

Tree commission may take root in Penn Hills

TIM MEANS

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A group of tree lovers, some wearing green shirts, urged Penn Hills council Monday night to create a shade tree commission.

Council is to vote on the idea after an ordinance is prepared.

Led by local landscape designer Kathleen Raborn, the residents asked council to set up a citizen-led committee — at no cost to the municipality — to plan, manage, plant and maintain trees in the community.

“A community tree program would greatly benefit Penn Hills,” Ms. Raborn told council. “The environmental benefits include reducing air pollution and stormwater runoff. Trees increase property values by up to 15 percent. Trees are good for business, make a good first impression and hold onto soil, reducing erosion.”

She said a shade tree commission would develop a shade tree inventory of public properties, including parks; seek federal, state and private funding for tree planting projects; and promote tree awareness within the community.

Describing herself as “a woman committed to making our community better through environmental and beautification projects,” Ms. Raborn has a track record for launching volunteer projects, including a program called Monarchs and Milkweeds that distributes milkweed plants in an effort to reverse a decline in the monarch butterfly population; a gazebo garden on Mount Carmel Road; and a garden under the electronic billboard on Allegheny River Boulevard.

“I agree with all you have said here,” Mayor Sara Kuhn told Ms. Raborn. “I am 100 percent in favor of it.” She instructed planning director Chris Blackwell to review the draft ordinance prepared by the group and bring back a final version to council for a vote.

In addition to Pittsburgh, other towns in the region that have shade tree commissions include Verona, Oakmont, Wilkinsburg, Swissvale, Aspinwall, Forest Hills, Blawnox and Edgewood.

Council approved four contracts totaling \$1.1 million for sanitary sewer maintenance and repairs: State Pipes Services of Cranberry, \$208,362 to televise 116,000 linear feet of sewer lines and \$271,550 to line 102 short segments of sewer line; Roto Rooter of Murrysville, \$300,711 for sewer repairs, including excavation, installation and adjustment of underground manholes; and Jet Jack of Oakdale, \$321,075 to line 49 sewer segments from manhole to manhole.

Council also approved revising the sewer plan module to permit development of land at 520 Rodi Road for a proposed O’Reilly Auto Parts store.

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