

Fairfax County Tree Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 4, 2023

Call to Order:

Chair Speas called the May 4, 2023, meeting of the Fairfax County Tree Commission (Tree Commission) to order at 7:04 p.m. Chair Speas welcomed all attendees and called the roll:

Present:	Cindy Speas, Chair	At-Large
	Elaine Kolish, Vice-Chair	Mt. Vernon District
	Jeanne Kadet	Braddock District
	Bob Vickers	Dranesville District
	Jessica Bowser	Franconia District
	Bret Leslie	Hunter Mill District
	Kevin Holland	Mason District
	Cory Suter	Springfield District
	Perry Rhodes	Sully District
	John Burke	FCPA
Absent:	Rick Healy	EQAC
	Jerry Peters	NVSWCD
	Brenda Frank	VA Cooperative Extension
	Jim McGlone	VA Department of Forestry
Vacant:		Providence District

Chair Speas called a quorum and began the meeting by recognizing **attending staff**: Brian Keightley, Urban Forestry Management Division (UFMD), and Christina DeMariano, UFMD.

Public Comment Period:

Chair Speas asked for members of the public to identify themselves, and say if they wished to address the Tree Commission. Bob Vickers introduced Barbara Ryan, a retired economist with a landscaping business from the Dranesville District. Ms. Ryan chairs the Environmental Committee of the McLean Citizen's Association, which has agreed to take on extending the Great Falls tree survey along Georgetown Pike into the McLean District. She is a certified horticulturist and Chesapeake Bay landscape professional level 2. Bob will be ending his appointment to the Tree Commission this summer and has recommended to his supervisor that Ms. Ryan be appointed. Ms. Ryan attended the meeting as an interested public observer. Larry Zaragoza was also present, representing the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC).

Approval of the Thursday, April 5, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

Chair Speas called for any corrections to the draft minutes for April 5, 2023. A short discussion followed with no edits noted. Chair Speas called for a motion to approve as amended.

Commissioner Kolish moved to adopt the April 5, 2023 minutes as presented.

Commissioner Leslie seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Old Business:

- **Change to agenda to discuss the Urban & Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act (UCFIRA) first so that Larry Zaragoza, Chair of EQAC could participate:**

The UCFIRA is a federal grant program with \$1.5 B available for competitive grants to increase equitable access to urban tree canopy with its associated health, environmental, and economic benefits, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Grants also broaden community engagement in our urban forests; and seek to improve community and urban forest resilience to climate change. Grant proposals are due June 1. UFMD is working with the Department of Planning and the Park Authority on two possible proposals:

- Increasing street trees in existing VDOT Rights of Way; and
- Actively manage county forest properties to include fighting invasive species and to increase the number of trees in disadvantaged areas.

UFMD plans to use One Fairfax for equity (focus on Justice 40 areas), plus creation and maintenance of green jobs in forest management. Casey Trees will be applying for more community-residential tree planting proposals, so the county will not cover those projects.

Fairfax County is looking for letters of support for their proposals from the Tree Commission, EQAC, and other groups. Staff would normally get the Board of Supervisors (BOS) to endorse the letters of support, but given the due date, that is not possible. So,

they seek letters directly from the support groups. They have commitments already from some groups but are looking for more. Suggested groups for support included the Faith Alliance, Second Story, Friends of Holmes Run, VDOT, and commissions on Justice 40 areas.

EQAC will also be drafting a letter of support. After discussion, the consensus was that separate letters from EQAC and the Tree Commission would be more impactful, since each has a different focus, both of which would support the proposals.

The Tree Commission will not be able to vote on a final letter of support because of timing (due before next meeting), but it can vote to approve the letter in concept and give authority to the Chair to prepare it.

Commissioner Suter moved to approve the Tree Commission's Chair preparing a letter of support for the Fairfax County UCFIRA grant proposals. Commissioner Kadet seconded. Motion passed, with two members abstaining.

- **Earth Day events:**

- **Sully Plantation Fairfax County Earth Day Celebration**

Commissioner Vickers noted that there were very few attendees stopping by from the opening at 10 until about 11:00. When he and Commissioner Rhodes were there, it seemed that the families were mostly at kid's activities on the other side of the common area. After Commissioners Kadet and Leslie showed up, it got busier. Kids seemed interested in the activities and would spend time at the booth asking questions. Some adults had specific questions about tree planting, maintenance, and removal. Event closed at 1:30 due to an imminent thunderstorm. First-time commissioners noted that they were impressed with the amount of material available for distribution, and wondered if there was a list of available materials that could be used and distributed at other events. Commissioner Kadet volunteered to compile a list of available and current materials.

Brian Keightley said that there was an adequate budget for reproduction of educational materials so the Tree Commission could get copies as needed.

The Tree Commissioners thanked UFMD for setting up and taking down the tent and table. The location beside UFMD and near other county environmental groups was ideal.

No one showed for Hugh Whitehead's tree planting demo. It was discussed that this was likely the result that it wasn't well publicized. There was a small sign along the road, but many participants never knew about it. Need more advertising next year.

- **Mt Vernon District Annual Environmental Expo**

Commissioners Kolish and Bowser represented the Tree Commission at this event with a set-up similar to Sully Plantation--same materials and games for kids. Many kids and parents stopped by, with positive responses.

As a result of the relative success of these events it was suggested that the Tree Commission look for more opportunities for similar outreach activities. It was also noted that a banner or sign, or tablecloth would be nice. Brian Keightley said that UFMD will have an Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator starting soon who can assist with these types of events.

- **Friends of Trees Awards**

Chair Speas stated that the Friends of Tree Awards celebration was fabulous: Chairman McKay was there with many of the Supervisors; the MC was terrific; the audio visuals and posters were great; there was a large audience and a reception with hearty snacks. Chair Speas and the UFMD Director have already thanked the BOS for the ceremony and are working on a similar combined celebration for next year. The Tree Commission wants the record to show our deep appreciation.

The Friends of Trees Awards for this year will start with a press release from Chair Speas. UFMD will send information to the DPWES Public Information Officer. Nominations will open June 1 and close July 15, although there is wiggle room to extend further if necessary.

The process will be similar to last year's. One change is that the Conservation Branch is now in Land Development Services (LDS), and UFMD will communicate with them to look out for potential applicants. UFMD will reach out to county offices and the Community of Practice, while the Tree Commission will reach out to community organizations.

- **Linear Project Exemption letter to the Board of Supervisors.**

Chair Speas summarized the meeting between county staff and the Tree Commission officers to discuss our letter (covered last month). As a result of that meeting and other input, our response letter to the BOS has been revised. Vice Chair Kolish lead a discussion of the issues and the recommendations in the new response letter. Tree preservation is the primary concern, along with best practices for saving trees. County staff explained that if they had to comply with all of the requirements of the Tree Preservation Code, it would greatly increase the cost of county managed linear projects. However, some remarked that this increased cost should be included in the project budgets. It was noted that if a project cannot meet code, developers must pay fees into the Tree Planting and Preservation Fund (TPPF) which supports tree planting projects, and county managed projects should also have to do that. Without having to pay into the TPPF, county projects might be faster and cheaper, but urban forests will suffer and citizens will

continue to complain about the visible loss of trees.

The revised letter has dropped any suggestion of adding requirements to the Public Facilities Manual (PFM). As a compromise, the revised letter suggested a BOS policy that requires county staff to report on tree preservation and planting outcomes on all approved county linear projects for three years so that information could be included in the Tree Commission's Annual Report.

Discussion included questions about the value of paying into the TPPF to use for newly planted trees vs. careful preservation of mature trees. It was noted there are statistical models such as iTree that can be used for analyses of tree value. The results of these analyses might be included in the reports from the county that are included in the Annual Report. Discussions also covered requirements of county, VDOT and joint projects, and other associated topics.

The letter needs further clarifications and adjustments before finalization, and it was agreed that the Tree Commission would ask for another meeting with county staff to discuss these questions and issues before completing the letter.

New Business:

- **Tree Preservation and Planting Fund (TPPF)**

Jim McGlone was absent, so this conversation was postponed. The Tree Commission has a seat at the multi-county agency panel that manages the TPPF, and Commissioner McGlone has filled that responsibility. Discussion would have included questions about the time commitment, level of content review and other related topics. A new commissioner will be needed to fill that role. TPPF policy states that the BOS and the Tree Commission will receive a copy of the TPPF report annually. UFMD's Hugh Whitehead will present that report at our July meeting.

- **Response to the Annual Report Responses from the County**

The BOS approved a Board Matter asking staff to respond to the Tree Commission's 2022 Annual Report recommendations, addressing each one individually, and the Chair has written a draft letter for review. Its main purpose is to thank the BOS and county staff for their time, energy, thoughts, and ideas and to suggest using the staff report as a vehicle to pursue continuing dialogue with the BOS. The letter comments that any items regarding changes to Virginia code will be addressed during the development of the 2024 legislative package this summer, and all other items will be addressed in the upcoming 2023 Annual Report. Those can be divided into areas where staff says the county is already acting--we can ask for results and supporting documentation, and areas where county actions have been delayed based on the Mt. Vernon Infill Task Force report that has not yet been taken up by the BOS.

The 2023 Annual Report content was briefly discussed. This year's report should focus on every staff conclusion/comment and our response. Our responses can be taken up at the July meeting. Chair Speas will email the Tree Commission with details on drafting the 2023 Annual Report.

Commissioner Suter moved to approve the letter to the BOS on staff responses to the 2022 Annual Report, as presented. Commissioner Leslie seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Development of Tree Commission educational messaging and materials:**

Vice-Chair Kolish shared that there is a new *Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives* Ambassador webinar

available. This training can provide templates and scripts that can be used by commissioners for most public presentations on trees. She and Chair Speas have signed up to take the webinar and will report back to the Tree Commission on this and what other materials can be used for public outreach supporting the Tree 50th anniversary and other events. A good reference document is *Flora and Fauna of Fairfax County* which was put out by the DPWES Stormwater Division, and can be found in county libraries.

- **Consideration of new start time**

Chair Speas opened discussion about possibly starting our meetings at 6:45 pm to get more work accomplished. Due to work schedules and long commutes/traffic, some commissioners did not support a permanent change. Policies allow two (2) zoom meetings per year, so as an alternative, the Tree Commission will have Zoom meetings in September and December (busiest travel times), and will start at 6:45 in June (lighter traffic) to see how the earlier time.

UFMD Director's Update — Director Brian Keightley:

- Director Keightley played the You Tube video of him representing UFMD which received the 2023 Canopy Award from Casey Trees.
- UFMD was busy with April Earth Day and Arbor Day activities, and will busy in May with upcoming grant proposals.
- UFMD will be getting back on track with the three TPPF-funded grants with Casey Trees:
 - Satellite Imagery is under way and GIS folks are getting some information. They are seeing less decline in canopy than was expected. These data will be available for publication this summer.
 - The Tree Commission's 50th anniversary tree planting at the Government Center has been approved, but the details have not been finalized yet.
 - Tree plantings at ten (10) schools have also been approved.
- UFMD is still figuring out the impact of moving the Conservation group to LDS, and will it be focused on upcoming tree planting and a possible new branch established for that purpose.
- In response to a question about availability of the tree canopy study results for the 2023 Annual Report, Director Keightley noted that the data from the satellite imagery is already being used to feed a Virginia Tech study, funded by Casey Trees and supported by Fairfax County, to analyze canopy change over the past ten years, The BOS will have to be briefed before results can be released, but the data may be available for the 2023 Annual Report.

Announcements:

- Chair Speas, Commissioner Kadet, and former Commissioner, Laura Beaty, attended the Arbor Day event at Mantua Elementary for a tree planting. It was a good event, where they answered tree questions from third graders prior to the classes joining in planting the trees.
- Other announcements will be sent out via email to end the meeting on time.

Chair Speas adjourned the meeting at 8:58 pm.