Committee considers replacing golf course trees

By Robert Morton-Ranney

The Tree Preservation and Protection Committee discussed damage to pine trees on the golf course at their May 15 meeting.

The superintendent of the Jamestown Golf Course, Joe Mistowski, told the committee that over the last five to six years, the course has lost approximately 120 pine trees to the turpentine beetle. The trees bordering on Conanicus Avenue were taken down last year, and he would like to replace them as soon as possible. Mistowski said he is concerned about the safety of passing motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians, as golf balls occasionally fly onto the roadway, or across to the abutting property.

Mistowski told the committee he has had complaints from several motorists, in recent years, whose cars had been hit by flying balls. He added that the course's liability insurance has risen some 400-percent as a result of the complaints.

Committee Vice-Chairman Jim Rugh asked whether this request was coming before the committee because the golf course is public land and is leased to Mistowski by the town. Public Works Director Steve Goslee, an ex officio committee member,said the area in question is a public right-of-way. Mistowski answered Committee Member Patrick Driscoll's question of whether the neighbors wanted them replaced, by saying that "they mostly like the view." He added that the goal was simply to replace what had been there before.

Committee member Anthony Antine asked Mistowski about alternative solutions, like installing a net or changing the direction of the hole.

Mistowski said that changing the hole was not a possibility because of the configuration of the course overall, and a net would not be aesthetically pleasing. Goslee said the trees are the minimal solution, while a net would be the maximum. Tree Warden David Nickerson said the trees that had been there were not enough, especially as they aged.

Committee Chairwoman Edwina Cloherty said there were two issues before the committee. The first was whether to support the tree replacement. If supported, the second issue was the tree of choice for replacement. With regard to the second, Goslee said the trees they had in mind were twenty-foot red cedars. Rugh said they would stop a golf ball, and added that it was unfortunate that the trees had dwindled over a number of years and the neighbors had become accustomed to the new view. He and Driscoll both agreed that "safety trumps views." Mistowski said an owner of one of the abutting properties doesn't want the trees and is willing to sign an affidavit waiving liability concerns. Driscoll pointed out that this doesn't stop safety or liability relating to cars and pedestrians. Goslee and Mistowski both indicated that, given the optimum timing for tree planting and for the completion of the decision-making process, the trees would probably be planted in the fall.

The committee adopted a motion approving the planting of trees on the public right-of-way on the golf course near Conanicus Avenue as specified, subject to the receipt of a planting plan and sketch which then will be sent to the abutters.

In other business, John Collins has been appointed to the committee but was not in attendance, and Cloherty will contact him about the date for the next meeting.

A request has been received to have the town plant five trees on public rights-of-way bordering a property on East Shore Road. The committee agreed to have one tree planted this fall, and include a request for a second on the list to be considered for next year's planning. In addition, the owner will be notified that there are other options. The owner may apply for a permit to purchase and plant the trees at his/her own expense, or apply to donate the trees and have the town plant them through the town's memorial tree program.

Related to this question, Antine asked whether the tree application form should specify a maximum number of tree plantings to be carried out by the town. Rugh felt it was important to be flexible and judge each situation on its own merits. Goslee cautioned, "You don't want to get the town into the landscaping business." Driscoll asked how many trees the town is planting in response to such requests, and Nickerson said it's about 30 trees a year.

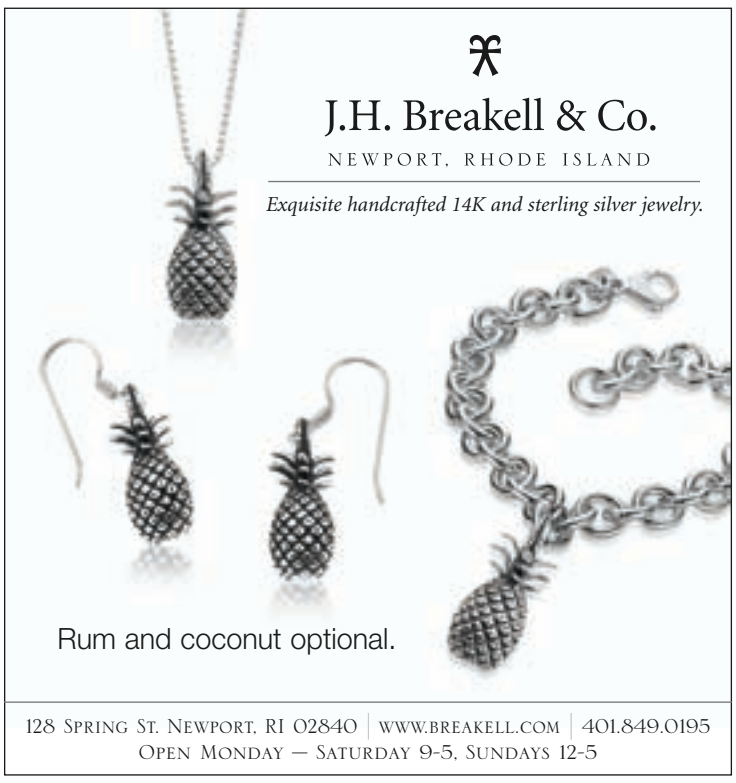
In his Tree Warden report, Nickerson said Jamestown has been awarded a $5,000 America The Beautiful (ATB) grant. Town matching funds, which include town materials and employee time, bring the total value to $13,381. A discussion followed on the question of whether responsibility for the care and watering of trees planted on public rights-of-way falls to owners of abutting property or to the town. Nickerson said the homeowners agree to that when they accept a tree. Goslee pointed out that it's easier for the town to do it than to "rip out a dead tree and replace it next year."

Cloherty pointed out that the ATB grant stipulates that tree committee members take responsibility for dividing the town into sections and communicating with property owners about the care of these trees. Committee Member Emmet Turley said this has been among the duties of committee members for some time, and he has contacted many owners for just this reason. Driscoll suggested that the issue be revisited at the next meeting, and Cloherty asked everyone to think about an area they might prefer.

Arbor Day was a success. A certificate of appreciation has been prepared for Gail and Harry Chase for the donation of a dawn redwood tree, which was planted on the traffic island at the intersection of Walcott Avenue, Blueberry Lane, Highland Drive, and Fort Wetherill Road, just behind the Fort Wetherill sign. A tree was also planted at the school, in memory of much-loved teacher Bruce Engelhard.

Nickerson was presented with a certificate of appreciation for his work as tree warden.

The committee agreed to continue gathering information for a fresh tree inventory and a new tree master plan. Rugh will bring information to the next meeting concerning the possibility of signage and labeling at the town forest. The mulching of trees on public land will also be discussed further at that meeting.



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