



# PARKS COMMISSION AGENDA

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

4:30 PM

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of Minutes for January 20, 2026
3. Stephen Decatur Park Playground Equipment Replacement
4. Spring Celebration Craft Discussion
5. Comments from Staff
6. Comments from the Commission
7. Adjournment

Upcoming Meeting/Event Schedule:

Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 4:30 PM

Saturday, April 4, 2026, at 10 AM (Spring Celebration)

Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 4:30 PM

Tuesday, July 7, 2026, at 4:30 PM

Tuesday, August 4, 2026, at 4:30 PM (National Night Out)

Tuesday, September 1, 2026, at 4:30 PM

Tuesday, November 3, 2026, at 4:30 PM

Friday, November 13, 2026, at 5:30 PM (Glow Walk – *tentative*)

**Berlin Town Hall, 10 William Street, Berlin, MD 21811**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room**  
**410-641-4314 for more information**

Parks Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, January 20, 2026

**4:30 PM      REGULAR SESSION – Berlin Town Hall Council Chambers**

**Commission Members Present:** Patricia Dufendach, Kristen Gerhart, Melissa Gillespie, and Laura Stearns

**Absent:** Corey Davis

**Staff Present:** Public Works Director Jimmy Charles, Public Works Superintendent Cody Chesser, and Special Projects Administrator Kate Daub

**Horticultural Advisory Committee Members Present:** Georgianna McElroy and Lara Mulvaney

**Others Present:** Dr. Joan Maloof

This meeting was also broadcast live via Facebook. Special Projects Administrator Kate Daub called the meeting to order at approximately 4:30 PM.

Ms. Daub welcomed attendees and noted that it was the group's first meeting of the year, with several new participants. She suggested going around the table for introductions and clarifying each person's affiliation. Participants introduce themselves in turn, including members of the Parks Commission, representatives from Public Works, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forest Service, the Horticultural Advisory Committee, and residents with a strong interest in tree preservation.

Ms. Daub presented the September 30, 2025, meeting minutes for approval. Ms. Dufendach made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Stearns, and the motion passed unanimously.

Next, Ms. Daub turned the meeting over to Mr. Greg Geesaman with the Department of Natural Resources regarding the Tree City USA designation. She emphasized that the topic has come up repeatedly over the past couple of years and expressed enthusiasm about exploring it further. Mr. Geesaman explained that he began his role as the urban and community forester for the eastern region in March of the previous year. He provided context that the position had been vacant for 20 to 25 years due to government restructuring, funding shortfalls, and hiring freezes, which explains why this type of outreach has not happened before. He described his background in environmental science and prior work in the oyster industry, including oyster reef and living shoreline projects, and noted that he is originally from Snow Hill.

He outlined his responsibilities, which included tree compliance, Forest Conservation Act reviews, and, importantly, outreach to communities to provide technical assistance, financial support, and guidance for tree planting and care. He shared that one of his goals upon starting the position was to identify communities with strong foundations for urban forestry initiatives and noted that Berlin quickly stood out due to its evident civic pride, active public involvement, and mature tree canopy typical of older towns. He characterized Berlin as a good candidate for Tree City USA recognition because much of the necessary groundwork already appears to be in place.

Mr. Geesaman explained that the Tree City USA designation can open pathways to funding and technical assistance and that the process is relatively straightforward, consisting of four standards.

He noted that a recent change has made him the regional reviewer for applications, meaning he both assists communities and approves their recognition. He reassured the group that the standards are intentionally accessible to encourage participation, especially in the first year. He also highlighted that the current year marks the 50th anniversary of the Tree City USA program, which includes special signage and recognition. He further explained that Tree City USA is a recognition program run by the Arbor Day Foundation that focuses on urban and community forestry and is designed to acknowledge towns for effective tree care and for celebrating the value of trees within the community.

Mr. Geesaman continued by outlining the four standards required for recognition. He said the first is having a tree board or department, which does not need to be a new or formal body; it can be an existing group, such as the Parks Commission, Public Works, or Horticultural Committee. He noted the key requirement is having a clear point of contact responsible for overseeing trees and submitting documentation.

Next, he said the second standard is the adoption of a public tree care ordinance. He explained that this typically addresses responsibility for tree care, spacing, pruning, and related issues. Ms. Dufendach asked for clarification about whether such an ordinance could include guidance on acceptable plant species and align with recently published forestry guidelines on prohibited or discouraged plants. He confirmed that communities can specify which species are allowed or disallowed and that the ordinance simply needs to be formalized and approved. He offered to provide sample ordinances that have already been accepted.

Ms. Daub clarified that she did not believe the Town of Berlin currently had a tree care ordinance, meaning one would need to be drafted and formally adopted by the Mayor and Council. An emphasis was placed on the importance of protecting not only trees on public land but also historically and ecologically significant trees on private property, while respecting property rights. Mr. Geesaman responded that the town has flexibility in how strict or comprehensive the ordinance is, as long as it meets minimum standards. He reiterated that the primary goal in the first year was to achieve recognition, with the option to strengthen and refine policies in subsequent years.

Mr. Geesaman then introduced the third standard: an annual expenditure of at least \$2 per capita on tree care. Based on Berlin's population, he said this would amount to roughly \$10,000 per year. He noted that tree maintenance costs add up quickly, so this threshold is generally easy to meet. He explained that qualifying expenses fall into several categories and are typically documented in a simple spreadsheet tracking costs across those categories.

He continued by outlining the third and fourth standards required for Tree City USA designation, beginning with the annual expenditure requirement. He explained that towns only needed to document their spending in a simple format, such as an Excel spreadsheet organized by qualifying categories. Importantly, he clarified that volunteer time could be counted as a qualified expense at the national average rate, allowing towns to meet the per capita spending threshold quickly.

Lastly, he noted that the final standard required holding a public Arbor Day event. Mr. Geesaman described this as the most enjoyable component, adding that the event could be modest or elaborate, involving just a couple of participants or a larger community celebration. However, he said the essential requirements were that a tree be planted, that the event be documented with

photos and social media posts, and that the Mayor issue a signed proclamation officially recognizing Arbor Day.

Members of the commission noted that Berlin was already conducting tree-related activities that could satisfy the Arbor Day requirement. Ms. McElroy referenced the “Keep Berlin Cool” initiative, under which 35 trees had been planted that year, including 12 in public parks. She also highlighted the planting of bald cypress trees grown from seeds originating from 2,600-year-old trees, an effort that had drawn particular interest. Mr. Geesaman emphasized that the Forest Service did not intend to alter the town’s existing initiatives but rather to support and enhance them by providing technical assistance, funding, and trees.

He reviewed a suggested timeline included in the meeting packet. During the winter months, he said the town could designate its tree board and review or adopt a model ordinance. By spring, the ordinance could be approved, and an Arbor Day event could be held. After that, he explained that the town would simply continue tracking expenditures and activities throughout the year before submitting its application the following winter. He reassured the group that the process was straightforward and did not require extensive narrative reporting.

The conversation shifted to opportunities connected to the new Buckingham Elementary school project on South Main Street. Mr. Geesaman expressed a strong interest in school partnerships, explaining that he had been working with several schools to increase tree canopy and create educational opportunities. He described projects such as establishing food forests with native fruit trees at Snow Hill Middle School and supporting outdoor classroom spaces with shade trees at Pocomoke Elementary. He said these initiatives combined environmental benefits with hands-on learning opportunities for students and saw potential for collaboration with schools in the Berlin area, which would complement Tree City USA efforts while expanding community impact.

Mr. Geesaman then provided a detailed overview of funding opportunities available through the Maryland Forest Service. He explained that the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2023 required the planting of five million trees statewide by 2031, bringing new funding streams to support urban and community forestry. Additionally, he described the Healthy Forests, Healthy Waters program, administered in partnership with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, which could fully fund tree plantings of more than one acre on private property. He encouraged commission members to share information about these programs with residents, noting that his role was to match projects with the most appropriate funding source.

He concluded the presentation by mentioning additional initiatives, including the Backyard Buffers Program, which distributed native trees to homeowners, and reiterated that numerous funding avenues were available to support Berlin’s tree planting goals. Ms. Daub clarified that she personally served as the contact for Worcester County and acted as host for the county’s participation. Mr. Geesaman expressed appreciation for her involvement and acknowledged the town’s ongoing engagement with tree initiatives.

Ms. Mulvaney then asked whether any available grants covered technical services such as conducting a tree inventory, performing an urban tree canopy analysis, or addressing invasive plant species. Mr. Geesaman explained that the specific grants he had just outlined did not include those elements, but a Chesapeake Bay Trust grant did offer funding for urban tree canopy analysis and related inventory work. He said that the same grant, which could provide up to \$25,000, also

included invasive species management among its funding tracks. He noted that these components were typically bundled together under that larger grant program.

Mr. Geesaman shared newly published data from the U.S. Forest Service that analyzed Berlin's tree canopy status between 2013 and 2021. Although federal staffing reductions had slowed dissemination of such information, he said he recently obtained the spatial analysis results and promised to email them to Kate for distribution. Commission members emphasized how valuable this information would be in shaping future ordinances, setting measurable goals, supporting grant applications, and educating the public.

The conversation turned to practical planting strategies, particularly in public spaces such as churches, schools, and parks. Commissioners noted that many semi-public areas could be eligible for funding under the programs described. Mr. Geesaman explained that planting selections would come from an approved list of native species, which he would provide. Ms. Stearns highlighted the need for additional trees in Henry Park and Stephen Decatur Park, particularly to create buffers along the highway. She expressed concern about children playing basketball near traffic pollution and advocated for natural buffers to improve air quality and safety. She also referenced the loss of mature trees in Stephen Decatur Park in recent years and the need for replacement plantings. Ms. Geesaman noted that tools such as iTree software could estimate environmental and sound-buffering benefits for different species. He also emphasized the importance of considering utility lines, recommending smaller species such as dogwoods or redbuds beneath power lines.

Ms. Mulvaney reported that several trees had already been planted along the highway fence at Henry Park, though members agreed there was still ample space for additional shade trees. Mr. Geesaman emphasized that the availability of canopy statistics would help support grant writing, long-term planning, and public outreach efforts. Commissioners stressed the importance of educating residents about the measurable benefits of expanding tree canopy.

As the discussion shifted toward next steps, Mr. Geesaman recommended that the group develop a comprehensive planting plan identifying specific locations, desired species, and estimated quantities. Depending on funding availability, he said, projects could be implemented in phases across multiple grant cycles. He offered to conduct on-site visits, map planting locations, and prepare grant applications or use smaller funding programs as appropriate.

Ms. Daub asked about flexibility in the Tree City USA timeline example, noting that the Parks Commission met only every other month, with the next formal meeting scheduled for March. She inquired whether the town could hold an Arbor Day event in April even if a formal tree ordinance had not yet been adopted. Mr. Geesaman explained that the timeline was only a suggestion, adding that all requirements simply needed to be completed by the December 31, 2026, deadline. The group agreed to move forward with the checklist items methodically over the course of the year. Mr. Geesaman reiterated his willingness to assist with next steps and promised to send the canopy data and other supporting materials to Ms. Daub for distribution.

As the meeting drew to a close, Ms. Daub reviewed the proposed 2026 Parks Commission meeting schedule. She noted that the only tentative date involved the November 2026 Glow Walk event, which required coordination with the health department. Ms. Dufendach sought procedural clarity regarding whether emergency votes could be conducted via email if urgent matters arise. Ms. Daub advised that email voting should not occur and that any emergency meeting would still require

proper public notice in accordance with statutory requirements. The group agreed that, whenever possible, issues should be deferred to scheduled meetings rather than handled as emergencies.

With no further questions or comments, Ms. Daub requested a motion to adjourn. On a motion made by Ms. Stearns and seconded by Ms. Dufendach, the meeting adjourned at approximately 5:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kate Daub". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kate Daub  
Special Projects Administrator





STEPHEN DECATUR PARK

PROPOSAL #:26STPHNDCTRPRK1



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