



ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD MOTION AND RESOLUTION 20140416 003c

Date: April 16, 2014

Subject: Resolution in support of the Development of a Comprehensive Master Plan for Austin's Urban Forest

Motioned By: Robert Deegan

Seconded By: Marisa Perales

The Environmental Board offers the attached resolution on Austin's Urban Forest.

Vote: 7-0-0-0

For: Deegan, Maxwell, Neely, Perales, Schissler, Smith, and Walker

Against:

Abstain:

Absent:

Approved By:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Gay Maxwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" and last name "Maxwell" being the most prominent parts.

Mary Gay Maxwell, Chair

Attachment:



RESOLUTION NO. EB020140416 003C 001

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD

Whereas the urban forest is a critical resource to the health and livability of the Community of Austin, and

Whereas approximately 90% of the trees which compose the urban forest are located on privately owned land, but still constitute a public resource, and

Whereas the recently completed Austin Urban Forest Plan addresses only those trees located on public property and

Whereas Implementation Item 6 of the aforementioned plan states:

“. It is recommended that a strategy be developed by City Council-appointed designees within 2 years of adoption of this plan to address the urban forest on private property.”

Therefore, the Environmental Board recommends that City Council take action to initiate the process and to allocate the necessary resources to develop a Comprehensive Master Plan for the urban forest on private property.

While the City's ability to impact the urban forest on private property is more limited than with public property, there are still substantial steps the City can take and in fact already is taking. The Tree Ordinance, Landscape Ordinance, and Arborist Program are just a few examples of City measures that impact the preservation and development of the urban forest on private property. Other City policies, such as those governing utility easements could serve to limit growth of the urban forest.

- To develop a comprehensive and effective Master Plan may necessitate engaging an independent consultant, and the City should take this into account in allocating resources to this project.
- Perhaps most importantly, the City can provide knowledge, resources, and incentives to private landowners to guide and assist them in their efforts to maintain their trees. The education of the public may be the best method to protect and manage our urban forest.

We believe that the development of an urban forest plan for private property would, at a minimum, include the following:


- Collection of datasets that may be used effectively for trend analyses regarding:
 1. Description of the structure of the urban forest; i.e., what is the current state of our urban forest; what do our trees look like; how do we protect what we have; what benefits does our urban forest currently provide; what would we like our urban forest to look like?
 2. Comprehensive evaluation of the value of the urban forest to the community and its impact on the environment;
- Development of a program to educate the community, including private landowners and managers on the proper maintenance of their trees and the resources available to assist them in these efforts.
- Integration of relevant portions of the Urban Forest Plan, Imagine Austin plan, existing programs, and initiatives, and a gap analysis to determine what additional efforts may be needed.
- Community outreach and community involvement throughout the development of the plan.
- A detailed review of all existing codes and ordinances that directly or indirectly, intentionally or inadvertently, impact the private urban forest, along with recommendations for how they could be improved. The focus should not be to increase regulation but rather to eliminate disincentives and ensure various parts of the code and criteria manuals work together towards a healthier urban forest, especially those portions of the code who's primary focus is not the urban forest (such as those governing transportation and utilities).

This planning process should be carried out under the leadership of the City Arborist Office in the Planning and Development Review Department with assistance from the Watershed Protection Department. By working together, these departments will have a greater ability to comprehensively evaluate the role of our urban forest in our community and the environment.

Despite the limitations on the City's control of the private urban forest, it is clear that there is much the City can do. We believe these efforts should be planned, focused, and thoughtfully integrated with stewardship efforts for the public urban forest in order to create a truly comprehensive plan for Austin's urban forest.

ADOPTED: April 16, 2014

ATTEST: _____



Dr. Mary Gay Maxwell

Environmental Board Chair