

**Tree Commission Retreat Minutes
 January 25, 2024 12pm – 3pm
 Fairfax County Public Safety Building
 12099 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia 22035
 Retreat TOPIC: Roles and Responsibilities**

Chair Speas called the Retreat to order at noon. Chair took roll on paper and not called aloud:

Name	District/Agency	Attendance
Cindy Speas, Chair	At-Large	Present
Elaine Kolish, Vice-Chair	Mount Vernon District	Present
Jeanne Kadet	Braddock District	Present
Barbara Ryan	Dranesville District	Present
Vacant	Franconia District	
Bret Leslie	Hunter Mill District	Absent
Kevin Holland	Mason District	Present
Rose Hendricks	Providence District	Present
Cory Suter	Springfield District	Present
Perry Rhodes	Sully District	Present
Rick Healy	EQAC	Present
John Burke	FCPA	Present
Jerry Peters	NVSWCD	Present
Brenda Frank	VA Coop Extension	Present
Jacob Zielinski	VDOF	Present

Notes from the Retreat follow. There were no votes taken on Tree Commission business.

Purpose: To build understanding and knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of the Tree Commission both now and under its new charter, to examine the roles and responsibilities of individual commissioners, and to seek opportunities for collaboration between the Tree Commission and the county agencies it works with in service of its outreach and advisory goals.

Opening Activity: Asked participants to visualize their favorite tree and share one word to describe it, and to share one word to describe the future of the Tree Commission

Favorite Tree Word:

- Shade
- Majestic (2)
- Ginormous
- Beautiful
- Colorful
- Threatened
- Awe-Inspiring
- Oak Grove
- Healing
- Baby
- Statuesque
- Vulnerable
- Slender
- Growing

The Future of the Tree Commission Word:

- Preservation (2)
- More
- Influence
- Relevant
- Collaboration (2)
- Innovative
- Healthy Forest
- Inspiration
- Conservation
- Support
- Outreach
- Stable

First Survey Question: *Approximately how many hours per month do you spend on work and activities related to serving on the Tree Commission?*

- 11 Responses
 - 1-3 hours (3)
 - 4-6 hours (6)
 - 7-9 hours (0)
 - 9+ hours (2)
- Total number of hours per month for the entire group is: 47-67 hours, or an average of 57 hours. This equates to an average of 5.2 hours per month per person.

Overview: *Guiding documents of the Tree Commission:*

- [Chapter 122: Tree Conservation Code](#)
- [Chapter 12 of PFM: Administrative Guidance](#)
- Tree Commission Charter
- [Tree Action Plan](#)
- [Tree Commission Annual Report & Work Plan](#)
- CoP Steering Committee Charter
- CoP Two-year Work Plan
- Current TC elected job responsibilities
- Current memos outlining commissioner and staff responsibilities to each other

Whiteboard: *Collectively we drew a graphic to capture what is in scope and what is out of scope for the Tree Commission.*

In Scope:

- Outreach
- Annual Report
- Volunteering (tabling at events)
- Partnerships
- Testifying on behalf of the TC
- Writing letters to the Board
- Department Liaison
- Attending Meetings
- Community of Practice

Out of Scope:

- Expressing political views as a TCer
- Lobbying as a TCer (At the Federal or State level)
- Advising on PFM to private entity
- Advising on a specific project
- FOIA – Meeting together with more than 2 TCers

Brainstorming: List of Tree Commission Actions for 2024 (to be prioritized at upcoming mtgs)

- Write advice letters to the Board of Supervisors
- Develop protocol to address natural landscaping (agency input)
- Monitoring the status of projects that we've commented on
- Update by-laws
- Make connections with FCPS
- Attend outreach events
- Increase request of data from agencies (deviations of enforcement)
- Education (advocating for better mulching)
- Revisiting materials and talking points
- Data on meeting 2025 canopy goals
- Rewriting Tree Action Plan (comprehensive plan could affect this)

Second Survey Question: How effective is the Tree Commission's work and activities with us spending this number of hours, on average?

- 11 responses
 - 0% extremely effective
 - 0% very effective
 - 55% moderately effective
 - 45% slightly effective
 - 0% not at all effective

Post Survey Question: Because there was room for improvement in terms of the effectiveness of the Tree Commission, we asked the group: What would make us more effective?

- Awareness of our roles and relevance – *Tree Basics* book modernized
- The Annual Report
 - more visuals, graphics, tables
 - more user-friendly

- board requirement
- accountability
- Is our message clear?
- Social media – Instagram
- Specific roles or subgroups could help spread the workload
- Perform more outreach/education
- Have measurable outcomes and metrics
- Get feedback from stakeholders, residents, politicians through surveys
- Have official swag for commissioners (i.e. t-shirts or nametags)
- Spend less time on reports and more time on actions

Third Survey Question: *Moving forward, given our new Charter, how many hours per month are you willing to spend on Tree Commission work and activities?*

- 12 Responses
 - 1-3 hours (0)
 - 4-6 hours (4)
 - 7-9 hours (5)
 - 9+ hours (3)
- Total number of hours per month for the entire group is: 78-102 hours, or an average of 90 hours. This equates to an average of 7.5 hours per month per person, a 2.3 hour increase from question #1.

Brainstorming: *Ways for the Tree Commission to share the workload*

- Have teams and/or committees (teams of 2). Committees can be standing or ad hoc. (multiple people said this)
- Have volunteers for individual assignments, not just for outreach.
- Know each commissioner’s strengths, skills, and interests so that assignments can be made.
- Write reports in a different way so that they take less time.
- Identify what each person is doing – could motivate others to take action.
- Have more frequent meetings or check-ins – one time per month is a large gap.

Considerations:

- Asynchronous or virtual
- Must be careful of the number of people (FOIA)
- Could there be a non-business interim meeting that requires less administrative work?
- An email between meetings
- A public facing message board

Drafted a statement about the workload of the Tree Commission to share with the Board of Supervisors and to newly appointed Commissioners.

Responsibility: To advise the Board of Supervisors on actions it might take to protect, improve, and expand the urban forest across Fairfax County and for each commissioner to come prepared to attend one regular business meeting per month.

Also:

- attend 1-2 subcommittee meetings per year (3-4 hours/year)
- volunteer for 2 outreach events per year (8-10 hours/year)
- participate in writing the Annual Report (3-6 hours/year)
- keep it simple and say- Participate in a range of activities including subcommittees, outreach events, and writing the Annual Report which could be an additional 20-30 hours per year depending on interest and availability.

Minimum Time Commitment: 3-4 hours per month; Total Time Commitment: 50-80 hours per year total

**** Should this be flexible?** It is helpful to have guidelines but be careful of “scope creep”. There could be a Part 1 of this that goes to the Board of Supervisors for recruitment, and a Part 2 for onboarding.

In addition to moving the work of the retreat forward at upcoming Tree Commission meetings, we captured these next steps:

- Cindy Speas would create the meeting minutes
- The Tree Commission would update their job descriptions to just include the requirements of each role rather than things that are “nice to have” or things that the current appointees are doing.
- Patricia Greenberg will share the link to the list of outreach events so that Tree Commissioners can sign up.

Closing activity: Choose one word to describe your heart and one word to describe your head at this moment.

Heart:

- Regenerative Ag.
- Soil Food Web
- Community Service
- Joy
- Inspirational
- Connecting
- Habitat
- Energized (2)
- Optimistic
- Action
- Advocacy
- Aboral Culture Education
- Mother Earth

Head:

- Forest Restoration
- Healthy forest
- Save trees
- Graphics
- Admin Constraints
- Hesitant
- Planning

- Planting
- Silviculture
- Environment
- Overthinking
- Logical Approach

Head and Heart:

- There is no planet B

Final Survey: How satisfied were you with the content of this retreat?

- 6 responses
 - Very Satisfied (57%)
 - Satisfied (43%)
 - Neutral (0%)
 - Dissatisfied (0%)
 - Very Dissatisfied (0%)

Do you have any other feedback regarding today's retreat?

- “This was super helpful. If we had more time, I would have loved an orientation/refresher of the many entities within the county (agencies and especially), what their missions and roles are, and how they relate to each other.”
- “It was wonderful that everyone participated fully”
- “No”
- “It was great in every way!”