

Jacksonville Tree Commission  
Wednesday November 16, 2022 – 9:30 AM  
Approved December 21, 2022  
Via Zoom Platform & In Person

<b>Commissioners Present:</b>	Chris Flagg, Chair Mike Robinson, Vice Chair Susan Fraser Steve Long Rhodes Robinson Ron Salem Curtis Hart	<b>Staff:</b>	Cindy Chism
<b>Advisors:</b>	Susan Grandin, OGC Justin Gearhart, City Arborist	<b>Public:</b>	Jameka Smith, COJ Andrew Roman, COJ Susan Caven, Scenic Jax Tracey Arpen, Scenic Jax Fred Pope, Scenic Jax Mike Zaffaroni, Liberty Landscape Becky Henson, Greenscape Lisa Grubba, Greenscape Lad Hawkins, Scenic Jax John November, Public Trust Deborah Early,

**1. Call to Order – Chair**

**2. Roll Call and Verification of Quorum – Cindy Chism**

**3. Submittal of Speaker's Cards – Chair**

- a) A raised hand icon as well as waving at the screen will be acknowledged by Chair or Ms. Chism.
- b) For those attending in person, paper speakers' cards are available.

**4. Reports:**

- a) Fund balance and encumbrance report for 15(F) (Ordinance Tree Fund), 15(N) (Charter Tree Fund) and BJP (Attachment A) –
  - i. Mr. Flagg said we continue to have challenges every month related to what we have. This needs to be rectified. We have been told we cannot get updated information, that the accountant representative cannot attend the meeting. Are there suggestions from the Commissioners on what we can do to ensure we get the numbers tightened up. CM Salem asked if a meeting has been held with accounting. Ms. Grandin said yes, they have met with accounting, and they say we cannot get updated information because it's the year-end close out.
  - ii. Ms. Grandin continued, we have met with accounting folks, finance folks, and council auditors and Mr. Hart was present for one meeting. At the last Strategic Planning meeting a matrix was put on the board to see what balances are in what account, there's the BJP account and then the 4 programs. Hopefully that information will be presented in the format requested and will be easier to understand.
  - iii. Mr. Hart said we changed accounting programs and lost a lot of data. It has been years we've been trying to get this data. We should know exactly how much money we have. CM Salem said part of the issue may be what's encumbered for a project and that's not been spent. There are logical ways to say this is encumbered for this project, so it is removed from the general total, though it has not

been spent, it is encumbered. Mr. Hart pointed out there is a category for Better Jacksonville Plan which as been shut down for years, does that money need to be unencumbered.

- iv. Ms. Fraser said at the Strategic Planning meeting there was a grid drawn on the whiteboard, which organized the funds, and everyone could understand where the funds are. Mr. Gearhart said he has been working on a template for the grid which was on the board. Everything shown on the board is listed as well as definitions of the key terms such as allocated and encumbered. The goal is to print it and distribute to each Commissioner. It is organized by Charter versus Ordinance what funds/ programs come from each one with amounts. Determining what's been allocated and what's encumbered is the last piece to 630-CITY and Remove & Replace are taking a little more time.
- v. Ms. Grandin said we are moving in the right direction. Mr. Gearhart and the Finance folks must get together. What's routinely distributed in the packet is from the Finance folks, the overall view, what Mr. Gearhart has is more detailed. Mr. Gearhart said we are currently investigating if the Better Jacksonville Plan funds can be readily used for our projects or does it have to be for something special. Ms. Grandin continued with the combination of the Finance folks and Mr. Gearhart, the financials should be more understandable.
- vi. Mr. Gearhart said what the new form will show will be the total available in the fund, the programs which have funds allocated from the Fund, 630-CITY, Level 2, Remove & Replace and Level 3, the allocated amounts for each fund, the encumbered amounts and what's available. These figures will be shown for Charter Funds as well as BJP Funds. CM Salem asked if the individual projects will be listed? Mr. Gearhart said that is one option; whichever the Commission would like. There is one shortened more condensed, showing total allocated, total encumbered, total available within each program. Or we could do more detailed for Level 2 Program and list each project encumbered and available. Mr. Flagg, CM Salem, and Mr. M. Robinson all agreed option 2 would be better. Mr. Gearhart said the current financial packet already has that information available.
- vii. Ms. Grandin said let's define the nomenclature: The Tree Fund money is appropriated by the City Council; the Tree Commission allocates money, and the money is encumbered when there is a contract. Ms. Fraser said the number that is missing is the balance of funds the City Council is appropriating from. Mr. Gearhart said that is the Available Balance Total listed in the Financial Packet on the page labeled Financials Combined.
- viii. Mr. Hart said the other number we need to know is over the years, how much has come in, what the trend is. Ms. Fraser said in January 2022 Finance provided data, remember the long piece of paper laying on the table. I took that and put the totals into a 1-page vertical format to read it more easily. What that showed was we had received \$114M and spent \$38M. Ms. Grandin went to Finance to determine the difference which necessitated some adjustments. Ms. Fraser emailed Finance and asked if they could update the table for today's meeting and was told they are too busy.
- ix. Mr. Flagg said Mr. Gearhart will you come back with a form which is understandable and will track what is available in each of the programs. Is there any pressure we can put on to get accounting representation at this meeting? Mr. Arpen said remember there are 2 different audiences, those that come to Tree Commission and are familiar with the programs and those that just look at the webpage. Mr. Flagg agreed it needs to be in a simplified form.

- x. Mr. Pope pointed out there are many old projects listed which still have funds. Those need to be closed out and the funds dispersed. Mr. Gearhart said he was working on that with his contract administrator, but she had to go out on medical leave for the next 3 months. He is not sure where she got to before she left. Mr. Hart suggested creating a policy which states that after the project is finished, the funds automatically get swept back into the fund they came from so this doesn't keep happening. Mr. Long said that is already in an ordinance; when the purchase order is closed, any remaining funds automatically go back to the fund it came from. Mr. Gearhart is working on getting those purchase orders closed. Mr. Flagg said clarity is the priority now, then let's get it cleaned up.
  - xi. CM Salem suggested he could help with the Council Auditor to help. Ms. Powell suggested using the Council Auditor because of the number of conversations and how long this has been an issue. CM Salem said he was going to help with that. Ms. Fraser asked if she sent the historical data table would CM Salem ask the Auditor to help with it as well. CM Salem agreed.
  - xii. Ms. Grandin said one of the numbers the Commission probably wants is, for instance, Level 2 had \$8M appropriated by the Council for Level 2, one of the things the Commission needs to know is how much money in Level 2 is available for allocating to projects. I think that's what Mr. Gearhart's form will show. Mr. Gearhart said that information is currently in the packet. Previously those balances have been reported verbally, going forward they will be listed in a table.
- b) Fund Status of 630-CITY, Remove & Replace and Level 2 Programs– Justin Gearhart
  - c) Status of Pending Level 2 Tree Projects (Attachment B) – Justin Gearhart
    - i.

## 5. Action Items:

- a) Approval of Minutes from September 21, 2022 meeting – Chair
  - i. Motion to approve the minutes made by Mr. R. Robinson, seconded by Mr. M. Robinson, none opposed.
- b) Approval of Minutes from October 4, 2022 Strategic Planning Meeting – Chair
  - i. Motion to approve the minutes made by Mr. R. Robinson, seconded by Mr. M. Robinson, none opposed.
- c) Approval of Minutes from October 13, 2022 Strategic Planning Meeting – Chair
  - i. Motion to approve the minutes made by Mr. R. Robinson, seconded by Ms. Fraser, none opposed.
- d) Approval of Minutes from November 2, 2022 Strategic Planning Meeting – Chair
  - i. Motion to approve the minutes made by Mr. R. Robinson, seconded by Mr. M. Robinson, none opposed.
- e) Approval of Final Strategic Planning Report – Chair
  - i. Motion to defer approval made by Mr. R. Robinson, seconded by Mr. M. Robinson, none opposed
  - ii. Ms. Fraser said this report captures the range of the discussions. The report sets us up to move forward in time based on a lot of assumptions; that we need more staff, we need more data, we want an urban forestry master plan. Some of the things we've accepted as the status we are in and

we are taking a strong position to change that status is up for debate and what I would like to propose. Some is timing and some is how far do we want to go. This document turns the Commission into advocates. We currently invest our time into 1 meeting per month, we spend an hour and half and have 1 staff person. This document says that is not enough. Will the Commissioners give individually a commitment to this document to make it happen because for a while it will only be the Commissioners, doing the work to get out of the box we are in. So voting to approve the final report, you are making that commitment.

- iii. In Strategy #1.A Commissioners will meet with City Council Members during 2023. That is a long-range commitment, could we do that in the first quarter of 2023, or do we want to drag that out through the whole year considering that is building consensus of who we are and how dire our need is for staff? Our number one thing is to build a relationship and emphasize the immediate need for staff. Unless we pick this up and make it happen, each commit to 20 hours per week to do this work or nothing will get done. Ms. Fraser suggests this be changed to the first quarter of 2023, move this forward more quickly and emphasize the immediate need for staff with every conversation. Mr. Flagg pointed out stakeholders were also asked for help. We do have to commit, divide, and conquer the best we can, perhaps not 20 hours a week.
- iv. Ms. Fraser said in Strategy #1.C Commissioners will work with Public Works to draft a job description. Ms. Fraser suggested it will take more than 1. This should be revised to say more than 1.
- v. CM Salem suggested presenting to the City Council via the 2 committees presented to last year, that was very well received and could go a long way towards educating the new Council members. Mr. Flagg agreed and suggested including some of the Strategic Planning initiatives and priorities as well. Ms. Grandin will work to get these presentations on the respective calendars. Ms. Grandin thought the Strategic Plan was referring to meeting with individual Council members. Mr. Flagg agreed but this presentation should also be done. CM Salem added meet with individual Council members after the presentations and detail the projects done in their district. Ask if they have any other projects they would like us to consider. Mr. Gearhart said he could develop a presentation for the committees. CM Salem suggested initially focusing on those District Council members running for reelection and schedule the individual meetings after the election. Mr. Hart said the committee meetings should be in January on what was accomplished in 2022. In June when the new Council has been selected, then schedule the individual meetings.
- vi. Ms. Fraser said for strategy #2.D this is a large data point which is missing. We have tried to get the information from the Planning Department and will now send a formal request to the Planning Department regarding the loss of mitigated trees since 2017.
- vii. Ms. Fraser said in strategy #3.B there were many discussion on getting a grant to fund a Urban Forest Master Plan but is the City not big enough to fund a master plan without a grant, we don't want to wait another year to get the grant and start the process. Every decision we make every month without this master plan is a less than guided planned decision. Do we want to make a request through the Council for a Master Plan? Mr. Long added it would be administered through Mowing & Landscape division it is just an issue of who funded it, the Mayor's office through CIP, through the budget process, through operational, allocated through City Council. CM Salem said we need information to appropriate the funding, what is the purpose of the Master Plan, what is the gain, a

white paper detailing purpose, gain and rough cost, not to exceed. Ms. Fraser said we should ask, if it's not approved, there is a grant we can apply for next year.

- viii. Ms. Powell suggested deferring the approval of the Strategic Planning report because the input given and sense of urgency necessary is not reflected in this document. One example is the staffing: the kind of staffing and how much funding. We have missed the deadline for the Master Plan and will have to wait a year to apply for the grant. We don't have a problem statement what we need these things because we don't have accurate financial information. If the Commission advertises all the great things done last year with very little staff, what should the Council vote for more staffing? The City has not spent general funds in 5 years for any kind of planting effort. It's not unreasonable to ask for \$100-200,000 for a Master Plan and our Council Liaison can help us advocate for that. If he had the right framing of what it was necessary, it could pass City Council and we won't have to wait a year. There is a crisis, trees are being cut down every day and not replanted at a rate that we can keep up. As a member of the public reading this document it needs active language and more conviction, it needs to be strengthened from an action-oriented perspective.
  - ix. CM Salem suggested if we are going to ask for things do it all at once, a global ask with documentation to back everything up. Ms. Fraser added, it starts with the duties assigned to the Commission, the 14 things to accomplish meeting once per month with one staff person. CM Salem continued the justification is what we've done, and we have 1 person being pulled in 10 different ways, these are things we want to do, and this is what it would cost. Put together a 2-page document which states these items and I'll run it.
  - x. Ms. Fraser said in Short-Term Goals, Strategy #4-1 work with City Arborist and Community Partners: The Commission needs to decide if they will be the lead or not and revise this document as appropriate. If the Commission is the lead, we will set the goal, the pace, push for resources and lead.
  - xi. Ms. Fraser said Strategy #4-2 maintenance budget. The ongoing pilot project to explore the cost of maintenance of the existing tree canopy. Mr. Gearhart said he believes the pilot project is not ongoing that the bids that came in were way too high and it was deemed not feasible from a budget standpoint. Ms. Fraser said this is the first we are hearing this. We thought this was being implemented. Mr. Gearhart will determine what the actual status is. Ms. Grandin said, Mr. Long just for your benefit, when we discussed the tree maintenance issue before, and how much money we should be spending on the maintenance of trees, either the trees planted with the fund or just existing trees, Mr. Pappas said we need to have the data and analysis before we can even ask for the money. That's what this pilot program was supposed to do, provide the data and analysis so we have an idea of how much money it takes the City to do maintenance on trees, because there is cost per mile.
  - xii. Ms. Fraser said as time and resources are limited, perhaps forming committees for each strategy to determine priorities, move these items forward. What does the Commission want to accomplish over time. For instance, implement Strategy #1 which is get the vacant position(s) filled and the other appears we have taken on already, it to generate talking points for Council members and the others are implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- f) Proposed Level 2 Project(s) – Justin Gearhart

- i. Airport Center Drive East Tree Planting Project (Attachment C) – Justin Gearhart
  1. Presentation – This is a standard median planting with a 2-year, non-irrigated warranty.
  2. Public Comment – Mr. Hart requested a North arrow be added to all maps. Mr. Gearhart agreed to do so in future.
    - i. Ms. Fraser asked what the width of the median was. Mr. Gearhart said it was 20-25 ft. wide. Ms. Fraser then asked if the stormwater was in the middle? Mr. Gearhart said it was a slight swale. Ms. Fraser said as part of obstacles in the median and speed and volume of the traffic, 25 ft. wide and storm water in the middle and you are moving it to the side. Mr. Gearhart said, it will be 4-5 ft off center, not close to the sides of the road, at least 10 ft. if not more between road and tree, uncurbed. All these trees are 100 ft. if not more because of how the medians are, they get narrow closer to the intersections. As for the sides of the road and how close the trees are, the offset is 5 ft. We have consulted with Traffic Engineering on the sight lines and are compliant with his suggestions.
    - ii. Mr. Hart pointed out that if the project has made it to the Commission, we either trust the design guy or not. By the time it comes here, everyone has had plenty of time to make comments on this if there is any question on the design. Mr. Gearhart said he does appreciate everyone looking at the projects, the more eyes the better to make sure nothing is overlooked.
    - iii. Ms. Grandin asked if there was a process for other City Departments to review the projects? Mr. Long said, Traffic Engineering was the correct department because the review consisted of sight lights and ensuring no trees were planted in the “clear zone.”
    - iv. Mr. R. Robinson suggested there be a list of the reviewers which have reviewed it. Mr. Gearhart said this project wasn’t review by Traffic Engineering. We have had this same conversation several times about different projects and believe we understand the requirements. If everyone would be more comfortable, we can forward the projects to him for review before bringing it to the Commission. Ms. Grandin suggested providing a list of those who have reviewed the project.
    - v. Ms. Fraser said the reason she pointed this out is there may be accident information about a specific road which we are unaware of. Mr. Long suggested sending each project to Traffic Engineering to ensure there are no objections.
  3. Vote – Mr. Hart made a motion to approve the project if the Traffic Engineering Division also approves, seconded by CM Salem, none opposed.
- ii. College Street Tree Planting Project (Attachment D) – Andrew Roman
  1. Presentation – 4 newly installed medians will have 4 shade trees installed: 2 American Sycamores and 2 American Elms. They are bare spots right now.
  2. Public Comment – Ms. Fraser asked if the project was a City project install new medians. Mr. Gearhart replied they more like parking islands. They were existing parking spaces, approximately 20 feet of length which was filled in on the side of the road with the intention of planting shade trees. It was filled in about a year ago. This request came from RAP with the

information the islands were designed for shade trees. Ms. Fraser pointed out if this was a City road project and the trees were installed during the project, trees could have been planted at that time for a lot less than \$8,000. What is the soil in the islands, does it need to be replaced? Mr. Gearhart said we didn't do a soil coring but preliminary review there was sand and loam.

3. Mr. Zaffaroni said when they are digging the hole to plant the tree if they see something which is concerning, they will let the contract manager know. We do amend the soil slightly, but it is not enough to allow the tree to grow for 20 years.
4. Mr. Flagg asked if the cost included replacing the soil? Mr. Zaffaroni said it did not. Mr. Gearhart suggested getting the cost of the soil replacement added to the project with a not to exceed limit so the project can continue to move through to MBRC. Mr. Flagg agreed, with a \$5,000 not to exceed limit.
5. Mr. Hart said it should have been determined if the soil needed to be replaced before the project even came to the Commission. Mr. Gearhart said it is a new planting island with new soil, it is raised above the parking lot, there is new soil. Ms. Fraser said it is probably compacted though.
6. Vote –Mr. R. Robinsons made a motion to approve with the amendment that soil replacement would be done with a financial cap of no more than \$5000 for the whole project, Mr. Hart seconded, none opposed.

iii. Ft. Caroline Road West Tree Planting Project (Attachment E) – Justin Gearhart

1. Presentation – CM Salem requested reworking of the landscape along Ft. Caroline, between Hartsfield Rd. and University Club. 87 trees around the pond of which majority are shade trees and the median trees are smaller since the medians are only 10 ft. This includes 113 existing trees to be removed from the medians. The total cost is actually higher than the actual cost there is an irrigation quote included but also a non-irrigation quote so we don't have to return to the Commission to ask for more funding. However, we would prefer to install the irrigation. There is also a quote from Prosser what is required and a detail of what that includes. As well as a tree removal quote.
2. Overall, from University Club to Hartsfield and slightly east there is a City owned retention pond with space to plant a mixture of shade trees, at the water line there is Bald Cypress, Red Maple and Sweet Gums. In the upland portion which is very sandy there are Cedars and in smaller areas due to the slope we could not fit shade trees or existing trees we will add Yaupon Holly and Walters Viburnum. The point of the Cedars, Holly and Viburnum are to screen an existing concrete wall and wooden fence on the west side to make it more aesthetic. We could not fit anything else on the upland slope due to mowing. In the smaller medians we are planting a mixture of Crepe Myrtles and Hollies which is easily managed. Some of the existing trees were in sight lines and could not be replaced but we did put in as many as we could.
3. Public Comment – Mr. Lad Hawkins said he submitted this project initially and the idea was to remove the trees which were dead or dying but retain all the oak trees, amend soil, fertilize, and do what ever was necessary to help the existing trees thrive. A lot of money has already been spent to trim the trees to arch nicely over the roadway. This project has all those trees being removed, removing 20-year-old Oaks to plant 2-year Oaks, this is not what the Tree Fund money

is about. This is not the project I asked for, how did my request get completely ignored and we don't know anything about it until we show up here and they are ready to build it. Mr. Hart pointed out we are not ready to build it, this is a discussion. Mr. Hawkins continued a lot of time has been spent figure this out and doing plans and it is the opposite of what we asked for.

4. Mr. Arpen said he didn't believe this was an efficient, appropriate, or wise use of the Tree Fund money. Trees are being removed which don't qualify as dead or dying, the individual trees don't look that great perhaps but driving down the road, collectively it gives a feeling of a tree canopy. In addition, \$20,000 is being spent to remove trees, any time using the tree funds to remove trees should be because they cannot be saved. Also, the public has gotten used to those 20-year-old Oak trees, when they are replaced with the younger trees, the public will not be happy. The Crepe Myrtles which are already don't look like they are doing well, no more should really be planted and the East Palatka Holly does not thrive anywhere in Jacksonville in a street tree setting. They seem to be in a constant state of decline not to mention the blight which is affecting them. Why is there a design, have we already committed to paying Prosser or is this an estimate to pay Prosser to draw something up?
5. Mr. Hawkins added that these trees are perfectly healthy. They're stunted a bit because they don't get enough water and haven't ever been fertilized. If the City nurtured them and did some stuff to try to improve them, they would grow bigger and better. We could spend the Tree Fund money helping them, doing what augmentation we could there without putting little diddly stuff in there that doesn't help with canopy. There could be 3 Live Oaks planted in the roundabout and the project only says 1. Mr. Gearhart pointed out that the roundabout is only 30 ft. across so planting Live Oaks 10 ft. apart would become an issue with the trees growing onto the road which incurs maintenance costs. Mr. Hawkins answer the idea is they will grow up and out over the road.
6. Mr. Hart suggested tabling this project for now, it is obviously going to need more discussion. Perhaps a meeting could be scheduled with Mr. Hawkins and City Staff. Mr. Flagg agreed but asked if perhaps the project should be rejected. Mr. Hart suggested the project originally proposed made sense, this isn't it.
7. Mr. R. Robinson asked if there was a maintenance issue with planting trees around the pond? This looks like the trees are being planted are awfully close. Mr. Gearhart said the City typically does not mow within 5-6 ft. of retention ponds to discourage people going near, especially children. Mr. R. Robinson clarified not that kind of maintenance, if we must do something to the stormwater pond can we get to it. If we can plant trees that close to ponds, that opens opportunity, if not we shouldn't be seeing it.
8. Mr. Pope pointed out that if a consultant doing the design, those should be the drawings presented. There are several Crepe Myrtles and Hollies which are in terrible shape and do need to be removed. There is the issue of soil replacement, dealing with a 10 ft wide median, it's lime rock contamination which has contributed to these trees being in such poor shape. There is also sugar sand in the area as well so soil replacement should be a priority when planting new trees.
9. Vote – Mr. Long made an amended motion to defer, seconded by Mr. Hart, none opposed. Mr. Hart said at the next meeting we need to be told if the Prosser cost has been incurred and a

representative should attend. Mr. Flagg added we also would like to know what the original intent of the project was.

**6. Old Business**

**a) Level 3 Program Agreement Revisions (Attachment E)– Susan Grandin**

- i. Legislation is going through Council which will attach as a template the new Level 3 Contract. It changed yesterday because the insurance requirements were a little different. Basically, the change is the non-profit doesn't have to put up \$2M of general liability, it's only \$1M. It should be voted out by December.

**7. New Business**

**a) None.**

**8. Public Comment**

- a) Mr. Zaffaroni said thank you to the Commission for meeting in December because of the way the process works, without that meeting, we would be out of planting sometime in mid-January with the current projects including the 1 or 2 approved today.

- 9. Adjournment** – the next Tree Commission meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 21, 2022, at 9:30am and will be a Hybrid/Zoom meeting in Ed Ball Building, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Public Works Office, conference room 5.