

Tree Conservation Commission
Business Meeting Minutes
City of Atlanta, City Hall
Arborist Division, Suite 3800
January 15, 5-6pm

Commissioners present: Sarah Boles, Jack Cebe, Dina Franch, Marvin Lampkin, Bruce Morton, Lawrence Richardson, Chet Tisdale, Elizabeth Ward.

Staff present: Andrew Walter, Department of City Planning, Tree Ordinance Update, Project Manager; David Zapanick, Arboricultural Manager; Kathy Evans, TCC staff

Visitors: Stephanie Coffin, Tree Next Door

1. **Minutes.** December 11 minutes reviewed and approved by all present.
2. **Urban Ecology Framework/Ordinance update.** Andrew Walter, Department of City Planning Project Manager, and David Zapanick, Arboricultural Manager, presented update on revisions to the Tree Ordinance. Majority of meeting was allocated for the presentation. Discussion and questions followed.
 - Written materials not yet available. Will provide draft for Tree Commission review when available. Delayed by contract and procurement issues. Contractor has provided written draft to the City, but it is not yet ready for public review until internal team completes its review.
 - Team is currently discussing: How protective? How restrictive should the ordinance be? How to make market-driven decisions?
 - Goal based on public comment is to make ordinance more protective of trees.
 - Main changes proposed:
 - Increase tree density requirements. Not sure yet what the density will look like.
 - Increase post-development tree coverage, based on available open land footprint.
 - Strategy – categorize tree values according to size, health, and location factors. Categories are not yet decided. Will establish five levels with top level for “specimen” trees (85 or 90% of the diameter of the state champion tree) and bottom level for non-native and invasive trees. Top and bottom category will each represent approximately 5% of all trees.
 - Calibrate recompense. Recompense cost will be higher for some categories of trees. Also, when certain categories of trees are removed, the ordinance will require more trees to be planted, compared with removal of lower categories of trees, which will require less planting.
 - Looking to find ways to provide recompense credit for people who save trees.
 - Payment for cutting trees (recompense) should be enough for City to plant a tree. Recompense is now \$175 for 2.5” tree but it costs the City \$450 to \$1250 to plant a tree.
 - Want to give arborists more discretion.
 - Considering administrative variances to save trees.
 - Other questions by Commission members.
 - Who will assess the health and location factors for categorizing trees?
 - How is the Urban Ecology Framework coordinating with Zoning? Per A. Walter, an RFP is out for updating the zoning code.
 - What are the incentives to preserve specimen and higher value trees?

- Are the consultants projecting the effect of the Code on the canopy in five years and further? Per A. Walter, it is impossible to predict the future because of new development, multi-family, etc. Need to balance all the goals of the City and the goals of the tree ordinance.
 - How will footprints be altered or planned to leave soil space for trees? Per A. Walter, we cannot change the allowable building area with this ordinance. Need to increase cost of recompense with market approach. Can't base recompense on land value because that would shut down development.
 - What metrics will be assessed to determine if proposed changes to ordinance would help progress toward stated goals?
 - What tree protections can we require without making a lot unbuildable?
 - Do we have a definition of what is unbuildable?
 - Can we request (legal) guidance about how restrictive measures can be for preservation?
 - Can the City require greater density in certain areas (especially if trees and open space are not being protected)?
 - How will you ensure there is enough space to plant if planting density requirements are higher?
 - Will City Arborist have authority to require designs to preserve trees?
 - Commercial developers sometimes use extraordinary methods to preserve trees such as boring, piers, etc. Are these methods that can be required under certain circumstances?
 - How can we incentivize development in the places we want to see greater density and avoid disturbance to the places we want to preserve because they are more environmentally sensitive or valuable?
 - Since Urban Ecology Framework was a GIS exercise and not ground truth-ed, it is difficult to translate into an overlay for policy purposes. Can we accomplish tree preservation goals in another way?
- Focus groups will be scheduled in the future.
 - Tree Commission would like to receive documents to review and schedule work sessions on specific topics (e.g. tree valuation system).

3. **Tree appeals.** Time allocated for individuals to review appeal packets (five).

4. **Old Business.** Don't forget: Arbor Day, Feb 21, 2020, noon. Lunch and learn. Council Proclamation at City Council meeting on Monday closest to the date. Thanks to Jack Cebe for volunteering to coordinate Arbor Day event.

5. **New Business.**

- Will need two appeal hearings this month: January 15 (this evening) and next Wednesday, January 22.