

**City of Oxford Tree Board  
Regular Meeting  
Thursday, January 5th, 2023**

**Opening**

Be it known that the City of Oxford Tree Board did meet in special session on Thursday, January 5th, 2023 at 11:00 A.M. in the City Hall Courtroom with phone/video conference available. The following were present:

**Tree Board:**

Cowan Hunter, Co-Chairman

Mary Hartwell Howorth

Ed Croom

Hume Bryant, Co-Chairman

Bill Freeman

\*Greg Pinion, Superintendent of Building and Grounds Department

\*Allison Ferris, Secretary, Office Manager for the Engineering Department

\*Ex-Officio, non-voting

**City Representatives**

Reanna Mayoral, City Engineer

Ben Requet, Director of Planning

Mark Levy, Director of Special Projects

**Other:**

Matt Nielson, Green Groves Arborist

**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 11:02 AM.

**Approval of Agenda**

Commissioner Cowan Hunter motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Mary Hartwell Howorth seconded the motion. All commissioners voted aye; the motion passed.

**Approval of November 2022 Minutes**

Commissioner Cowan Hunter motioned to approve the November 2022 Minutes as well as reminded everyone the board had voted to cancel the December 2022 meeting. Commissioners Bill Freeman and Mary Hartwell Howorth seconded. All commissioners voted aye; the motion passed.

## **Departmental Issues and Reports**

### **1. Buildings and Grounds**

- a. Assistance to property owners, hazard trees, etc.*
- b. Current status of tree work, purchases, planting plans, etc.*

Greg indicated tree planting went well and all trees are in. Per Greg, a total of 45 trees were planted. Greg indicated a dogwood tree on Sibley was assessed due to being a dead tree in City Right-of-Way. There was discussion. Cowan inquired about the plans for the winter season. Greg indicated all the trees are in the ground as well as there was not major tree maintenance at this time. There was more discussion, and Greg indicated it's a quieter time of the year for the Building and Grounds Department.

### **2. Planning**

- a. Pending or upcoming development issues.*

Ben Requet, Director of Planning, reminded the Tree Board about the big "Champion" tree at Ford Dyes property that was brought to the Tree Board's attention in the November meeting. Per Ben, there was considerable discussion by the Planning Commission. Additional information has been requested by the commission. Per Ben, the Gary Family is sub-dividing land, but indicated they don't have plans for a new neighborhood at this time. Ben indicated they were still waiting for more information from the family's engineer, and he indicated the proposal references 4 lots on Lincoln. Mary Hartwell Howorth inquired with Ben regarding the plans for the 4 lots/size. There was discussion. Ben reiterated that it's still being looked at by the Planning Commission as well as reiterated that because the tree is a "Champion Tree", it would have to be looked at by the Tree Board. There was further discussion.

### ***Cedar Bend***

Cowan inquired with Ben regarding the Cedar Bend area. There was discussion. Ed Croom inquired regarding the guidance from the City regarding trees and property owner's practices. There was further discussion regarding the laws for tree maintenance and property owners roles/practices i.e. limbs over-hanging the property/what to do. Croom also inquired about the approval process/timelines for the Planning Commission. There was more discussion regarding the process and communication during the approval process.

### **3. Engineering / Special Projects**

#### *a. Current status of City Hall and Cemetery Creek projects*

#### **Cemetery Project**

Reanna Mayoral, City Engineer, reported that Mary Levy, Director of Special Projects, was unable to attend this portion of the meeting. Reanna reported the Cemetery Project has been completed i.e. the cemetery channel is finished. However, she noted the landscaping is still on-going. Reanna reported it looks beautiful. There was discussion. Cowan inquired about the property owners in the area. There was more discussion, and Reanna noted that the City aims to leave everything as good or better, therefore, the property owners should be pleased.

#### **City Hall Park**

Cowan inquired if Reanna could provide an update on the City Hall Park. Per Reanna, on Mark's behalf, the crew is within the liquidated damages period of the project, and they are working to the complete project. There was discussion. Reanna explained the crew is being assessed a penalty fee each day now, therefore, they are working diligently to complete the project. Reanna indicated this was discussed at Board of Alderman Meeting on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

#### **Business**

#### *a. Presentation by Matt Neilson, Green Groves Arborist, re completed project/ recommendations for City of Oxford, Q & A, etc.*

Matt Neilson thanked Hume Bryant and the rest of the Tree Board for their help through his project as well as the city officials Greg Pinion, Ben Requet, Reanna Mayoral, and Hollis Green.

Matt indicated he would hit the highlights regarding the project. He noted the project took longer than he originally anticipated. Matt reported he found that the tree ordinances issue was a complex issue, but indicated that Oxford is ahead of the curve in comparison to other places. Matt indicated he believed Oxford was doing a good job, but there is room for growth.

Throughout the presentation, Matt referred to his recommendation document provided to the Tree Board and City Officials. He indicated his hope was to provide a framework as well as a working outline for the City i.e. changes to the tree list. Matt noted and

discussed his recommendation for further research in regards to different ways for calculating Tree Mitigation i.e. looking at other City Ordinances outside of Oxford, MS. Matt also discussed his strong feelings regarding the role of possibly adding a City Arborist for the City of Oxford as well encouraged pursuing future grant opportunities for funding this position to allow that person to focus on trees in the Urban environment. Matt also acknowledged the need for the Tree Board to clarify their role as well as goals of applying for future grants that would help address issues or needs that come to the board.

Cowan expressed gratitude to Matt for his help, experience, and the effort he brought to this process. Cowan asked Reanna about her experience. Reanna noted she found it very helpful, particularly regarding the approval lists as well as the site distances on plans as they relate to Engineering. There was discussion. Cowan also inquired about Ben's thoughts regarding the process. Ben reiterated that he enjoyed working with Matt as well as hearing his ideas regarding the future i.e. assessing different areas to see what trees have been successful and helping the developers understand.

Cowan asked the Tree Board to comment on their thoughts regarding the recommendations. Hume inquired with Matt regarding his thoughts about the Tree Escrow Fund. There was discussion. Matt reported he didn't believe other cities he looked at outside of Oxford area had a Tree Escrow Fund. There was further discussion regarding the budgeting process/future possibilities. Matt recommended researching what other City Municipalities are doing. Matt indicated he believed a long-term goal should be a City budget item for tree mitigation as well as incentives for the development community. Matt also discussed something that was not in his report regarding future movements in urban areas outside of trees regarding planting within the ecosystems i.e. vegetation. Ed Croom and Mary Hartwell indicated there was a lot of information and they both needed time to digest the recommendations. Bill Freeman indicated there were several things he had not thought about and asked for a revised format to help the Tree Board as they work through recommendations the future as well as inquired if a priority suggestion could be included in addition to clarifying the role of the Tree Board. Matt responded and indicated it was difficult for him to prioritize, but he would work on simplifying the way the Tree Board could refer to the recommendations. Hume stated he would be interested to know what other Cities do with private trees as well as discussed the long history of establishing the Tree Ordinances and other thoughts regarding tree mitigation policies. There was further discussion. Matt noted tree mitigation was a complex issue. There was more discussion. Ed Croom interjected that the board did not need to focus on specific details at this time, but noted Matt had done a tremendous job of providing helpful recommendations and stated the recommendations were a good starting point. Croom discussed how the Tree Board needed to clarify how their role as the Tree Board related to the information provided as well as in relation to future project and timelines.

Cowan discussed the report was to help the Tree Board and the City of Oxford have a starting point for future plans, goals, or possible policy changes within city tree ordinances. Cowan discussed past behavior within project developments as well the

status of current project developments. There was more discussion. Cowan indicated the Tree Board would be looking at the information presented and work to establish goals within the next few months. Cowan also highlighted the need for a City Arborist. There was further discussion. Cowan highlighted the need to brief the Board of Alderman regarding Matt's recommendations as well as future grant opportunities. Cowan reiterated the board would be digesting and reviewing the report further and expressed appreciation.

***Other Business***

Mary Hartwell expressed concern regarding Bailey Woods. The Board and City Officials indicated it belongs to the University of MS. There was discussion.

Cowan encouraged the tree board to keep reviewing the report and be prepared to discuss future goals at the next meeting.

**Move to Adjourn**

Commissioner Cowan Hunter motioned to adjourn at 12:10 PM. Ed Croom seconded; all members voted aye.