

TREE BOARD

November 2, 2020

The Tree Board of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met for a virtual meeting appearing via video conference on the 2nd day of November 2020, at 4:00 P.M.

ITEM 1, being:

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairman Menzie and Members Buthod, Huffman, Janaway, Pape, Spain and Tedder-Loffland

Absent: Member Fagin

City Officials: Tim Vermillion, City Forester

ITEM 2, being:

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 5, 2020 MEETING MINUTES

Member Huffman made the motion and Member Pape seconded to approve the minutes. The vote was taken with the following results:

YEAH: Chairman Menzie and Members Buthod, Huffman, Janaway, Pape, Spain and Tedder-Loffland

NAY: None

ITEM 3, being:

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Member Spain made the motion and Chairman Menzie seconded to approve the agenda. The vote was taken with the following results:

YEAH: Chairman Menzie and Members Buthod, Huffman, Janaway, Pape, Spain and Tedder-Loffland

NAY: None

ITEM 3, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING THE URBAN FOREST MASTER PLAN

Mr. Tim Vermillion, City Forester, said two firms, PlanitGeo and Davey Tree were asked to provide written presentations on how they would address the City's needs in terms of an Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP). He said they provided informational packets and RFP's will be send out at a later date; likely more firms will send in responses to our RFP.

Member Pape said she had read an article in the newspaper that the Council Oversight Committee plans to study Urban Forest Master planning and come up with their own set of recommendations. Mr. Vermillion said yes, that is what they indicated. He explained that the Council Oversight Committee has decided to put together a working group to help alleviate some of the work load of studying ordinances from cities that are similar to Norman. Mr. Vermillion said the working group would draft a new ordinance and/or amendment(s) to take into consideration, as well as other topics of concern such as land clearing for development. Once the working group is done, they will send the draft ordinance to the Tree Board for review. Mr. Vermillion said this is different from the normal procedure whereas the Tree Board usually does the analysis and presents their findings to the Council. He said he has requested to meet with the Council Oversight Committee to discuss.

Mr. Vermillion asked the Board for input and comments on the informational packets and Member Huffman felt they consultant's presentations were very similar. Member Spain agreed and said PlanitGeo was very specific to Norman. He asked what the fee would be if PlanitGeo created only the ordinance and Staff said the fee is \$19,000. Chairman Menzie asked whether the existing inventory software from PlanitGeo would work with Davey Tree and Mr. Vermillion said he has been told the software is compatible. Member Huffman wondered if creating an amended ordinance would require more staff and Mr. Vermillion said yes. Member Huffman felt it was important that the consultant(s) know this fact. Mr. Vermillion said another approach that Staff has discussed is to focus on planting trees and/or removing hazardous trees so that the existing canopy can be maintained at the same level until such time that an updated ordinance could be funded rather than focusing on an amended ordinance at this time.

Member Tedder-Loffland said she has not looked over PlanitGeo's packet yet; however, she has reviewed the Davey Tree Packet. She said from a philosophic point of view, similar to the Center City Planning, bringing a consultant in would help Council to focus on data driven analysis. She felt it will help firm up what is possible using data as opposed to current opinion that may not be based in realism. Member Tedder-Loffland it is a good process regardless of outcome and felt planting trees in locations without an overall plan is not a good idea.

Councilmember Huffman asked whether Staff has a list of what the working group wants to look at and Mr. Vermillion said yes; Canopy Coverage, Land Clearing and Managing Trees on Private Property, and Tree Preservation During Construction. Councilmember Huffman said he is concerned if the focus is on those specific topics, the consultant will come up with something that is too large for the Forester to manage. Mr. Vermillion said the ordinance would likely be a phased approach that would allow staffing to match the required work load so Staff can be added, if in fact, they decide to add Staff at some point.

Member Pape asked who is responsible for street tree removal and Mr. Vermillion said that is a grey area. He said the City is required to keep the Right of Way open for the travelling public. He said when he receives a call from a homeowner who requests a street tree removed that is located in the ROW, he has to make a judgment call based on risk, budget, and the homeowner's ability to cost share. Mr. Vermillion said the land clearing portion of the updated ordinance would likely require some mitigation; therefore, Staff would have to document what is out at the site, what is getting removed and then calculate a mitigation ratio either in planting back trees or paying into a tree fund.

Chairperson Menzie said he does not like clear cutting that leaves only a few trees standing because those remaining trees almost always die and he felt a regulation needed to be added to the ordinance prohibiting contractors from parking their heavy equipment under trees during construction project(s).

Member Janaway said during his travels he has seen cities require signage laying out the rules to build around trees and Chairman Menzie told the Board preservation stories about the Mercy Hospital project and protecting trees. Member Pape asked about the criteria for the project and Chairman Menzie explained the arborist's process for inspection and documenting the information.

Mr. Vermillion said the consultant hired will hold stakeholder meetings that will help flesh out little holes in the existing tree ordinance to include how Code Enforcement cannot issue citations for dead trees etc. He said another example would be how the existing landscaping ordinance might require trees to be planted, but finding another resolution if powerlines exist above.

Member Huffman asked what Staff needed from the Board and Mr. Vermillion said the next step will be scheduling a meeting with the working group to get us all on the same page. Chairman Menzie requested the Board finish looking over the draft proposals from PlanitGeo and Davey Tree Tree so the topic can be discussed further at the next Tree Board meeting.

ITEM 5, being:

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS

The Board discussed ongoing issues from the October Ice Event regarding removal of trees and/or limbs. Mr. Vermillion explained the leaner/hanger removal process and said only 2-inch diameter branches and larger that are located in the Rights of Way are being removed at this time. Member Janaway asked where Staff generally plants trees and Mr. Vermillion said the current Ordinance requires a certain number of trees to be planted per the size of the lot, etc.; however, some newer neighborhoods have terrible soil and it is causing some of the homeowners to constantly replace their trees. Mr. Vermillion suggested taking this issue in consideration when amending the Ordinance.

Member Pape asked Staff what type of trees are being replanted on Berry Road and Mr. Vermillion said Wireless Zelkova, City Sprite Zelkova, Amur Maple, Prairiefire Crabapple, and Oklahoma Redbud. Chairman Menzie said it takes three to seven years for trees to recover from events such as the most recent ice storm. Mr. Vermillion said he has updated the helpful tree care information on the City's website regarding ice storm tree issues.

ITEM 6, being:

ADJOURNMENT

Member Huffman made the motion and Member Tedder-Loffland seconded to adjourn. The vote was taken with the following results:

YEAH: Chairman Menzie and Members Buthod, Huffman, Janaway, Pape, Spain and Tedder-Loffland

NAY: None

Passed and approved this 1st of March 2021
2020

Don Menzie, Chairperson


