

York Neighborhood Association General Membership Meeting

Norway Hall—1419 North Forest Street

October 30, 2024 Minutes

Approved: Motion 2026-03-26.1 ✓

Present: YNA Board members Colin Beazley (President), Opie Knechtel (Treasurer), Mark Ellis Walker (Secretary), Élan Engel, Kevin Cussen, Todd Kleinbrook, Tom Scott, and about 13 or so community members and children, plus guest speaker Stefanie Cilinceon (Communications and Outreach Coordinator of the City of Bellingham Public Works Department).

Absent: Chris Donaldson (Vice President), Jeremy Ferrera, John DeOrio, Mars Lindgren, Megan Doyle, Paul D'Agnolo.

Called to order at 6:30pm by Colin.

1. Public Works Department Presentation

After quick introductions by Colin, Stefanie Cilinceon gave us an update on the City's goals for the growth of Bellingham's tree canopy, noting for starters that current citywide tree cover is 40% but that York is among the lowest at 17% (with Sunnyland being slightly lower and Downtown the lowest).

She told us about the City's *State of the Urban Forest* report, published in May 2022 and available on the City's website and which Colin recommends, which presents that data along with introducing the American Forests **Tree Equity Score** gauge by which the City assessed how well Bellingham is doing compared to other cities in the region when it comes to the tree canopy's impact on not just the health of the city but also unemployment and low-income rates, population age, both physical and mental health, and other demographic aspects. Bellingham overall scored an 89—higher than Auburn, Vancouver, Kent, and Bellevue.

The City is now incentivizing the planting of trees on private property, as public property is largely as planted as possible already. Earlier this year, they launched the Community Tree Program offering a coupons for trees at local nurseries; it has proven very popular, and there is already a wait list. Another arm of this Community Tree Program hosts tree giveaways such as one coming up on November 30 at the Bellingham Farmers Market downtown. Such giveaways are also being hosted by local organizations such as the Whatcom Million Trees Project, and she notes that they are looking for volunteers to help.

Opie presented a draft document (which will be made available to interested property owners once it's finalized by the City's staff) addressing how the YNA and the City are partnering to make native trees available to them for free by means of a supply to be purchased from and held at our own York nursery Plantas Nativa, with reservations able to start now and trees available to pick up by March or April 2025. The City will provide information and education about this effort at a Rock Hill Park work party in January.

Tom noted that property owners concerned about old sewer/utility lines that may be under where they want to plant a tree can call 8-1-1 to have the City locate them.

In other Public Works news, Stefanie spoke briefly about the emergency Landmark Tree Ordinance the City passed this summer, which prevents Bellingham's largest and most significant trees from being removed or damaged without City approval. The City Council took emergency action in this case because in the typical six-week public-notice period of a drafted ordinance being proposed, more landmark trees were at risk of being damaged or removed without the benefit of a replacement plan or mitigation strategy. She also recommended checking out their Tree Planting Guidance web page.

A mural is in the works for the Lakeway underpass which leads in and out of York at its eastern midpoint, being designed by the Yorker-owned Paper Whale nonprofit arts group. As for the status of the replacement of the Meador Avenue and James Street bridges across Whatcom Creek, she notes that the temporary one erected in place of the James one to always keep one route open during the project will be replaced with a permanent one as soon as the new Meador bridge is completed this winter, with the intention of having both done by next summer. Information about all this and more can be found in Public Works Department newsletters available on their website, and she provided sample copies for attendees.

2. Holiday Party Planning Status

Tom reported that we have reserved the full-size wagon with Cramer Classics, Sehome High School's choir has confirmed attendance, and the Fire Department has been contacted. We are now looking for "name sponsors" to be featured on promotional materials and the YNA website's pages promoting the event, and live music has yet to be arranged. He also noted for perspective that last year saw about 215 riders but probably more.

3. Rock Hill Park Refresh Status

Colin announced that the preliminary design for the Rock Hill Park Refresh project will be available on the City's Engage Bellingham website on or around November 12th and that feedback can be provided there until the 25th.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:23pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mark Ellis Walker, Board Secretary.