecting trees and private property owners’ rights. Village Manager

Sigman stated in 2002, there was no tree preservation ordinance. At that time, the goal was to protect the character of the neighborhood, which is most impacted by the front and side yards, while also striking a balance with resident's property rights. Attorney Hill stressed that back when the Code originated, several trustees were property rights advocates who believed it was too excessive to tell people where they could place their houses and other improvements on their lots.

President Frazier suggested that Northfield consider mandating the protection of trees for the entire lot but limiting it to special specimens or heritage trees. She believed that Northfield is platted out and any new construction would not be on vacant land. She stated that trees were important for clean air, property values, and muffling noise. She liked the idea of a tree committee and thought it was important to identify heritage trees that merit protection.

Trustee Whittaker stated that he had never heard from anyone in the community that Northfield's tree preservation ordinance was not strong enough. He inquired about how many complaints the Village had received.

Village Manager Sigman, Director Gutierrez, and Planner O'Neill stated that they had not received any complaints but at times they do get questions on the specifics of the tree preservation ordinance.

Trustee Fowler stated that tree preservation was last addressed in 2003 and noted the Board had gone through a comprehensive plan of how they want the downtown to look and trees played an integral role. He agreed to expand tree protection to the entirety for single-family lots but thought people should get credit for getting rid of undesirable trees. He thought the Village should have unified parameters to better the community.

Trustee Goodwin believed that it was important to identify specific heritage trees to preserve and offered to help out with a potential tree committee. He thought encompassing the whole lot was reasonable.

Resident Betsy Kochvar noted that Northfield was built on a swamp and there would be flooding issues and a big impact if residents started to cut down trees.

Trustee Terrill noted they we need a tree committee with a twenty-year plan and Northfield had ample areas to plant trees for the future.

Trustee Lungmus remarked that the current ordinance does a fine job of protecting trees and allowed property owners to build on their lots. He felt that the setbacks worked well to preserve the character of the community. He liked the sentiment of preserving heritage trees and planting more trees. He believed the 50/50 program should never have a cap. He stated he was against making any wholesale changes to the ordinance.

Trustee Orth was not in favor of expanding tree protection to entire single-family lots and felt that people should be able to do what they want in their backyards. He offered to help with a

potential tree committee consisting of residents and Village Board members to have further discussion on tree preservation.

President Frazier believed that forming a tree committee would be valuable to review all the various options, so no decisions were made on the Tree Preservation Code at this time.

Update and discussion on Go Green Northfield's request to consider a seasonal ban on gas- powered leaf blowers

President Frazier indicated the next item was a discussion on Go Green Northfield's request to consider a seasonal ban on gas-powered leaf blowers. The Village currently does not place restrictions on gas-powered leaf blowers.

Trustee Whittaker, Board liaison to Go Green Northfield, noted that Go Green's mission statement was to encourage awareness of environmental concerns and to take actions in our daily lives to keep Northfield green.

Melissa Jewett, staff liaison to Go Green Northfield, stated Go Green Northfield had requested that the Village Board consider restricting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers (GLB's) to only spring and fall cleanups (banned from around mid-May till the end of September.) They requested this restriction because of the negative environmental impact of gas-powered leaf blowers, including carbon emissions, particulate matter produced, and noise pollution. Commercial landscapers highly favored gas-powered leaf blowers because they were more portable and powerful than their electric counterparts. From a sound standpoint, electric blowers were typically in the 65-70 decibel range while gas-powered leaf blowers ranged from 95-115 decibels. By way of comparison, commercial lawn mowers were about 90-100 decibels.

Melissa Jewett noted that Following Go Green Northfield's request, staff surveyed to see what restrictions were in place for our neighboring communities. Glencoe, Wilmette, and Winnetka had restrictions but Glenview and Northbrook had none. The municipalities surveyed indicated that they found it incredibly difficult to enforce their regulations. They also noted that to ensure compliance, it was important to cite the landscaping contractor or homeowner, rather than the employee. She remarked that from a residential standpoint, Northfield was fairly unique due to the much larger than typical lot sizes and that 75% of our homeowners used commercial landscaping services. As such, switching from gas-powered leaf blowers to electric would likely be less impactful to residents on small lots versus those on larger lots. Gas-powered leaf blowers were more powerful so they reduced the amount of time it took to landscape a property. Restricting gas-powered leaf blowers may therefore increase the cost of landscaping services or may make it more challenging to find a landscaping service willing to accommodate the restriction. Staff was seeking direction from the Board on whether gas-powered leaf blowing restrictions were appropriate for Northfield. If the Board desired, an ordinance will be prepared for consideration at a future Village Board meeting.

Betsy Kochvar stated she was the head of the Go Green Northfield – Land, Air and Water Subcommittee. She proposed a restriction on the use of gas-powered leaf blowers in the

ordinance from mid-May until the end of September. She noted that the Northfield Village Board was the first North Shore village to adopt the Mayors Caucus Greenest Region Compact 2 in 2016. Within this compact, the goals were to reduce greenhouse emissions, maintain clean and healthful air. She emphasized that GLBs negatively impact the environment in many ways. Particulate matter kicked up by GLBs can be especially problematic for those with respiratory problems like asthma. Beyond the chemicals released, they produced dust that included pesticides and herbicides from lawn treatments, animal feces, fertilizers, “spores, fungi, pollens, and brake-lining dust. Noise levels from GLBs can exceed 100 decibels, equivalent to the noise of a jackhammer. She noted that observational and experimental studies showed that noise exposure leads to annoyance, disturbed sleep, and caused daytime sleepiness, affected patient outcomes and staff performance in hospitals, increased the occurrence of hypertension and cardiovascular disease, and impaired cognitive performance in schoolchildren. She commented that leaf blowers are not necessary, blow topsoil, and disrupt native pollinators. She recommended just using an electric leaf blower during this timeframe to blow off patios and driveways. She remarked that nearby towns of Evanston, Glencoe, Highland Park, Kenilworth, Wilmette, and Winnetka had instituted seasonal restrictions by way of village ordinances on GLBs. She emphasized ticketing the company, not the worker, who would only be doing their job and suffering most of the ill-effects of operating the GLBs.

Go Green member Trudy Gibbs stated that in Wilmette, police were reluctant to give tickets to the workers and stressed the importance of ticketing the landscape companies. She also stressed the importance of education so this is not viewed as punitive but rather a health benefit, especially for the landscape workers.

Trustee Terrill recommended a permit be issued to landscaping companies outlining the rules, start with a warning, and then increasingly stiff fines be enforced when they are disregarded.

Go Green member Robin reinforced that many neighboring communities have implemented these restrictions and would love for Northfield to do the same. She noted that insects are hidden in the leaf litter and it was important for our biodiversity to ban GLBs during the summer season.

President Frazier stated it was a compelling argument and people need to take the environmental issues seriously, as well as the potential health issues to the landscape workers.

Trustee Lungmus questioned why only GLBs were in question since there are many other gas powered maintenance devices including lawnmowers, line trimmers, etc. He also noted that there was little compliance with the GLBs restrictions in neighboring communities. He stated that with the numerous, large lot sizes in Northfield, it could cause serious grievances among residents if these restrictions were implemented.

Go Green Betsy Kochvar replied that it was a beginning and GLBs, in particular, were unnecessary for most of the year.

Trustee Orth commented that Glenview and Northbrook do not have any GLBs restrictions. He stated that workers can and should wear proper hearing protection to counteract the loud sound of yard maintenance tools, such as leaf blowers, snowblowers, and lawnmowers. He mentioned

that the GLBs blow off and prevent a lot of chemicals from being tracked into homes which can be harmful. He noted that it would be difficult for landscape workers to use electric leaf blowers because of the logistics of keeping them charged.

Trustee Terrill recommended getting information from a landscape company as to their perspective on the prospect of restricting GLBs.

Due to time limitation, the Board continued the discussion to the March 16, 2021 COW meeting on whether gas-powered leaf blowing restrictions were appropriate for Northfield.

Other Business

Trustee Orth made a motion, seconded by Trustee Terrill to adjourn the meeting.

AYES: Orth NAYS: 0 ABSTAIN: 0 ABSENT: 0
 Fowler
 Lungmus
 Goodwin
 Whittaker
 Terrill

The meeting adjourned at 6:59 p.m.