

# MINNEAPOLIS TREE ADVISORY COMMISSION

Meeting of March 16, 2023

Held remotely via Zoom

Decision/Consensus/Assignment items are set out in bold.

**COMMISSION MEMBERS ARE RESPECTFULLY REQUESTED TO REVIEW THESE MINUTES CAREFULLY FOR ASSIGNMENT AND ACTION ITEMS PERTAINING TO THEM**

The meeting of the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission (MTAC) of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) convened at 5:30 p.m. on March 16, 2023, with the following Commission Members in attendance: Co-Chair Peter MacDonagh (U of M liaison), Chris Linde (District 1), Giuseppe Marrari (District 2), Mary Bolla (Districts 4 and 6), Barb Schlaefer (At-Large), Steve Nicholson (MN Shade Tree Advisory Committee), Don Willeke (Mayor's Representative), Linea Palmisano (City Council, Ward 13), Ralph Sievert (MPRB Forestry Director), Curt Hartog (Executive Director for MPS Facilities, School Board Representative), Billy Menz (MPRB Commissioner District 1), Steve Collin (Public Works).

Not in attendance: Carol Sersland (Districts 3 and 5).

Guests in attendance: Tim Keane, Philip Potyondy (MPRB Sustainable Forestry Coordinator).

## CALL TO ORDER AND MINUTES

Co-Chair MacDonagh called the meeting to order. **The MTAC meeting minutes for February 16, 2023, were approved as delivered.**

## INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions of existing MTAC members who have been on the Commission since 2022 were completed.

Peter MacDonagh – has been a member of the MTAC since 2013, goals: diversity of trees planted is happening,

Don Willeke – since 1974, member since 2004

Giuseppe Marrari – been on the Commission since 2019, representing the interests of the north side communities.

Steve Collin – Public Works, Street Maintenance Engineer, longer than 10 years on the MTAC

Steve Nicholson – Private consultant,

Curt Hartog – Engineer and Executive Director for Facilities with the Minneapolis Public Schools

Barb Schlaefer – focusing on tree equity, and the communications between all divisions of the Park Board, learn more about tree species and whether we should be planting more native tree species.

Chris Linde – Worked on an EAB treatment plan in St. Anthony neighborhood resulting in about 115 trees surviving, was on the Bicycle Advisory Committee for 8 years,

Philip Potyandy – urban forestry analytics and outreach

Ralph Sievert – all tree planting, maintenance, and removal ('whip' to 'chip'), \$10 M budget, 41 arborists, 13 crew leaders, 5 district forester, Forestry Operations Manager

Mary Bolla – new member with a focus on invasives species removal, more native trees

### Minnesota Shade Tree Short Course

Attendees share their highlights:

MacDonagh – highlight was Gary Johnson's<sup>1</sup> presentation about changes in forestry over the decades.

Nicholson – session on professionalism in the arboriculture industry, the range of presenters at this year's program was impressive.

Linde – Gary Johnson's session with links to other resources with which to learn more and the tree identification course.

Bolla – "I'm not dead yet" about the professionals who climb and prune trees to save them.

Sievert – fruit trees and the fact that apple trees require a lot of maintenance (also mentioned peach trees!)

Potyandy – on the Planning Committee (we could provide suggestions to him), latest updates in utilizing machine learning to complete tree inventory.

[Sersland – not at this MTAC meeting but got great ideas for working with youth at the "Engaging Youth in Environmental Education" session].

All attendees thank the MPRB for sponsoring our attendance.

### MPRB FORESTRY DEPARTMENT UPDATE

At yesterday's MPRB meeting

The resolution for purchasing trees was approved by the Board. There was associated discussion about the types of trees that were ordered and planted; specifically, about native vs non-native tree species<sup>2</sup>. Sievert went on to explain that the Department plants trees that are beneficial for birds, and they also plant species that benefit people. For example, while the Ginkgo may not benefit birds, it has no pest problems and no insect problems. On the other hand, many oaks are planted (good for birds and other wildlife) but are susceptible to oak wilt. Sievert mentioned Asian long-horned beetle which, unfortunately, is not species specific – and that could be devastating.

Willeke suggested that the MTAC schedule a meeting focused on the advantages/disadvantages of native vs. non-native trees, considering that the city/urban environment is not a 'native' environment. MacDonagh added info about his experiences with planting and the realization that there are constraints that prohibit our ability to have only native species. **MacDonagh will place this topic on a future meeting agenda.**

#### Results of the MPRB March 15 Meeting and By-Laws discussion

The resolution for the MPRB to approve the By-Laws was discussed. For the most part, the By-Laws were well received as submitted. There was, however, an amendment offered by Commissioner Alba to add a position to the MTAC: an MPRB field arborist. The objective is to provide a perspective from a worker in the field. The Board tabled By-Laws approval to send the amendment to the MTAC for their analysis. Repercussions to adding a staff Arborist is that, under Union contract, the Arborist would need to be paid overtime. Whereas the current By-Laws indicate that all MTAC members serve with no compensation. A suggested option could be to have an Arborist volunteer to attend MTAC meetings. The By-Laws approval has been moved to April 12<sup>th</sup>.

Under new business, the MTAC will discuss the proposed addition of the Minneapolis Private Tree Coordinator to the Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Johnson was the Urban Forestry professor in the College of Forestry for decades and advised the Extension department as well.

<sup>2</sup> Over 70% of the trees bought by the Forestry Department are native species.

One can watch the MPRB discussion on the YouTube channel – agenda item is close to the beginning of the meeting.

Discussion of an Arborist – question was asked about the Arborist working for Sievert in the Forestry Department and yes, that is the case. Does the other addition of Private Property Tree Program Coordinator also work for Sievert. That position is in the Health Department and is a recently designated position. The staff position’s assignment is to encourage tree planting on private property (including the spring tree sale).

Menz – perspective – a volunteer at this point, but it would be a voice for the people who work at the “ground” level. The cost is not necessarily the important issue or as important as “how they would be selected” because he sees that the person who’s at the Rec Center or who maintains the fields – they don’t have a voice independent of the management who does attend the meetings. The person would have voting rights and “give voice and credibility” to those from a multi-tier level and not just people who come from Commissioner nominations. The hourly workers would necessarily have a different “issue” than staff that are salaried employees. Menz is recommending that we craft a resolution or By-Laws amendment around have the additional position come from the arborist level.

Linde presented the issue of asking a Union employee to volunteer presents issues of its own and that the Commission should consider compensation as a part of the package.

Nicholson likes the idea of having an on-the-ground staff member to talk with the Commission. The money could be a thorny issue, but don’t want to prevent someone who wants to be on the commission from being a part of the Commission. Would the staff be able to speak freely?

Where did the idea of having an arborist on the MTAC originate? Menz: someone from the Union approached Commissioner Alper, which they do at times to express their grievances and “we like to reassure them”. Alper thought “this would be a way for there to be a voice from people who might not feel like they are represented in different sectors of our organization”.

Potyandy reminded us to consider what the MTAC’s mission is. Also, the MTAC’s meetings are currently open for anyone to attend. When there are general concerns among the general public, how does the MTAC want to facilitate that? Would the MTAC want to get involved in staff and union issues.

Others commented about the potential for this opening to becoming a way for other staff that might need want to be considered for a place on the MTAC.

Palmisano reminded us that the Commission can invite professional staff to have a voice on issues when they’re needed.

As a representative body, we each can bring issues to the meetings.

Co-Chair MacDonagh wants the MPRB to understand that we will have a response to the Board. The Board may need to hold off on approval of the By-Laws until the MTAC has had further discussion.

Arbor Day update: Friday April 28<sup>th</sup> at Windom Park (Lowry Avenue NE and Johnson Street NE). The neighborhood association is totally on-board and engaged in the planning efforts.

**MTAC BUSINESS**  
**Co-Chair MacDonagh**

Open Co-Chair Position

**Schlaefer nominates Marrari for the Co-Chair position. Approved.**

New addition to the MTAC

Sydney Schaaaf with the City Trees Program is proposed to join the MTAC. Trees on private property make up 70-80% of the City's tree population. This position would be added to the proposed By-Laws. **Sievert offered to make the edits to the By-Laws.**

<https://www.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/environmental-programs/city-trees/>

Sievert provided additional context for this position: the program is run in conjunction with the Tree Trust and there are several programs, e.g. neighborhood education efforts, in which they cooperate.

Sievert motion. Nicholson second. **All in favor and the motion passes to add the City Trees Program Coordinator to the MTAC.**

Next MTAC meeting

This meeting will be a field trip. **We will meet at the temporary tree distribution site at the Bohemian Flats** where Craig Pinkala (Forestry Preservation Coordinator) will guide us through the activities.

NEW BUSINESS

Orientation scheduled for new MTAC members? This will happen following the By-Laws' approval by the MPRB.

Discussion revisited the City's orientation to not having city employees on commissions. Palmisano reported that the City is undergoing reforms to all boards and commissions toward establishing consistent and clear practices, including not having employees as voting members. There are examples of this procedure not going well. Additional comments were made in relation to additional work for an employee who may be considered a volunteer but at the same time being judged as an employee.

**MOTION by Palmisano: MTAC thanks the Park Board for allowing us to have this discussion, and have decided we will not move forward with the idea of adding an MPRB Arborist to the MTAC at this time. Menz seconds. Majority in favor, one 'no', the motion passes.**

Motion to adjourn.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Commission's Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Carol Sersland – Commission Secretary