

Urban Forest Commission

Meeting Minutes March 21, 2018

Attendance:

Commissioners: Mike Pennington, Christine Penney, Beth Kleinke, Susan Stanich, Judy Gibbs, Brandon Van Tassel

City Staff: Clark Christenson, City Forester; Erik Birkeland, Ex-Officio

City Councilor Em Westerlund

Call to Order:

The meeting started at 6:00.

Minute Approval:

A motion was made to approve the minutes pending minor amendments from the February 21th, 2018, Meeting. M/S/C.

Public Comment Period

Woodland Avenue Road Construction Project

Ben Garland (public) spoke towards the Woodland Avenue Road Construction Project that will be started in 2019 by St. Louis County. He is concerned that no trees are included in the reconstruction and the lack of any public process during the design phase of the project.

Erik Birkeland (City of Duluth) stated that the Urban Forest Commission has only been aware of the project for three weeks. This project is being completed by St. Louis County. The Urban Forest Commission is working with The City of Duluth Engineering Department to replace trees. Funding for the trees will come from the City of Duluth.

Forester's Report

Western Waterfront Trail Clear Cut

It was brought to the City's attention that a developer clear cut land around South 72nd Avenue W & Milford Street. This happened approximately 10 years ago. The Planning Department looked into their records and determined that the Developer acted within his rights when the work was completed. With the current Unified Development Chapter this work would not be allowed. This was brought before the Commission as an example of whether or not the Commission would like to weigh in on future occurrences of this nature. The Commission acknowledged that they would like to be involved in any instance of future infractions of the Unified Development Chapter.

Public Speakers on the clear cut:

Alison Clarke stated that the Urban Forest Commission needs to be involved early in projects that affect trees to give their expert opinion on how best to proceed. She also inquired about who is responsible for enforcement of the Unified Development Chapter and the difficulties enforcing infractions.

Gail Gilliland stated that she spoke with Kyle Demming from the Planning Department about the Department of Natural Resources shoreline rules. She stated that no cutting should occur 50' back from the high water mark. To preserve viewsapes she suggested planting low native plant species. She suggested this rule should be enforced along the St. Louis River.

New Business:

Commission Effectiveness

The Commissioners discussed how to be more effective in the project planning process. Before the creation of the Urban Forest Commission, it was preceded by the Environmental Advisory Committee. This committee was the regulatory body for proposed projects. It was dissolved and the regulatory responsibility was transferred to the Planning Department. The Planning Department oversees the compliance and the enforcement of the Unified Development Chapter.

Items that were identified that reduces the effectiveness of the Urban Forest Commission are:

1. Projects or City Departments are not required to vet projects through the Commission for their input.
2. Street projects have not been vetted through the Urban Forest Commission. The Commission usually gets involved after the projects have been bid and the public process is underway. The Commission would like to find a way to be on the front end of projects to approve and identify potential problems.

A suggestion was made to have the Commission evolve into a Natural Resources Committee. This would expand the scope of their expertise to other areas besides trees. It was also suggested that one of the open seats on the Commission be filled with an expert on wetlands.

The Commission will continue to work on solutions through the Executive Board meeting and correspondence.

Report by Diane Desotelle

Diane Desotelle is the Natural Resource Coordinator for the City of Duluth. She asked the Commission for nominate Duluth park areas for management plans. She also asked for assistance from the Commission to look at all of the City lands and prioritize projects and maintenance options.

Old Business

City Forester

The City of Duluth will be hiring a full time City Forester. The position should be filled in June or July.

Adjournment

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:08, m/s/c.