



## NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION AGENDA

December 6, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.  
Hartley Nature Center  
3001 Woodland Ave.  
Duluth, MN 55811

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### I. Call to Order [Chair Lindgren]

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

### II. Roll Call [Sam Singer]

Commissioners Present: Pam Foster, Judy Gibbs, John Lindgren, Mike Schrage, Nancy Schuldt, Tiffany Sprague, Michael Raichel, Andrew Streit

Absent: Lori Dando

Staff Present: Kate Kubiak, Clark Christensen, Sam Singer

Chair Lindgren introduced new Commissioner, Michael Raichel. Commissioner Raichel described his interest and professional experience related to natural resource management.

### III. Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Schuldt made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Foster. Unanimously approved.

### IV. Approval of the November 1, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Streit made a motion to approve the November 1, 2023 meeting minutes; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

### V. Old Business

None

### VI. New Business

#### A. Application Received for Viewshed Relief – Skyline Drive

Christensen reviewed city ordinance Chapter 35, Section 29.1 guiding actions related to citizens requesting to remove trees on public property that are obstructing their view. Ordinance states “Removal shall be performed under the supervision of the tree inspector, provided that removal of five or more trees shall occur only after consultation with the tree commission.” The Natural Resources Commission was formerly known as the Tree Commission and so is being asked to review the application for viewshed relief. Christensen described consultation already provided to requestor and planned site visit, marking of trees to be removed, requirement for removal to be conducted by a licensed tree service, and replacement plantings of vegetation after removal. Viewshed relief application is for trees on public land and does not include trees on private property, which would be a matter between private parties and would not involve the city forester. Discussion among Commissioners on what, if anything should be left at the site of the removed trees, whether stumps would be removed, whether there would be chipping on site, whether there were any special species among the trees to be removed, and the nature of the vegetation to be planted afterwards. Commissioner Schuldt requests a report from Christensen after conducting the site visit of trees to be removed.



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#### **B. Presentation – Replacement species in black ash wetlands: Adapting to EAB and Climate Change**

Brian Palik, Researcher with the US Forest Service Northern Research Station based in Grand Rapids, attended the meeting to provide information on research findings on replacement species in black ash wetlands.

The USFS Northern Research Station is focused on forest ecology including impacts of climate change and invasive species. Palik's research project is based in the Chippewa National Forest, which is rich in black ash and an area of particular concern with EAB moving into the area. EAB's migration into the Chippewa National Forest is linked with climate change, as the area has been identified as a climate hotspot, warming at a quicker rate than other areas in the nation.

The impact of black ash dying in wetlands is of concern due to the impacts on the wetland, becoming wetter, and allowing sedge/shrubs to dominate – impacting the diversity of mammals residing within the wetlands. Black ash wetlands are unique habitat, with a greater number of species than in upland. When canopy is lost, the mix of species changes.

Palik's research is focused on what other tree species might be appropriate replacements for black ash when it dies as a result of EAB infestation. After simulating EAB infestation, attempted different planting scenarios with both native and non-native species and tracked growth. Group selection seems to be the most successful where ash is cut into groups with replacement species planted in between. Swamp White Oak and American Elm has been successful in growing in these settings. These species can also be planted within uncut forests with nearly the same survival indicating planting within uncut forests is possible and it's not necessary to group clear before planting.

Continued study in planting different species in uncut wetlands, including Silver Maple. Continue to measure and monitor growth but at this point, it appears Swamp White Oak and Silver Maple are doing well.

Discussion among Commissioners and Palik on whether there was a discernable difference between wet and very wet sites (no, there wasn't). Commissioner Schuldt asks whether Swamp White Oak is susceptible to oak wilt. Christensen says it's less susceptible and there isn't oak wilt in our area as of yet. EAB treatments and efficacy discussed as well.

#### **VII. Staff Reports**

##### **A. Natural Resources Coordinator's Report [Kate Kubiak]**

Kubiak outlined issues and concerns facing Duluth forests: under-ash planting/forested wetlands, replacing aging aspen/popple and possibly restoring long-lived conifers, controlling invasives – buckthorn and scotch pine, and preparing forests for climate change. In addition to climate change, there are other challenges to Duluth forests including emerald ash borer and other pests, historically high deer populations, wildlife suppression and lack of natural disturbance, historic logging at the turn of the century. Current grant-funded work with Community Action Duluth underway to remove buckthorn but replacement planting and maintenance not part of the project. Proposing grant-funded work in Mission Tract, planting River Birch, Silver Maple, Swamp White Oak, and in Amity Tract, planting White Pine,



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Yellow Birch and Red Oak. Highlighted efforts by other agencies to plant conifers as part of restoration activities in the area. Known black ash forests in Mission watershed that should be prioritized. Activity proposed in focus watersheds include work in newly acquired land near Downer Park and Park Hill cemetery, Lester Park, and reforestation field on city property off Riley Road. Additional opportunity for plantings in Tischer Watershed. Although the city has limited resources in staff time and funding, underscored the importance of active management of city's forests and the negative outcome from no management.

Second Annual City/Partners Natural Resources Projects Review Meeting had 35 attendees, representing 15 different organizations and agencies, discussing 44 different projects in the area.

Discussion among Commissioners on other grant-funded work underway in Kingsbury area and Mission Creek. Possible need for follow-up and maintenance care. Commissioner Sprague mentions past collaborative work with Thompson Township and area boy scout troops on planting as well as past project in Amity watershed.

Commissioner Streitz appreciated recent meeting to discuss plans for Hartley Pond and remarked on engaged citizens who attended the meeting. Still concerns about people living downstream from the pond and their relationship with the creek. Commissioner Schuldt asked about timing for the final report on the feasibility study. Kubiak says the DNR has extended the contract with the consultants through June and is looking at other possible proposed actions including an engineered gate and culvert. Commissioner Lindgren references more recent communication addressing those proposed solutions.

Commissioner Schrage raised concern about reference in a recent Duluth News Tribune article referencing Parks Commission role in determining plans for Hartley Pond. Kubiak restated the material of the article, clarifying that the reference was to the Hartley Park Mini-Master Plan which the Parks Commission was involved in approving in 2014, before the conception of the Natural Resources Commission.

### **B. Forester's Report [Clark Christenson]**

Contractors are removing ash trees through the winter, funded through grants from the DNR. These trees are more challenging for the forester and team to handle as well as time consuming. Replanting with species that are diverse and appropriate to the block. Will continue removals of ash trees in the spring. Have moved on to pruning and expect to continue that work through March.

### **VIII. Announcements**

None

### **IX. Public Comment**

Parking Commission released new plans for Superior Street West redevelopment which include removing 140 parking spaces and putting in boulevards and bike lanes. Wondering if Parks Maintenance has the capacity to manage that additional responsibility. Christensen confirms that they are aware of the proposed changes and that the bike lanes are to be used as snow storage and not cleared through the winter. The Cross City Trail will continue to be maintained and offers bike access through the area. The



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plans also include rain gardens but their maintenance would be the responsibility of the Storm Water team with the city.

**X. Adjournment**

Commissioner Sprague made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Schuldt.

**Next Meeting** – Wednesday, January 3, 2024 at 6 PM in Conference Room 430, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor City Hall

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