

CHARLOTTESVILLE TREE COMMISSION

September 2, 2025

5:00 – 7:00 pm

MINUTES

**In-Person Meeting – Parks and Recreation Office
(Downtown Mall, Adjacent to Parking Garage)**

Call to Order 5:03.

Minutes approved

For next meeting add commissioners who were not at the meeting

Introduction of new Commissioners

5:05-5:15

Worthy Martin - On the Landscape and Arboretum committee at UVA, now retired Assoc. Professor of Computer Science, worked in IATH. Lives in the Fry's Springs neighborhood.

Shea Wales - Works in climate action, ecological restoration, background in forest ecology and lives in the Fry's Springs neighborhood.

Commissioners in-attendance:

Susan McKinnon, Chair

JD Brown

Tyler Miller

Hannah Brown

Woody Parrish

Shanti Levy, Vice Chair

MaKshya Tolbert

Betsy Roettger

Commissioners not in-attendance:

2 vacant positions

City:

Steve Gaines - Urban Forester, Charlottesville Parks and Rec

Katie Lockhart - Deputy Director, Charlottesville Parks and Rec

Guests:

Cathy Byd - Executive Director of ReLeaf Cville

Tori Kanellopoulos - City of Charlottesville, Long Range Planner

Ruth – UVA student

At 6pm:

Kellie Brown, Director of Neighborhood Development Services (NDS), City of Charlottesville

Matthew Alfele, Development Planning Manager, City of Charlottesville

Riaan Anthony, Director of Parks and Recreation

Urban Forest Management Plan – Update

- Parks and Recreation will continue working with Eocene Environmental Consultants to compose an up-to-date Urban Forest Management plan. This document will be an adaptive approach to the management of City owned properties and rights of way.

GAINES: Will probably be hiring Eocene for more work - currently negotiating new contract. More funds will come from the Environmental Sustainability, some from Parks and Recreation.

Invasive Plant Control Update

- Rx Fire to resume forestry mulching/herbicide treatments/pollinator installations/tree installations in late summer/fall 2025.

GAINES: This will happen towards the end of September, let the trees finish flowering and birds and bees do their thing. Steve will place the planting plan on Microsoft Teams and will try to add what will be planted and when. Will be adding pollinator gardens in new areas, like Riverview Park and under power lines.

Tree Planting Fall 2025

- Staff will be compiling maps for tree installations city wide. Project RFQ released by Sept 20, 2025, for installations to occur by early January 2026.

GAINES: They are in the middle of tree planting now, they are focusing on schools this year, also the usual right of ways etc. Greenbriar School getting about 20 trees

Downtown Mall Trees

- Staff inspected all trees on the mall over August 2025. We will expect annual tree pruning in early January 2026.

GAINES: Not as much big dead wood as in year's past – but trees are getting old. Analysis is done and they plan to do a pruning in January.

Question about invasive treatments: Do you put signs up for the public to understand what is happening? Yes, the City does press releases and puts up signs in the area.

Question: What do you mean by an adaptive approach? This approach leaves room for changes as we go.

Tolbert: Friends of the Downtown Mall will be meeting about the 50th anniversary for the Downtown Mall at 9am tomorrow morning, 9/3/25. Makasha will be there at the meeting as the New City Arts representative and will be report back about this.

New/Old Business

- **Update and follow-through on TC Recruitment (All)**

McKINNON: 2 new members are here today, but our 2 LINR positions remain vacant. Flyers have been circulated and notes sent to neighborhood leaders. But there were no applicants from those neighborhoods in the last round. We will try to recruit again. What is the best way to do this?

LEVI: Took flyers to Fifeville Neighborhood Association meeting but there was low attendance at that one meeting due to the basketball game.

GAINES: On the Day of Caring, there may be interested residents, they will be at Tonsler Park doing trail work and invasive plant control.

McKINNON: CHIPP people can spread the word.

- ***Preparing for the meeting with NDS***

Question: Kellie Brown's checklist says saving existing trees is more difficult - why is that?

GAINES: The total canopy cover is what counts as developers. There is more of a risk to say they are going to preserve trees which takes much work and trees can die – rather than planting new trees

Ideas for offering more information earlier in the development process were discussed:

- Pre application conference – this is a time/place to share educational material with developers
- Development Plan Review – NDS will want more documentation of the existing trees
- Final site plan

Could have a tree commissioner or arborist join meetings or have a packet of best tree saving practices to give the developer

Tree Commission/NDS could give developers tools, websites, time of year, what species are best, give a percentage of whether or not the trees would live – general METRICS need to show the power of keeping the tree.

Calculating the critical root zone etc. - include in the packet

Is planting the easiest way to meet the requirements – what about having a percentage of existing canopy kept vs planting new trees?'

What about including a list of grants or financial assistance to keeping large trees?

5:59 Kellie Brown – from Director of NDS to respond to the Tree Commission letter

Kelly has been in this role in Charlottesville and living here for almost a year now

Matthew Alfele, Development Planning Manager, City of Charlottesville and Tori Kanellopoulos - City of Charlottesville, Long Range Planner are here and will be our best contacts for this work going forward.

BROWN: Worked on the missing middle housing in Arlington, VA. They tried some more progressive tree preservation and planting strategies with the passage of their new zoning – was very difficult.

Thank you for the letter from the tree commission - Great opportunity to talk about what happened on Garrett Street and come up with new ideas.

How to ensure protection through the official site plan process.

Noted in the letter the difference between:

1. New planting
2. Existing trees
3. Voluntary planting

Need to clarify the documentation for trees counted toward canopy.

Need to endorse professional documentation for canopy trees.

NDS collaborating with Parks and Rec and City Arborist for technical standards.

New Zoning Inspector role is funded to review and endorse tree preservation plans – will be posting position next week.

Tree removal permits - required for trees over 8" caliber, how has this been working, needs more administrative support?

What about bonds for trees?

In Northern Virginia – state code allows a jurisdiction to have more stringent requirements (seem to be the localities around/ adjacent? to the Chesapeake Bay). Could we also push for legislative changes to add Central Virginia to the list?

Tree Canopy – we can enforce tree canopy up to the maximum that the state allows.

Current \$2500 fine for cutting down trees that are to be kept– this is in the state code – are there opportunities for stronger penalties?

Classify trees as stormwater reduction?

Overall, NDS is looking at all their environmental regulations for room to improve the tree canopy and preserve existing trees.

Next steps – New zoning enforcer – want arborist designation – part of the job description. Ongoing planning and interdepartmental study needed

6:17 JD Brown – presents tree commission ideas on behalf of the tree commission

Really appreciate NDS coming in, Tree Commission would like to be active in these discussions and to help produce educational materials.

- What is available right now and what can be improved?
- Longer term improvements

First – need to preserve more existing trees and elevate their importance.

Need to use the expertise of arborists as much as possible.

Need to communicate options to developers and landowners – benefits and costs of tree preservation and tools available to them.

IDEAS:

Shorter Term

- Make an educational packet of materials available for developer or landowners.
- Make the tree permit process more visible.
- If we do this early (talk with developers), there are more options to save trees – change the culture of the site plan processes to add this tree preservation layer to all discussions.
- Improve the standard for site plan drawings – Make sure the all plans are drawn to scale on drawings and accurately mark trees.
- Develop Case studies
Why saving the trees could be a financial benefit – clarify the cost of replacing an older tree... Show metrics.

Longer Term

- Identify what is possible within the state regulations and where we can make progress in the following areas:
 - Creating incentives
 - Changing stormwater fee and structure
 - Updating the enforcement
 - Offering preservation credits – does our current system reflect the right credit?

Question: If we were going to make a pamphlet to talk about the cost for removal of trees vs. the cost to preserve the trees – how would we do this? What happens after a developer comes to talk to NDS?

Matthew Alfele (NDS) explained the sequence of meetings:

1. First: A developer will schedule a **pre-application meeting on Wednesdays**, multi-departmental representatives there for a 30-minute time slot. Developer needs to bring a prelim site plan for feedback. Sometimes developers skip this meeting and come in with plans already drawn up.
2. Next, the applicant submits a pre-development plan – should be more of a zoning site plan, sometimes developers get very detailed too soon (at this stage), adding engineering drawings and wanting to move more quickly.
3. The final site plan is submitted – must have all the engineering and everything worked out

Question: When would be the best time to offer the pamphlet?

Have it available to developers (e.g., in Cadre) as part of all the development review guidance.

Go to developers before they come to NDS instead of waiting for developers to bring in plans.

Issues: 50% of developers already have their plans set

Is it possible to pace them or slow them down? State code obligates the City to process the applications in a certain number of days – state just voted to make cities work more quickly.

Why can't we get the developers to come in before they've already produced a plan? In the pre-application meeting?

KELLIE BROWN: The State made a law that applicants can go straight to the final site plan so the City can only *encourage* the applicants to do the pre-development meetings. Remember the new zoning is intentionally “as of right.” This is to encourage more housing to be built.

NDS: Brochures could be helpful because out of town developers still hire local firms to do the work.

GAINES: Could we get arborists on call to help designers decide whether it is possible to save trees when it is still possible to move units around. Could do research and find grant opportunities (\$\$) for this step to go towards saving trees.

ALFELE NDS: Grant opportunities can use an Equity lens - in places where they need canopy, this would benefit the whole city.

R ANTHONY: Do we really want to preserve trees at this particular site - this must be an investment for the city (city needs a checklist to help preserve the trees). Discussion about complexities between density and trees and need for housing, be more proactive about our own public trees.

KELLIE BROWN: We have an opportunity to focus on better details in plans and then better enforcement. Need to improve the required documentation on site plans and tree preservation plans.

Various ideas were discussed:

- Need to ask for better drawing standards on the site plans – really showing utility lines, poles, trenching, and more details for the real size of trees (roots).
- Need to really show the value of the tree.
- Could use Cadre – to reach local firms and developers to as advocates. This could be a place to push for changes. Go to Cadre meeting to talk about incentives to preserve trees – get developer feedback.
- We need the City to TELL people that we want to preserve the trees – really advocate.
- There is a big difference between a heritage tree vs. the 8” caliber tree – need to think of it as **valuable infrastructure**. Need to clarify the size, age, condition of the tree – not just caliber.

General Public Comment

6:55-7:00

Adjourn 7:08pm

(†) At the discretion of the Chair, public comments related to particular agenda items may be solicited at that point in the meeting.

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