

A meeting of the Park and Tree Advisory Committee was held on **February 22, 2018 at 3:00 p.m.** in City Hall, 1911 Boundary Street. In attendance were Chairman Barb Farris, committee members Amanda Flake, Gordon Fritz, Blake Austin, and Chuck Rushing, and Brian Franklin, city staff.

In accordance with the South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d) as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

Chairman Farris called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

MINUTES

Mr. Rushing made a motion, second by Mr. Fritz, to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2017 PTAC meeting. Ms. Flake abstained from voting because she was not present at the meeting. **The motion to approve the minutes as submitted passed 4-0.**

TREE REMOVAL APPLICATION – 412 JOSHUA COURT

Janice Thompson said she has a beautiful live oak in her front yard. It has “two trunks,” and one “has started to curve toward the sun,” so people entering and exiting her home have to go under the tree, she said, and it’s “easy to bump into.” Ms. Thompson said she doesn't want to grind the stump down, so as not to affect the other part of the tree.

Mr. Franklin said he had denied Ms. Thompson’s application for removal. An arborist was doing trimming on the tree after Mr. Franklin issued that denial; there’s a letter about that portion of the tree in the committee’s packets. “The overall size of the tree” and its health were the reasons for his denial, Mr. Franklin said. This is a “manmade” problem, he feels, not a problem with the tree, so he wanted to bring it to PTAC to get the committee’s opinions.

Chairman Farris said the tree is healthy, but it’s creating a hazard to humans. Ms. Flake said she’d prefer to look at the tree herself, and she asked the timeframe on this. Mr. Franklin said that’s up to the committee.

Ms. Thompson described how much of the tree “was chopped” before the trimming was stopped.

Mr. Fritz said he’d talked to arborist **Michael Murphy**, who recommends that these trees be trimmed from the top, which could “arrest that motion.” Mr. Franklin and Mr. Rushing said they have seen the tree. Mr. Austin asked if less than a third of the canopy would be lost with this trimming. Mr. Franklin and Mr. Rushing said probably no more than a third.

Mr. Austin said it sounds like the tree is creating “a nuisance.” If less than a third of the canopy is taken off, his understanding is that it will not have any ill effect on the tree.

Mr. Franklin said he wanted the committee to apply its expertise and then approve or deny the application.

Mr. Franklin said he'd talked to **David Tedford** of Action Tree Service, who said if the limb is left, it would still be a viable part of the tree. Ms. Thompson said, aesthetically, "it looks very unfinished." Mr. Fritz said live oaks, when they're trimmed back, will shoot out new growth for more balance. He said he understands where Ms. Thompson is coming from, but he is "a tree man," and he feels this is a "manmade problem." He can't justify taking out a tree that is "balanced," he said, especially when they can balance it out within a couple of years. It could be an attractive tree again "and add value to your house," Mr. Fritz said.

Mr. Rushing said the tree is similar to how it looked on a Google 2008 map. He agreed with Mr. Fritz that it is a manmade problem, and he feels the solution is "an architectural" one. Ms. Thompson could re-route the walkway and put a little more curve into it in order to get in the front door more easily, Mr. Rushing said.

Mr. Austin said he disagrees about the balance of the tree with the amount of canopy that's been trimmed off. "There's a Dr. Seuss-looking limb" that is going off to the right, he said, and if it's a nuisance to the homeowner, he is leaning toward allowing it to be cut off. He thinks it will be fine as long as less than a third of the canopy is removed.

Mr. Rushing said he'd hate to make an assessment on whether the tree has lost a third of its canopy, given how much the tree service has taken out. If they take the remainder, he thinks that's probably "less than a third of what's left." Mr. Austin said the arborist's notes say the tree is "healed up." Mr. Rushing said the arborist just did this trimming recently, so it can't be healed yet. Mr. Franklin said the trimming was done within the last 2 months.

This piece is 20" DBH, Ms. Flake said. She called it "a large wound" and said decay could get into the root system over time. She said again that she'd like to go look at the tree in person, rather than looking at a picture of it.

Chairman Farris said she would defer to Ms. Flake because she is a certified arborist. Ms. Flake said she would like to table this application for a month to give the committee time to have a look at the tree. **Mr. Fritz made a motion to table, seconded by Mr. Austin. The motion passed unanimously.**

TREE REMOVAL APPLICATION – 1006 BATTERY CREEK ROAD

George Webb said he has a tree in front of his house that has "quite a cavity in it," and it's leaning toward his house. He moved there in 1985, and the tree is "increasingly close" to his house. Mr. Webb believes it's a live oak, and he said it's "full of vines" that

grow into the tree from the base to the top and are now part of the tree. In the spring, the vine produces “non-edible figs,” he said.

Ms. Flake said she had looked at this tree, and the vines are a type of fig. She said Mr. Murphy had said it’s “a weird fig vine” that is “difficult to get rid of”; she’d never heard of it, but she looked at it last year with **Liza Hill**. She didn’t remember seeing a cavity in the tree.

Chairman Farrow asked Ms. Flake if Mr. Murphy had indicated that this kind of vine would “eventually smother the tree,” and if there’s “nothing to be done about it.” Mr. Austin said he has killed that type of vine before by cutting it and putting the ends in Roundup. That might be a first approach. Mr. Webb said the vine has grown into the tree, and he “can’t separate it out.” Mr. Franklin said the “aggressive vine around the base” is jasmine. Mr. Austin said Mr. Webb could take steps to try to get rid of the vine and hope it recovers, but if not, the vine will smother the tree.

Mr. Webb said he wants “all of the trees removed,” which includes two in his backyard. The tree in the front yard is “definitely damaged,” he said, and he feels “a good storm” is likely to “push it onto my house,” which is “scary.” The other two trees are also covered with vines, Mr. Webb said. He’d like to get a new roof on the house, but he hesitates to because there are tree branches all over this roof every year.

Mr. Franklin said the trees in the backyard are 6-8’ off the back of the house and are about 20”. Ms. Flake asked Mr. Austin about removing the jasmine vines on them. Having someone take care of the Asiatic jasmine vines would be less expensive than taking the trees out, Mr. Austin said, and he can’t see taking those trees out because of the jasmine. The fig vine on the front tree, he said, looks like it has been cut off at the bottom, and “that’s another consideration.”

Mr. Webb said he hasn’t measured how deep the cavity is in the front yard tree. He believes it’s about 3’ deep at the base; “a child could sit in there.” He told Mr. Fritz an arborist has not looked at the tree. Mr. Fritz said some live oaks are hollow inside – he has seen “a hunter hiding in” one on his property – and Mr. Webb’s oak is probably not going to go down for 200 or 300 years. He understands that Mr. Webb is concerned about it coming down, but that’s not likely, unless there’s a huge storm that would take out his house, too.

Mr. Fritz agreed that Mr. Webb should try to take out the fig vine, “and then go from there.” Mr. Austin said Mr. Webb would know “in a span of 2 or 3 months” if the effort to kill the vine was successful. Chairman Farrow suggested having a certified arborist assess the tree and make recommendations.

Ms. Flake said she thinks Ms. Hill had Mr. Murphy look at it. Without having a bucket truck, it's difficult for her to tell about the upper structure of the tree. Chairman Farris said the application of Roundup might be different on the fig and jasmine vines.

Mr. Webb asked if he could leave in the application for removal, see what the certified arborist suggests, and then wait and see what happens. There was general agreement that he could.

Mr. Rushing said this removal request "is a matter of want, not of need." The Asiatic jasmine "has been grossly mismanaged," and if it continues to grow, it's going to cause more problems with the house than the trees will. On the 2 trees in the backyard, Mr. Rushing said Mr. Webb has "an Asiatic jasmine problem, not a tree problem." He thinks the tree in the front yard needs to be looked at by a certified arborist, who may conclude that it is not a danger to the house. A certified arborist can tell Mr. Webb if the tree is viable and if it is in any danger of falling down, Mr. Rushing said.

Ms. Flake made a motion for Mr. Webb to leave in the submission for removal, have a certified arborist look at the tree and write a letter, try to control the vines and see what happens, and then Mr. Webb can return to PTAC. Mr. Austin seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

SOUTHSIDE PARK TRAIL UPDATE

Mr. Franklin said the city has awarded the contract for construction of the trail, which should be starting next week. The bridge will be aluminum – not wood, as was originally planned – because of concerns about maintenance, he said, and the knee walls supporting the bridge will be concrete, not timber. The contractor believes they can meet the May 18 deadline, Mr. Franklin said.

BOUNDARY STREET PLANTING UPDATE

Mr. Franklin said the night work on the buried asphalt on Boundary Street will begin soon so the trees can go in. Live oaks and palms have been planted on Polk Street, with grass between them and a mulch base. There are three palms in the median in front of the former Applebees, he said, and there should be 15 more in by the end of the week on Boundary Street.

SPANISH MOSS TRAIL TREES

Mr. Fritz asked about the new trees near the Spanish Moss Trail that "look like they're dying." Chairman Farris said three of them "look bad." Mr. Austin said that could be due to a variety of reasons. They were planted as replacements for the trees that were girdled, he said, and Chairman Farris explained what had happened to the original trees her garden club had planted. Southern Palmetto planted 34 new trees to replace those, she said, and three of them look bad, but the others look good. Mr. Fritz asked if those three would be replanted. Mr. Austin said, "We'll see"; they might live after

they've dropped their leaves. With ½" - to 1" - caliper trees, they need to wait a year to see what happens, he said.

Mr. Austin said the county needs to be "leaned on," so the weeds don't overtake the beds, and the maintenance around the trees is done correctly, so the same issue doesn't happen to those trees as happened to the original trees.

Chairman Farris suggested using Roundup around the trees. Mr. Austin said yes, and a cylinder around each tree would also be a necessary step. He doesn't know how often the county maintains those trees. Ms. Flake said she's not sure which department maintains this section. Chairman Farris asked who the best person would be to contact the county, and she offered to do it as the chairman of PTAC.

Mr. Austin said the county will say these trees are "on the schedule" and "basically plead the fifth." He said he's scared that when the maintenance is done, someone will "go out there with a weedeater" and "do what was done in the first place" to the trees that were killed. There are plants that are maintained every other week, Mr. Austin said, and some that will "get out of hand" because they are only maintained 4 times a year. He discussed the type of cylinder that could be used with Chairman Farris.

Chairman Farris said she could call someone as the PTAC chair and "former planter of trees," to ensure that the trees aren't girdled again. Mr. Franklin asked if Chairman Farris's garden club could purchase a little Roundup to "augment county maintenance." Chairman Farris said yes, and they could maybe buy the disks for the base of the trees. Mr. Franklin said he'd ask Mr. Murphy about the disks and get back to Chairman Farris. The disks are being used on the crepe myrtles on Depot Road, he said.

Chairman Farris told Mr. Austin that the wholesale nursery from which these trees came was to replace any trees that didn't thrive. Mr. Austin said he could do that for the three trees that they are concerned about. Chairman Farris said she'd taken pictures of the roots, and it's only been 2 months since they were purchased, so the guarantee should still be in effect. She asked Mr. Austin to look into this right away, and he said he would.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Ms. Flake nominated Mr. Austin to be vice-chairman, and Mr. Rushing seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Flake asked what had happened with Holy Trinity School wanting to use Southside Park for soccer fields. Mr. Franklin said it's still "being batted around" in the city's departments, and the city manager is getting more feedback.

Mr. Franklin said there has been a history of the residents around Southside Park wanting it to be a passive park. Also, as Mr. Rushing said at the last meeting, if the city is divesting itself of other sports fields, it may not want to be in the business of using a 30-acre piece of its property for a school to put soccer fields on. Southside Park is close to the school, Mr. Franklin said, but one element being looked at is whether soccer fields are an appropriate use.

Chairman Farnior said she agrees, and she wonders if there are other soccer fields in place that Holy Trinity could utilize for this purpose. Mr. Franklin said there are, but they aren't as well-connected to the school via the Spanish Moss Trail. They're county fields, he said, and are a short car ride from the school, rather than within walking distance.

Mr. Fritz asked what the cost to the city would be, if it allows the soccer fields. Mr. Rushing said he thinks this was discussed, and Holy Trinity would install the fields, but the city would have to maintain them. Mr. Franklin said the area is currently mowed twice a month; if Holy Trinity were to need more mowing, they would pay the city for that or hire a landscape company to come in and mow it; the city didn't want to take on more expense because of this use. The current proposal would be for Holy Trinity to have the fields for 6 years, Mr. Franklin said, which some people "aren't comfortable with."

Mr. Franklin said he had walked the Whitehall property with its landscape architect, and they "have eyed" the major trees. The trees on proposed lots could be saved, he said, but if a road is approved, the trees that are in the way "are going to get looked at." They flagged some trees, and looked at trees that could be saved, and the developer is willing to adjust the location of the road to save trees, Mr. Franklin said. The developer is aware of the property's trees and wants to save as many of them as possible.

Mr. Fritz said he has been tied up with the Whitehall issue. When he first spoke with the developer, **Sam Levine**, about it, Mr. Levine said he wanted to save 90% of the trees, but at a recent MPC meeting, the figures **Lauren Kelly** gave indicated that more than 10% were to be taken out. Mr. Fritz feels it's more like 70% of the trees would be left there. He feels Mr. Levine is "still asking for more than he needs." His first plan was not good, and the new plan is much better, but Mr. Fritz would like the tree issue addressed.

Mr. Franklin said every tree in the buffer is being saved; the buffer is estimated to be 60'. All the other trees within the project that are "larger and healthier" – all the highest-grade trees – are being saved, he said. There are a lot of water oaks and laurel oaks in the center of the project where the more dense building structure is going, so some of them may be lost, but the live oaks around the perimeter and in the core are being saved, which Mr. Franklin thinks "is a good approach." There will also be new plantings, he said, and he'd prefer a different overstory tree to the laurel oaks as they get to 30", for example.

Mr. Fritz said Mr. Murphy had made a series of recommendation to ensure that the trees that are saved “are there in 100 years.” The Sea Island Coalition would like a contractual condition to be that Mr. Murphy is onsite to ensure the health of those trees. Mr. Fritz doesn’t think Mr. Murphy “has any close relationship with water and laurel oaks,” but the live oaks can live for hundreds of years, and they will show what the city values.

Mr. Franklin said Mr. Murphy will be at the next meeting with Whitehall, or at another meeting, and he will give his input on the trees, but the initial road layout does not have an impact on the trees there. There is one road that would have to have its position adjusted to save a single tree, he said.

Mr. Fritz said Mr. Murphy says the most important thing in the Whitehall development is to take care of the root system of the trees being retained, and for weight to be taken off the top to ensure they are “balanced and stable.” Mr. Murphy wants to keep them healthy with fertilizer “6 years into the future,” Mr. Fritz said, and he wants the roots to be hand-pruned, too. This is why Sea Island Coalition wants Mr. Murphy to remain involved with the Whitehall project, he said. Mr. Rushing said, in his experience, what Mr. Murphy is recommending is “the industry standard.”

Mr. Franklin said DOT has approved the Walmart medians for a redesign, and he’s meeting with Ms. Kelly about it. Mr. Franklin discussed the plants in his design.

Mr. Franklin said the Old Commons neighborhood association has bought live oaks, and he is helping to facilitate their planting. They are awaiting approval, but they should go in in early March, he said.

Mr. Franklin said in the future, if he sees a tree removal “with a lot of red flags” or one that he feels should be denied, he will bring it to PTAC and provide “more narrative on the backstory” on what has happened with the case. He’ll also encourage the applicants to get a certified arborist to look at their trees before they come to PTAC.

Chairman Fariior suggested giving PTAC “a good bit of time before we meet with” the applicants, so the committee members have time to go to the sites. Mr. Franklin said he’d do his best.

Mr. Rushing made a motion to establish a deadline for applications for tree removal to be submitted no later than 2 weeks before the next PTAC meeting. Mr. Fritz seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

There was a discussion about Ms. Thompson’s application and solutions for her issue.

There being no further business to come before the committee, Mr. Rushing made a motion, seconded by Mr. Fritz, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:16 p.m.