

ASSIGNMENT: Review the roles of the UFB and recommend expansion in key areas.

Nick Classen, Dec. 19, 2012

Roles: The UFB has the very important role (per City Ordinance – see attached) of advising the city council, the city manager and the PARD Director in all matters pertaining to trees and the urban forest. As stated in the ordinance, the UFB has the authority to study, investigate, plan, advice, report and recommend any activity, program, plan, or legislation which the board determines necessary or advisable for tree care in public parks, along streets, and in other public areas.

As it is currently, the process appears to be that the board reviews and recommends the PARD plans that are presented to the board by the staff at board meetings near the final stage of the plan development. **Therefore, in the interests of a better informed board and improved communications between board and staff, I am recommending that the staff be encouraged to give the board an opportunity to participate in the development of certain plans at an early stage.** In so doing, the Forestry staff will have an opportunity to take advantage of the diverse expertise of UFB members (the strength of the UFB is the diverse background of its members).

It is recommended and proposed that there be a 15-minute discussion period during which the UFB members may advise Forestry staff on aspects of a plan at early stages, instead of having only presentations and briefings.

A. Expand: The UFB should expand into a more advisory role to assist the Forestry staff.

- 1) Actively participate in the development of Standards of tree care and Best Management Practices.

The UFB should not only request initiation and recommend approval of specific standards for tree care and Best Management Practices, but should also provide direction and advice to Forestry staff on the development of these standards and actively participate in the development of the standards with periodic reviews.

For example, there is a critical need for standards for (1) watering young trees, (2) for watering established trees during drought periods, and (3) for soil aeration to reduce soil compaction.

- 2) Participate in meetings of certain City internal groups and task forces that pertain to trees and the urban forest.

The UFB needs to be more informed of plans that impact trees that are being discussed by the various internal and interdepartmental groups and task forces. This can be done by:

- a. Being allowed to send a representative (UFB member or volunteer citizen) to attend and actively participate in the meetings and report back to the UFB; or
- b. Being allowed to send a representative to listen to the discussion (not participate) and report back to the UFB; or
- c. Periodically obtaining briefings or written reports of these meetings if participation is not possible or feasible.

The task forces of interest include, but are not limited to:

1. Land Management Plan (a group of all City departments dealing with trees and land management, lead by the Sustainability Office);
2. Tree Task Force (now renamed);
3. Wildland Urban Interface Fire Mitigation Task Force and fire code development (lead by AFD);
4. Urban Trails Master Plan (to be lead by the Watershed Dept.);
5. Connectivity Division (bicycle paths) that affect trees.

B. Expand: Community Outreach

- 1) It is recommended that the staff be encouraged to periodically provide OAK WILT data to the board so that the board can implement an Oak Wilt education, prevention, and community outreach program.

This information could include new areas with oak wilt, number of trees affected, areas that are being trenched, areas where Austin Energy will be pruning trees, etc. With this information, the UFB could reach out to affected neighborhoods to provide information and advice to their associations or volunteer groups about the successful Oak Wilt notification and prevention program of the North West Austin Civic Association.

- 2) The UFB should expand into community outreach to inform the public about various UFB projects; for example, requesting input into the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). Examples of our medium of notification are the Austin Neighborhood Council (ANC), articles written by the UFB for the PARD Forestry electronic newsletter, and additional dissemination of the UFB articles through various nonprofits email distribution lists.

C. Expand: Private Trees can be included in the UFMP.

- 1) The UFB can include certain recommendations for private trees in the UFMP.

Mitzi Cotton, City attorney, explained at a recent UFB meeting that the board could include private trees in the UFMP. For example, the plan could recommend providing rebates to homeowners who plant and/or maintain a tree on their private property as an incentive to increase the urban forest. A rebate could also be provided to homeowners who water their heritage trees during drought, following UFB watering guidelines and City's watering restrictions.

- 2) The UFMP should include recommendations for community outreach regarding private trees, such as providing guidelines and procedures.

§ 2-1-183 URBAN FORESTRY BOARD

(A) The Urban Forestry Board membership should include persons with expertise in arboriculture, urban forestry, or landscape architecture and persons who represent diverse regions or interests of the community.

(B) The urban forester, city arborist, the director of the Parks and Recreation Department, and the director of the Watershed Protection Department shall serve as ex officio members of the board.

(C) The board shall act in an advisory capacity to the city council, the city manager, and the director of the Parks and Recreation Department in all matters pertaining to the City's urban forest.

(D) The board may study, investigate, plan, advise, report, and recommend any action, program, plan, or legislation which the board determines necessary or advisable for the care, preservation, pruning, planting, replanting, removal, or disposition of trees and shrubs and other landscaping in public parks, along streets, and in other public areas.

(E) The board shall develop and establish a comprehensive Urban Forest Management Plan for the planting, maintenance, and replacement of trees in parks, along streets, and in other public areas. When a portion of the plan has been developed and established, it shall be submitted to the city council for adoption before implementation.

(F) The board shall perform other functions within the scope of its work if requested to do so by the city council, the city manager, or the director of the Parks and Recreation Department.

DRAFT

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.

Toni, Zola, Chris on working group