

Athens Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)
Annual Report for 2023

Membership in 2023:

Dr. Joshua Lipsman (Chair), Moira Little, Cate Collinson, Robert Brunner Jr, Leslie Reed

Members that left the CAC during the year:

Gerald Bunting, Susan Grilli, Merrill Roth, Kyle Winslow

Ex-officio members:

Maggie Moree, Planning Board Chair; Chris Sprague, DPW Director; Robert Scott, Village Trustee liaison

January: Arborist Angelo Schembari attended the January meeting to discuss Street Tree Inventory and Street Tree Management plans. A total of 303 street trees were inventoried of which only 9% are less than 6 inches in diameter, indicating an aging tree population. Mr. Schembari recommended 32 trees be removed, 10 were already in the process of being removed and approximately 20 trees should be removed within the next two years.

The lack of tree diversity in Athens was discussed with approximately 43% of street trees being maple and 17% being ornamental pears, CAC advised to avoid planting trees of this type.

The CAC and Mr. Schembari discussed tree management plan and threats to village trees. Insects such as gypsy moths, spotted lantern fly, Japanese beetles and cicadas will be a concern in coming years.

Discussion on January 25th public hearing for possible updates to village tree law.

February: A public hearing was held at the January 25th Village Board meeting to hear public comments on the proposed changes to the village tree law. After a large turn out against the law the Village Board voted to not make any changes to the law. The CAC spent much of the meeting discussing how to proceed and achieve some of the objectives in the proposed tree law.

A discussion took place on having a village trustee as chair. Dr. Lipsman was happy to continue in his role but would be willing to step aside for new leadership. The CAC will continue to look for new members to join the group.

Merrill Roth announced that he would be submitting a letter of resignation from the Council.

March: No meeting held

April: New members Leslie Reed and Robert Brunner Jr. were introduced to the group.

NYSDOH representatives Stephanie Facchine, John Mickelson, and Madeline Silecchia attended the meeting to discuss draft report on the Drinking Water Source Protection Project(DWSPP). Further discussion will take place next meeting as well as recommendations to the Village Board.

The Street Tree Inventory and Management Plan was discussed, Ms. Reed and Ms. Moree volunteered to work on suggestions on how to present the Plan to the Village Board. Grants were discussed, Dr. Lipsman will keep watch for upcoming grants.

Tree City USA discussion, application due by November, plans for Arbor Day observance to qualify.

Susan Grilli has moved out of the village and is no longer a member, new vacancy discussed. Dr. Lipsman would like to step down as chairperson and would be working with the mayor on a replacement, though he would continue as a member and Village Board liaison.

May: Athens Mayor Amy Serrago attended the meeting to share ideas and priorities. NYSDOH members that attended the April meeting returned to give update on DWSPP.

Mayor Serrago asked CAC to focus on four areas:

- Work with the Waterfront Advisory Committee to update the Athens Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan.
- Offer advice to the Village Board on Sleepy Hollow Lake water monitoring program.
- Review environmental implications of development projects as they arise.
- Review tree law and make recommendations to the Village Board. Also seek grant money to plant and/or maintain street trees. Work to maintain Tree City USA status.

June: Discussion on damage to trees bordering north side of municipal parking lot. Dead limbs should be trimmed and trees should be given another year to improve. DPW staff will be asked to see if gashes could be related to piling up of snow in that location. If yes then barriers will be recommended.

The Village Board approved Dr. Lipsman's request to plant trees in front of his residence on S. Franklin St. The CAC discussed and recommended DPW should sign off on final location to avoid potential harm to underground water infrastructure.

The Village Board accepted Ms. Reed's materials for tree management that were available to the public on Athens Community Day. The mayor will add them to the Village website for public viewing. A printed copy as well as materials from Cornell will be available at the Village office.

Ms. Reed will submit the Tree City USA renewal application later in the summer.

July: NYSDOH members attended meeting to present final draft report on DWSPP. The CAC approved of documents unanimously. The DOH will review for formal approval after which the documents will be forwarded to the Village Board.

Dr. Lipsman provided information on the Athens Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) update grant. The CAC will have a role in the process but it is yet to be determined.

Discussion on the possibility of working with Friends of Athens to pursue a tree grant opportunity due by 8/16

August: No Meeting held

September: Meeting did not have a quorum so no action taken.

October: Mr. Brunner presented results of his review of Village code on trees. Chapter 211 was adopted in 2018 with a new section on trees. There are old sections of the code relating to trees that do not appear to be relevant or needed and could be removed in a future update. A discussion took place to look into updating chapter 211 possibly to limit cutting above a certain number of trees, sizes or types.

Flood plain map updates discussed regarding impact on trees in the Brick Row area.

Mr. Brunner brought up Facebook discussion on smells coming from Peckham site near Union St.

Ms. Reed offered to approach the Hudsonia group to attend a future CAC meeting to discuss the possibility of developing a Natural Resources Inventory.

Ms. Moree mentioned there is a new resource person at the Greene Land Trust who might be helpful to the CAC.

November: Gretchen Stevens and Amanda Bevan Zientek from Hudsonia attended meeting to discuss habitat mapping, its value to the CAC and community. Sources of funding from state programs and private groups were discussed. CAC members expressed interest in mapping the village as well as Hollister lake. If funding were approved in 2024 the process would start in early 2025 and take six months to complete.

The Tree City USA application was submitted through a joint effort of Ms. Reed and Dr. Lipsman.

Dr. Lipsman discussed the DEC Community Forest Management Plan Implementation RFA. He has reached out to a tree planting company, Greene Bee Greenhouse and a tree maintenance company, Grand Arbor Tree Service about a possible partnership with the village to submit an application. Greene Bee Greenhouse owners have invited the CAC to visit their facility. The group is interested and Dr. Lipsman will make the arrangements.

A discussion on the lack of crown condition in the Street Tree Inventory took place and how it could be an obstacle in applying for the grant. Funding for training of DPW staff in tree maintenance was discussed. Dr. Lipsman will look into both items.

December: Meeting canceled due to holidays and member availability. Members from the CAC went to Green Bee Greenhouse in Cornwallville to meet with owners, review trees and discuss possible work on a tree grant opportunity. Ms. Reed will help with crown condition inspection of street trees to qualify for tree grant due in January 2024.