

**TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND
TREE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
May 26, 2026**

A regular meeting of the Town of Sullivan's Island Tree Commission was held at 4:00 p.m. at Town Hall. All requirements of the Freedom of Information Act have been satisfied. Present were Commission members Mark Miller, Milton Langley, Madeleine McGee and Derek Wade.

Members of the public present:

Members of Council: Ned Higgins, member of Sullivan's Island Town Council

Staff members present: Rebecca Fanning, Director of Resilience & Natural Resource Management, Charles Drayton, Director of Planning and Zoning and Christina Oxford, Permit and Planning Assistant

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Miller called the meeting to order and stated that the press and public were duly notified pursuant to State Law and a quorum of Commission Members was present. There were no known members of the media present.

- I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM April 27, 2026:** Mr. Langley made a motion to grant approval of the April 27, 2026, Tree Commission Meeting Minutes. Mr. Wade seconded this motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

II. TREE REMOVAL REQUESTS:

1914 Central: Gerald J. Benoit, on behalf of Eugene Blanchard, property owner, requests the removal of a Category I tree, a 11+7+6" Carolina Laurelcherry (*Prunus caroliniana*) tree. The request is being made in accordance with Zoning Ordinance, Section 21-162 B (Application for tree relocation, or removal and replacement). (PIN# 529-05-00-059)

Ms. Fanning stated this Carolina Laurelcherry has two living branches at 11 and 6" DBH. The arborist's letter cites numerous faults with the tree, but notes that the risk of the tree posing a hazard is minor, given its position along the back edge of the property. Substantial tree removals have already been approved by the Tree Commission in June of 2025, and yet the canopy coverage on this lot is still well above average at 60%. Staff recommends allowing the removal of this tree with partial mitigation at 17" for the living portion of its three trunks.

Katie Duncan, landscape designer representing Gerald Benoit, presented the application to the Commission.

No public comment was made.

The Commission members asked for confirmation that the applicant is planting above and beyond what was required by the Tree Commission at a previous meeting.

Mr. Langley moved to accept the Town's approval with 17 inch mitigation. Ms. McGee seconded the motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed.

2663 BAYONNE: Sabine & Waters, on behalf of Josephine Hutcheson, property owner, requests the removal of a Category I tree, a 17" Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) tree. The request is being made in accordance with Zoning Ordinance, Section 21-162 B (Application for tree relocation, or removal and replacement). (PIN# 529-11-00-069)

Ms. Fanning stated this 17" Juniper has recovered from being windblown and felled in the past and is a healthy dual trunked tree. The request for its removal is part of a larger land clearing effort in preparation to raise the elevation of this wetland area which was only recently incorporated into the parcel boundaries and zoned residential. Wetland reclamation involves the use of heavy machinery and multiple feet of fill in places, hence the tree removal requests along the seaward band of the lot. Staff recommends allowing this tree removal request with full mitigation

A representative of Sabine & Waters presented the application to the Commission.

No public comment was made.

The Commission asked why full mitigation is needed for a tree that has been on the ground for 10 years. Ms. Fanning stated the tree has recovered from the fall and has new leaders. The Commission expressed that because of the work they are planning to do on the lot, full mitigation is appropriate.

Ms. McGee made a motion to approve with Staff recommendation of full mitigation. Mr. Langley seconded the motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed.

III. STAFF UPDATES

1. Invasive Species Removal Program

Ms. Fanning stated the current balance of the Tree Fund is \$597,992.00 with \$261,874.00 in encumbrances. The unencumbered amount in the Tree Fund is \$336,118.00. Staff expects around \$40,000.00 to be reimbursed this year in tree mitigation refunds but it could be more since the increase in tree mitigation rates is encouraging people to plant more. The Commission planned a multi-year plan for two purposes:

- 1) Planning judicious spending
- 2) Invasives are never gone and we will need a multi-year plan to remove them.

Ms. Fanning stated that because the Town has not done a project in the forest and have not received bids that we are extrapolating numbers from different site locations a chipper truck can be pulled up to the tree essentially and so there isn't great data on what it will cost to do this work. Because contractors have had more experience removing popcorn trees from the forest, they are giving more accurate bids for removals. Popcorn trees like wet feet and so they will be unlikely to be in the dried areas of the Island but in the lower elevation lands like the swampy interdune ponds. Ms. Fanning would like to begin the invasive species removals at Station 16 where the heaviest infestation of popcorn trees can be found. This is also the area where residents of the past did illegal clear cutting which goes hand in hand with invasive colonization. There is a concern of removing all the root structure of the popcorn trees that is holding the soil together but this part of the forest has had time to heal and has a variety of trees on the high dune ridges. The swale where the popcorn trees are located is less vulnerable to erosion if a wave were to come over the top of the dune.

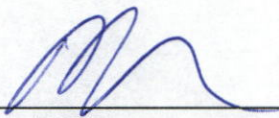
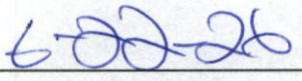
Ms. Fanning stated AmeriCorps Volunteers of the Sustainability Institute and Master Naturalist Association could help pull out the thinner popcorn trees and then contractors could be hired to remove the larger trees. The Commission commented that they would like to use the Tree Funds as a way to incentivize and support residents who have managed their property properly and they questioned if this gives the view that the residents who illegally removed the popcorn trees in the first place the view that they wanted. Ms. Fanning stated that she considered this but that this is the worst infestation on the Island and that this area that needs to reduce the propagation pressure the most. Next year, Ms. Fanning would like to use the funds in other areas of the Island where residents have already had popcorn trees removed. The Commission suggested waiving the \$250.00 fees for invasive RC trimming permits. Ms. Fanning stated the Bureau of Coastal Management draws base and setback lines and has jurisdiction over part of that maritime forest which is the most vulnerable during storms. The Town would need to work with them on any vegetation removals and pruning in those areas. The proposed removal area near Station 16 does not fall in that area. The Commission expressed the concern that we need to be as transparent as possible with the residents and the property owners about the decision making criteria that is being used to determine which areas are being targeted for removals. The Commission discussed contributing Tree Fund money to residents to help them pay the contractors to remove the popcorn trees. There was further discussion of waiving or having the Tree Fund cover the Tree Removal Fee of \$250.00.

Ms. Fanning stated a diversity of other programs outside of the maritime forest are also being proposed such as removing *Elaeagnus* at the boardwalk at Station 24 and workdays in the neighborhoods.

2. Emergency Removals

Ms. Fanning stated there were two emergency oak removals of trees that were 17 and 20 inches at Station 23. The trees were dead and towered over a highly used area of the yard. The second removal was located at 1102 Middle. The tree was a tall sycamore tree that had buildings close to it. The Commission supported the removals and urged Staff to use their discretion in approving the emergency removals.

IV.ADJOURN: Mr. Wade made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:17 p.m. Mr. Langley seconded this motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

	
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Mark Miller, Chairman	Date