URBAN FORESTRY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, December 19, 2012 - 5:30 p.m.
City Hall, 301 W. 2nd Street, Room 1029
Austin, Texas 78701

URBAN FORESTRY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2012

Board Members in Attendance:
Patrick Brewer, Chair, Tom Hayes, Vice Chair, Board Members Nicholas Classen, Ryan Fleming, Peggy Maceo, Daniel VanTreeck

Staff in Attendance:

Parks and Recreation Department:
Pat Fuller, Division Manager, Park Ranger Division
Angela Hanson, Executive Liaison
Robert Clawson, Staff Liaison

Austin Energy Department
Ray Henning

Ex-Officio Members in Attendance:
Jessica Wilson, Environmental Conservation Manager, Watershed Protection Department Director Designee
Michael Embesi, City Arborist, Planning and Development Review Department

MEETING MINUTES

A. CALL TO ORDER
Board Chair Brewer called the meeting to order at 5:34P.M.

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
1. Motion made by Board member Fleming, seconded by Vice-Chair Hayes to approve the UFB meeting minutes of November 14, 2012. Board member Maceo abstained.

C. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION
The first 4 (four) speakers signed up prior to the calling of the meeting to order are allowed a three-minute allotment each to address their concerns regarding items not posted on the agenda.

Craig Nazor – Sierra Club – Trees/Austin Energy – LCRA Electrical issue at Gracywoods neighborhood. Eight years trees were trimmed and removed. Four years later, more trees were trimmed. Now trees to be trimmed again. Higher gauge transmission lines put in. 70% of canopy removed. Recommended to contact UFB members individually to sponsor an action item, or contact council member or the Mayor.

Zoila Vega – Parker Lane Trees – Copy of email to UFB members distributed. Amount of water for these trees an issue. What is plan for watering these trees?
Brian Leonard – Barton Springs Pool – Petition presented to UFB against grounds improvement project. South Hill changes are the issue. 1,254 signatures gathered requesting no changes on South Hill.

D. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Introduction of Daniel vanTreeck, new UFB member.
Jessica Wilson – Grow Green Landscape training. Email sent to UFB members. Ready, Set, Plant. Partnership with PARD. Encourages larger buffer zones. More info on Tree Folks website.
Angela Hanson – Two containerized tree planting this week. Using reclaimed water. Invasive Species Management Plan – Bloomberg grant awarded. Imagine Austin – staff working on outlining green infrastructure priority program.
Michael Embesi – Jay Culver retired.

Board Chair Brewer announced a change to the order of the Agenda: First: Update on Republic Square Master Plan, second, move briefing on Lower Shoal Creek and Seaholm Development, and move #3 action item – Discuss and make recommendations for staff about vegetation issues in the Lower Shoal Creek and Seaholm Developments, to allow City staff to present briefings, and give board members time to discuss.

E. DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

1. Discussion and recommendation of possible action for submittal of UFB comments on the proposed Urban Wildland Interface code to lessen fire hazards in the Austin Area. Presenter: UFB Working Group – Urban Wildland Interface working Group.
   Presentation made by Board member Fleming. In the UFB recommendation regarding the proposed WUI fire code, all words "should" be changed to "shall". Motion made by Board member Fleming, seconded by Board Vice-Chair Hayes, to accept the recommendations with changes of the Wildfire Interface code to lessen fire hazards in the Austin area for fire risk reduction and forward to City Council. All in favor.

2. Provide recommendations to City Council on the Barton Springs Grounds Improvement Plan. Presenter: Patrick Brewer, Board Chair. Citizen comments by Brian Leonard regarding language concerning South side. Vice Chair Hayes provided a draft letter concerning increasing soil volumes on the south parking area and the use of Silva cells, and Chair Brewer provided a document listing five points on pitfalls in the tree court area. (Please Board and Commission website for a copy of these handouts). Motion made by Vice Chair Hayes, seconded by Board member Fleming to provide recommendations to council regarding south parking lot, tree court and south lawn at Barton Springs Pool.
   Substitute motion – Motion made by Board member Fleming, seconded by vanTreeck to approve Barton Springs General Grounds Improvement Plan, with following recommendations:
   1. With regard to renovations in the Tree Court area, to assuage concerns for protection of tree root zones, the following recommendations are made for construction activities and staging:
      A. That the entire Tree Court is treated as a Critical Root Zone, and all associated protection and compaction avoidance restrictions be followed.
      B. That decomposed granite is removed from the root zones and beneath the proposed walk to native grade.
      C. That the piers for the concrete walk suspended pavement are excavated for the first two feet with an air excavation tool.
      D. That the soil beneath the suspended pavement is de-compacted after the piers are poured and heavy equipment will not be used on the soil.

E. That an approved Certified Arborist, Registered Consulting arborist, or appropriate city staff be present during soil work operations to approve each of the above stages of construction.

2. Remove the overlook from the plan and pathway to the overlook.
3. Increase size of planting median in south parking area to 4000 square feet and reduce the large maturing trees in the planting to two trees. All in favor.

3. Discuss and make recommendations for staff about vegetation issues in the Lower Shoal Creek and Seaholm Developments. Presenter: Patrick Brewer, Board Chair. Soil issue volumes were discussed. Working group to assemble to provide input for this project specifically about improving soil volumes. Chair Brewer, and Board members Maceo and vanTreeck to present information to Board at the January, 2013 meeting. Motion made by Board member Fleming, seconded by Board member Maceo to postpone action on this item until the January 2013 meeting. All in favor.

4. Discussion and action to request more time to review and refine the process for implementing the Pilot Program for Prominent Trees. Presenter: Board Member Maceo. Motion made by Board member Fleming, seconded by Board member Maceo. to approve the letter to be sent to Mayor and Council member to ask for more time to address and refine process for preserving prominent trees. All in favor. Working group consists of Board member Maceo, Vice-Chair Hayes and Zoila Marchena. Board member Christopher Kite appoint to working group.

F. BRIEFINGS

4. Briefing on Lower Shoal Creek and Seaholm Developments. Presenter: Cynthia Jordan, Project Manager, Public Works Department and Marty Stump, Project Management Supervisor, Parks and Recreation Department. 2nd Street extension and and Library discussed. Seaholm redevelopment has multiple contractors, contracts, stakeholders. Public spaces to be developed. Power point presentation given. Heritage trees on Green Treatment? Eight protected heritage trees. Board member Classen stated he wanted to make sure the tree would be planted to be able to grow into heritage trees. Criteria will be met. No willows to be planted. Sidewalk along Seaholm wall being moved back to not interfere with the root zone of two trees. Chair Brewer stated a concern about soil volume amounts. Structural soil only used under pavement.

5. Austin Energy Line Clearance Monthly Update -- Ray Henning, Line Clearance Superintendent, Austin Energy. Monthly report presented by Ray Henning. Line miles are down. Working in neighborhoods with Oak Wilt issues. Tree distribution down some. In part due to holidays. Customer calls staying down. No significant storms. Offices have just been moved to 2500 Montopolis. Reason for not having monthly report ready for posting prior to meeting.

6. City Arborist Program Tree Presentation and Replenishment Monthly Update – Michael Embesi, City Arborist, Planning and Development Review Department. Inclement weather possible. Crews are on standby. November and December stats are lower. Permitting is up for November and December. Downtown tree inventory completed and field work done. Data collected on all 19 inch and larger heritage tree species in central business district and all trees in the right of way.

7. City Arborist Program Heritage Tree Monthly Update – Michael Embesi, City Arborist, Planning and Development Review Department. Multiple heritage trees removed due to poor health. Keith Morris introduced. Update given on Bowie Street Pecan tree. Environmental Design company doing the work. Board member Maceo asked about the agreement with the state concerning purchases of land sales with the City and some sort of working group with the City manager on a new interface between City

Manager and the land at 45th and Bull Creek. Not sure of results of the City council meeting. Would need to check with City Legal. Vice-Chair Hayes requested briefings on expenditures at future meetings. To be reported annually.

8. Update on Republic Square Master Plan. Presenter: Philip Koske, Design Workshop. Presentation on updates. Now at 90% phase of development. Now going to Boards and Commission to finalize plans. Design alternatives to deal with existing trees. Trees on 4th street to remain. Not proposing to move any trees from this site. San Antonio frontage – no increase of impervious coverage. Plaza area to have some trees.

9. UFB Review and update on Strategic Goals Progress Report. Presenter: Patrick Brewer, Board Chair. Chair Brewer has been working on the soil volume issue. Board member Classen reported on review of the roles of the Urban Forestry Board and recommend expansion in key areas. Need to be involved in the early stages of projects. Recommending staff give UFB opportunity to participate in plans earlier. Expand advisory role to assist Forestry staff and actively participate in the development of standards for tree standards and best management practices. Staff be encouraged to periodically provide Oak Wilt information. Provide number of trees affected. Areas where Austin Energy will be pruning trees. Expand community outreach. Request input in the Urban Forest Management Plan. UFB to provide information concerning private trees.

10. Comprehensive Urban Forest Plan Update. Presenters: Leah Haynie, Program Coordinator, Forestry, and Angela Hanson, Acting Forestry Program Manager, Parks and Recreation Department. City code requirement since 1992. Staff met with approximately 10 City departments to work on this Plan. Initial outline developed and draft vision statement completed. Public input session held in April 2012. Nine hundred responses generated. Two working group meeting in June 2012 to review progress to date. Two working group meeting in December 2012. Leah Haynie reported on the two working group meetings in December. Board member Classen stated more public input is needed.

G. URBAN FORESTER EXECUTIVE LIAISON REPORT -- Angela Hanson, Acting Program Manager, Parks and Recreation Department, Urban Forestry Program, including:

- Monthly Notification: Removal of protected size trees on parkland that constitute an imminent public safety hazard. Forestry program provided input to the request for proposals for scope of work for management operations and maintenance of city cemeteries. Current contract expires in April 2013. PARD to find replacement contractor. There have been concerns about the work of the current contractor. Scope of work revised. Had stakeholder input. Scope of work includes annual limited visual risk assessment and surveys of 3-inch and larger trees. Email received from Zoila Marchena regarding watering of cemetery trees. Angela Hanson to report on this item at January 2013 meeting.
- Update on Invasive Species Management Plan implementation. Information provided in Announcements this meeting. Mapping City owned priority properties. Where on City owned land could we achieve multiple benefits by providing land management, top of watershed, creek buffer? Will help decide where to collect data. Staff was directed by City Council to look into the relationship between storm water and trees. Should we be funding tree maintenance out of the storm drainage fund? Average tree reduces 1700 to 2400 gallons of storm water per year.

H. FUTURE ITEMS FROM BOARD MEMBERS

Ideas for expansion of Urban Forestry Board. Presenter: Board Chair Patrick Brewer.

Discuss and make recommendations for staff about vegetation issues in the Lower Shoal Creek and Seaholm Developments. Presenter: Patrick Brewer, Board Chair

Update on Urban Forestry Board Management Plan Working Group. Presenter: Board Chair Patrick Brewer.

Executive Liaison Report on watering of trees at Parker Lane. Angela Hanson, Acting Program Manager, PARD Urban Forestry Program.

Meetings for 2013 will be at Northwest Recreation Center, 2913 Northland.

I. ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Brewer adjourned the meeting at 9:22P.M. without objection.

The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the American with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications are provided upon request. Meeting locations are planned with wheelchair access. If requiring Sign Language Interpreters or alternative formats, please give notice at least 4 (four) days before the meeting date. Please call Robert Clawson at the Parks and Recreation Department, at 978-2600, for additional information; TTY users route through Relay Texas at 711.

For more information on the Urban Forestry Board, please contact Angela Hanson at angela.hanson@austintexas.gov or by phone at 974-9551.

TO: **Mayor Leffingwell and City Council members; Chief Evans, AFD; Marc Ott, City Manager; Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager; Sue Edwards, Assistant City Manager; Sara Hensley, PARD Director; Victoria Li, WPD Director; Michael Embesi, City Arborist; William Conrad, BCCP Secretary**

FROM: **City of Austin Urban Forestry Board**

DATE: **December 19, 2012**

SUBJECT: **Recommendations Regarding the Proposed Wildland Urban Interface Code**

The City of Austin Urban Forestry Board (UFB) recognizes that Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fire is a serious concern. However, fire risk reduction is not only just a fire issue, but a critical ecological and environmental issue that impacts the entire community. A rational approach is needed to balance the needs for fire risk reduction with protecting the urban forest environment.

Vegetative fuel load reduction does not provide significant fire risk reduction unless it is combined with home hardening. The majority of homes do not catch fire from a fire front, but from embers. Case studies show that the majority of home fires are started by embers that travel up to 5 miles and land on combustible materials, most often a shingle roof or a pile of leaves in the gutter.

Retrofitting existing homes on a neighborhood basis to minimize combustibility is important, since adjacent burning houses are a leading cause of home ignition. Relative to vegetation, structures exhibit more intense fire with a longer residence time, increasing the likelihood of igniting adjacent structures. Fire from neighboring homes is often more devastating and a greater ignition threat than fire from vegetation. Homes built very close to each other in new subdivisions facilitate ignition by exposure to other burning houses.

The UFB strongly recommends the following regarding the new WUI fire code:

- The new WUI code shall incorporate all of the Watershed Department's comments on the draft ordinance, including the boundary map.
- The fire chief shall collaborate with other departments both for writing the WUI code and when implementing the code (i.e., when deciding on individual cases).
- The home hardening measures for fire risk reduction shall be required for new and existing homes and other structures within the WUI zone. City building code shall be revised to include such measures, including those listed in Appendix A.
    - ⇨A retroactive reduction in existing home ignition potential shall be the top priority, because potential combustibility is the principal cause of home losses in WUI fires. Studies show that hardening the home provides a risk reduction of about twice as much as that obtained from removal of vegetative fuel load.
- WUI regulations that prioritize vegetation removal shall be avoided, since protecting trees and vegetation is crucial for a healthy urban forest.
- The new WUI fire code shall follow Firewise recommendations to reduce home and structural ignition, such as decreasing and disconnecting these and other fuel load paths around the home.
- Once structures are retrofitted to minimize ignition potential, the defensible space shall be determined on a case by case basis by AFD experts working with other City departments. Defensible space prescriptions shall be carefully adapted to the local hazard level and topography, as well as on-site structures, vegetation, and irrigation. Firewise defensible space guidelines (30 ft. and 100 ft. buffers) shall only serve as a starting point for adapting regulations (up or down) to the site.
    - ⇨Prior to implementation, the commonly used recommendation, that defensible space shall be 30 ft. from the edge of the home for zone 1 and 100 ft. for zone 2, shall be validated by computer models, experimental tests, or case studies, which are specific to the predominantly short-statured woodlands of the Austin area.
- The code shall specifically require and enforce retrofitting of existing homes in high fire risk areas, to reduce the home ignition as much as feasible by using non-combustible materials (replacing a wooden fence with an iron fence, replacing a shingle roof with a metal roof, etc.)

and HIZ techniques (such as leaving gaps between combustible materials like a wooded deck to the home, watering trees near the home, etc.).

- The reduction in vegetative fuel load shall follow locally adapted Firewise guidelines. In zone 1, the objective shall be thinning brush and preserving trees, with branches pruned only as needed close to roofs, ground, or adjacent tree canopy. In zone 2, reduction shall be only as needed and limited either to thinning brush OR pruning trees. Thinning both trees and brush shall be avoided, except in very heavy wooded areas, and as determined on a case by case basis by AFD experts.
- The code shall require the flexibility to preserve tree groves and heritage trees that may be adversely impacted.
- The new WUI code shall not recommend, or encourage, the removal of pre-selected native tree species. In particular, species shall not be targeted, which have high value to wildlife, such as juniper, mesquite and hackberry. To help buffer climate change, protection of existing native tree species is needed for wildlife and endangered species.
- The new WUI code shall require future developments to leave a minimum 100 ft. undeveloped "fire" buffer extending from the existing edge of the preserves into the development site. In this manner, development and WUI management shall not encroach upon on preserves, WQL, and other conservation lands.
- The city shall provide assistance to lower-income households in high fire risk areas for retrofitting their homes with noncombustible materials.
- The new WUI code shall require that new developments in high risk wooded areas be planned and built in a Firewise manner with an upgraded fire (building) code that emphasizes noncombustible building materials.
- Homeowners who reduce vegetation fuel loads shall be required to comply with all federal, state and local laws, including the Protected and Heritage Tree Ordinance, including all necessary permits without exemptions or waivers.
- Wherever possible, Firewise recommendations for crown separation within Zones 1-2 shall be reduced by compensatory on-site measures, such as pruning lower branches and thinning underlying shrubs. If no alternative exists to prevent tree removal, including structural retrofitting, then non-native and younger trees shall be removed, so that protected and heritage trees remain.

- The existing city code requirement that no more than 25% of the canopy be removed shall remain in effect during application of the WUI code.
- Strong city enforcement of the WUI code shall be required. The ultimate responsibility for home wildfire protection lies with private homeowners.

Appendix A
Home Hardening Measures

WUI code requirements to reduce the ignition potential of homes and other structures shall include:

- Non-combustible roofs in high risk areas
- Replacing wooden fences with non-combustible fences
- Installing adequate guards or sealing at potential entrances to prevent embers from reaching the attic
- Separating adjacent wooden and combustible structures (sheds, detached garages, etc.) from the home and other structures
- Avoiding wooden decks or separating them from the home and other structures
- Replacing single pane windows with double pane windows
- Use only metal gutters
- Installing guards on gutter (even if cleaned before the fire, gutters can be filled with debris during fires)
- Cleaning leaves and debris from roof, gutters, and around structures
- Removing wood piles and other flammable objects (outdoor furniture, cushions, etc.) away from structures
- Maintain and irrigate their landscape
- Use fire-safe construction materials
- Close the underside of a deck or building
- Replace siding, porches, or decks with fire resistant materials
- Increased fines and enforcement for throwing cigarettes out of your car
- Use propane, not coals, for barbequing
- Greatly increased penalties for violating burn bans

The City of Austin
Urban Forestry Board

December 19, 2012

To: The Honorable Mayor Lee Leffingwell and the Austin City Council Members.

CC. Marc Ott, City Manager; Burt Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager; Sara Hensley, PARD Director; Greg Guernsey, PDRD Director; Cora Wright, PARD Assistant Director; W. Pat Fuller, Division manager-Park Rangers/Forestry; Michael Embesi, City Arborist.

RE: Pilot Program for Prominent Urban Trees/Austin City Council Resolution 20120426-076

On September 19, 2012, the UFB submitted a proposed protocol for the identification, selection, and care process for at-risk prominent trees in the Austin community. Since that time meetings with representatives from Council member Tovo's office and Council Member Morrison's office, sponsors of the resolution, have brought to light aspects of the proposed process that need review, refinement, and simplification. Some of these are: additional review and simplification of the application process: vetting of funding sources: additional input from PARD and the city arborist on the application and implementation process.

Considering the importance of the pilot project and its positive impact on our urban forest, the UFB is requesting more time to address these issues and refine the process for preserving our prominent trees.

TO: Mayor Leffingwell and City Council members

FROM: UFB Chair Patrick Brewer

DATE: January 22, 2013

SUBJECT: Urban Forestry Board Comments on the Barton Springs Grounds Improvements

The Austin Urban Forestry Board reviewed the planned improvements at Barton Springs Pool, and approved the plan with the following three recommendations:

1) With regard to renovations in the Tree Court area, to assuage concerns for protection of tree root zones, the following recommendations are made for construction activities and staging:
   a. That the entire Tree Court is treated as a Critical Root Zone, and all associated protection and compaction avoidance restrictions be followed.
   b. That decomposed granite is removed from the root zones and beneath the proposed walk to native grade.
   c. That the piers for the concrete walk suspended pavement are excavated for the first two feet with an air excavation tool.
   d. That the soil beneath the suspended pavement is de-compacted after the piers are poured and heavy equipment will not be used on the soil.
   e. That an approved Certified Arborist, Registered Consulting arborist, or appropriate city staff be present during soil work operations to approve each of the above stages of construction.

2) Remove the overlook from the plan and pathway to the overlook.

3) Increase size of planting median in south parking area to 4000 square feet and reduce the large maturing trees in the planting to two trees.