

Jacksonville Tree Commission
Urban Forest Master Plan Committee Minutes

Thursday, March 16, 2023, 9:30AM

Approved April 19, 2023

Ed Ball Bldg., 10th Floor, Conference Room 5

Attendees:

Susan Fraser, Tree Commissioner
Justin Gearhart, City Arborist
Jameka Smith, Landscape Architect
Kathleen McGovern, Parks Dept.
Cindy Chism, Staff

Joe Anderson, JEA
Scott Sauder, JEA
Nancy Powell, Scenic Jacksonville
Fred Pope, Scenic Jacksonville
Lisa Grubba, Greenscape

- 1. Call to Order** – Ms. Fraser
- 2. Roll Call** – Cindy Chism
- 3. Objective** – Susan Fraser
 - a. We're not here to write the Urban Forestry Master Plan, we here to develop a scope of work and an approach to generate an RFP or RFQ to contract the work. We will determine what the Master Plan looks like and how to get one implemented in Jacksonville.
 - b. We have the City Arborist who cannot do this by himself and there is the mandate from the Strategic Plan that this is one of our immediate goals.
 - c. Part of this discussion will be what do we want and how do we fund it, hopefully there will be more than one way.
 - d. There are so many voices looking for Master Plans and Studies, we must find a unique hook on why this is important and why it is important now. We need to build consensus and a wave of support; we must sell this.
 - e. Mr. Anderson pointed out we need a sales pitch. There are five steps to a good sales pitch, 1) pique their interest, the hook, 2) build integrity, 3) understand the needs, 4) meet their needs and then 5) ask for the sale. If we can build those principles into the Urban Forest Master Plan, we'll have a good sales pitch to give to our public and representatives.

4. Presentation on Urban Forest Master Plan Workshop – Justin Gearhart

- a. Attachment A is an overview of the workshop attended. Attachment B is the general outline of all the steps required. Attachment C is a condensed outline of Attachment B and may be used as the Introduction and Table of Contents.
- b. Money and the ability to commit to the large amount of time necessary are the largest two obstacles: staff time or money for consultants.
- c. Mr. Anderson asked if those two obstacles are why we don't have an Urban Forestry Master Plan now? Mr. Gearheart said part of it is there really hasn't been an Urban Forest Division until recently, the Manager position is only five years old and has a lot of other things to catch up on. It is something which probably should have been done in 2000 when there was clearly overwhelming support of the population. It is something which is overdue, every City is focusing on it right now, large and small, more and more people are becoming aware of what is required for an Urban Forest. It is a great tool to manage the existing resources.
- d. We do have an inventory, but we will need a social survey done of the City. A social scientist, perhaps someone from UNF we could partner with, without that, getting Mayoral and City Council support is much harder.
- e. Ms. Fraser suggested before sending out a survey, an education program should be done. The state of the industry has changed in 20 years, now people understand it is a deliberate process, to plant and maintain and replace.

5. Stakeholder Perspectives

- a. Mr. Sauder said this was the first place he's ever worked in which the community does not care about trees, coming from Savannah and Atlanta. The vast majority of the customer calls we receive at JEA are people wanting trees removed. They are afraid of trees here, perhaps because of hurricanes. It seems to be a culture issue, a lot of the immigrants from the Caribbean and South America, they don't want any trees in their yard.
- b. Ms. Fraser added the insurance companies seem to be driving that as well. As people buy new homes, especially in the Riverside area, they have to get inspections to get reinsured and the insurance companies are telling them they will not insure their new home unless they remove X tree. Though we can't stop the insurance companies, we can get them to plant a tree if they remove one.
- c. Ms. McGovern asked if Ms. Fraser thought the best idea was a Master Plan for the whole City or to break it up into pieces. Ms. Fraser said she personally believes there should be subarea designations, the Core, the Suburban, the World and some of the data which helps us decide where those boundaries are where the development is occurring, where is there pressure for development because that's where the trees are

- being removed and where are we anticipating pressure for development 5 years from now. The whole City is too much, we would do well to be successful where we find support and then use that as an example to say we can help you too, come see us. The worst thing to do is to visit people and say we are the government; we are here to help you. We need to find a successful location which thinks like we do, thinks this is an important part of their community and be successful there and then repeat it.
- d. Mr. Gearhart pointed out that one thing to keep in mind is Florida and various entities within Florida, conservation measures usually pass with a majority of 60% or so. This could be applied to Jacksonville as well. There is support here but we just don't have it in a quantifiable form. Without that we can't say to a Council Member, we have the citizen's support, we are trying to get this done and can you help us.
 - e. Ms. Fraser agreed, the survey will measure what people will support, what the data tells you and what the community wants to ask for. However, we can't put a survey out until we decide on the massive public education PR program. That is all the data on what trees do to clean the air, stop stormwater, and help with flooding and home values. If we can't tell people there is a measurable benefit to them, it's too ethereal, and we won't get support.
 - f. Ms. Grubba said if you want to feel good about trees and the public, come out to a Greenscape tree planting. We see the opposite of what you see, we see people who are enthusiastic about trees. People come not necessarily because they are tree-huggers, they come because they need service hours or their company is making them, but then they are out in a beautiful park on a Saturday morning and in under 2 hours that place has been transformed with volunteer effort. There is also advocacy and education about trees, e.g., this tree planting is solving an issue of stormwater uptake. The result is so much enthusiasm and camaraderie, it is quite gratifying. We do hear, especially in low-income neighborhoods, that people are afraid. They do not have the time or the money to deal with a tree. That is an education process other cities have gone through and maybe we can learn something from them. The City of Atlanta has done a huge education program in its community and maybe we can take some lessons from them.
 - g. Ms. Grubba continued, in attending the national and state conferences we see the successful programs all have strong leadership at the top, a strong advocate in the head of Public Works or their Mayor. Whether that came from a grassroots consensus or came from that person is unknown, but they also incorporate all different groups, not just the municipality. It's more work than one city can do, they need the workforce development people and their advocacy groups and their university extensions and getting everyone working together. A lot of cities have that figured out, though there is

not one template because every city is different but that tis the key, strong public/private partnership.

- h. Ms. Smith said she has done management plans and master planning and in doing them in the past, public consultation and buy-in is the most critical part. The funding comes but it's the public consultation and buy-in which really gets the funding. In listening to everyone and hearing there might not be much public which wants these trees, if not them then who is it going to come from. If the Stakeholders push it and then it collapses because the public doesn't really want it. It can't come from the Stakeholders; it must be the public who truly want it.
- i. Ms. Grubba asked what the process was to update the tree inventory. Mr. Pope said he didn't think getting another inventory was necessary since the most current one was done in 2017. American Forest did a study in Jacksonville approximately 10 years and it includes percentage of canopy. The historic studies could be compared to the 2017 study to see a trend which could be utilized right now. This study is posted on the American Forest website.
- j. Ms. Fraser added we also have the permit report from the Planning & Development which gives us the address of the permit, the number of tree inches removed of the 4 categories of removal, all those inches planted and the inches deficit. Ms. Fraser wants to request the Planning Department geocode the addresses to facilitate mapping. Mr. Gearhart said he didn't need that much detail; council district or zip code should be sufficient.
- k. Ms. Powell suggested what we need is the overall trend of how much canopy we are losing per year, 5%, 10% or more? Mr. Pope said with the 3 reports we currently have we can calculate the trend, each report had a canopy assessment; 2005 American Forest report, the 2017 inventory and the I-Tree Report.

6. Typical Urban Forest Master Plans

- a. Attachment E is an overview of the Urban Forest Master Plan for Tallahassee done in 2018. Mr. Pope said it is so much like Jacksonville and includes a section on recommendations which seems to parallel what Jacksonville is going through. There is also a section on community outreach, regulatory issues, it is a very comprehensive plan.

7. Funding Options

- a. Mr. Pope suggested educating the City Council members on the canopy loss which is taking place now, how important a Master Plan is and request funding to at least get a

social survey to determine what the residents want. We have enough data to develop a simple presentation illustrating the loss trend.

- b. Ms. Fraser asked the committee members who are engaged with Council members, if they thought the Council members, incoming and outgoing, if we can get enough consensus at the political level will the social survey and the actual fine points of what people in actual communities want to do, can be part of the study, do we have any champions on the City Council, going by district and the ongoing development.
- c. Ms. Fraser said grants are one option (Attachment D). Mr. Anderson said there were a lot of submissions this year, so many that the funds had to be spread out. This year there were 30 applications, there were 28 last year, and 80% got grants but not the full amount. Mr. Gearhart added, this isn't something we can get grants and matching funds for, we will have to get additional funding from another source. A grant will help, but it is a drop in the bucket. Ms. Grubba asked if there were grants, we don't know about and if the City's grant writers could help.

8. Discussion Items for Subsequent Committee meetings

- a. **Ms. Powell will send out the updated list of links for other plans. Ms. Fraser suggested everyone select one plan to read through and give a brief overview at the next meeting.**
- b. Mr. Pope agreed a Scope of Work included a review of all the existing documents. In the Tallahassee Plan there was a very thorough review of the regulatory situation. Ms. Powell added we don't want to duplicate the effort we've already completed but we also need to follow through on some of the recommendations which have already been made.
- c. Mr. Gearhart pointed out that's why we need support from the top. Also, if we don't have the citizens' support, values included, there will be no sign-off from City Council or Mayor. If the City Council and Mayor were not approached first, and their input added, their support would not be forthcoming. There are two things which need to be determined first; how the City Council and the Mayor feel about a Master Urban Plan and then how do the people feel.
- d. Ms. Powell recommended not doing a survey without some education first. Mr. Gearhart said the surveys are relatively simply. There is a sample survey from the seminar I just attended; the questions are basic and don't require any detailed knowledge of tree canopy. If you wait to educate the public before the survey you may find that people don't listen, they don't read, or you won't change their minds but now you've wasted time and money.

- e. Mr. Gearhart continued; the first is a social scientist must design the questions of the survey in ways that people will understand. The survey must be done by a social scientist so we have results we can stand by. Ms. Fraser added, but we must sell the funding for the social scientist's survey. Mr. Gearhart replied, with our limited staff and City Council's time can we find a way to build support. Ms. Powell pointed out that the Resiliency Report may contain a lot of data which would be relevant to us.
- f. Ms. Fraser asked, with what the Tree Commission does, they have money, there are meetings, projects, programs how will an Urban Forest Master Plan benefit that process. How will this enhance and complement the delivery of trees in the City. Ms. Powell said it's more than the delivery of trees, we must protect the existing tree canopy, maintenance, prevention, and how do we deal with private property. The Tree Commission doesn't address private property at all.
- g. Ms. Powell suggested calling the plan Urban and Community Forestry Plan. Ms. Powell will go through each of the reports and list the table of contents for each one for comparison purposes. **It is recommended that everyone read the Tallahassee and Miami Master Plans.**
- h. At the next meeting if everyone could develop an opinion about pieces which are integral to our success, pieces we would like to have and pieces which appear extraneous to what Jacksonville is or is trying to accomplish. Ms. Powell added, the geographic scope is an important discussion. Ms. Fraser said the scope of the work would say the study includes the creation of sub-areas for application of policy.

9. Establish Meeting schedule.

- a. Meetings will be held on the third Thursday of the month at 9:30am in the Ed Ball Bldg., 10th floor, conference room 5.

10. Adjourned.