

TREE AND BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Thursday, November 17, 2022 – 9:30 a.m.

City Hall, Training Room, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Chairman, Katherine Booth; Vice Chairman, Fran Robinson and Member, Opal Nelson **Also Present:** Deputy City Clerk, Sherri Philo

1. CALL TO ORDER

Today's meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. and the Deputy City Clerk performed the roll call.

Mrs. Robinson handed out to the Commission members a copy of the Florida Native Plant Society's Good Citizen Guide to Natural Florida Brochure (on file in the City Clerk's office).

Mrs. Booth reported that Mrs. Rebecca Siplak resigned from the Commission. She stated that she asked the City Clerk if there were any applicants who want to serve on the Commission and was told that there were none.

*Please note that the items on today's agenda were not discussed in the order listed.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) October 20, 2022

Mrs. Booth made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 20, 2022 Tree and Beautification Commission meeting. Ms. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

4. NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Booth reported that Chapter 72 of the Landscape Ordinance has been renamed to Environmental Protection. She felt that the Commission should be renamed to the Environmental Protection Commission. She thought that this name change would generate more candidate interest in the Commission.

Mrs. Booth made a motion that the Tree and Beautification Commission be renamed to the Environmental Protection Commission. Ms. Nelson seconded the motion.

Mrs. Robinson asked how she came up with this idea.

Mrs. Booth said because the Landscape Ordinance has been renamed to Environmental Protection. She noted that she would have to go before the City Council to rename the Commission.

Mrs. Robinson asked if this would impact the Commission as far as meeting the requirements of being a Tree City USA.

Mrs. Booth said that she would like to have the Commission renamed because she felt this would cause a change in perspective on how they are viewing the trees, both on public and private properties.

Mrs. Robinson asked how would that impact their Tree City USA designation. She felt this needed further investigation.

Mrs. Booth said having a name change would not mean that they would have to forgo the initial purpose of the Commission, which was simply to be a figurehead for Tree City USA. She said this Commission is the organization that the City uses to maintain the Tree City USA standing. She did not think that having a name change would mean that they would no longer have the Charter responsibility for the Tree City USA designation.

Mrs. Robinson said that she would like to have a copy of what Mrs. Booth is putting before them. She said that she would like to have more time to consider this.

Mrs. Booth withdrew her motion with the expectation that they would discuss this again at their meeting in February.

Mrs. Booth said Tree City U.S.A. designation requires \$2.00 per capita to be spent on tree care. Tree care is a euphemism for pruning because the City's mature native Oak Trees are being pruned unnecessarily. She said when clearance is the only valid reason for pruning these trees and because the City Planner will not change the Tree Protection Ordinance to protect the City's mature native trees from egregious pruning methods and because the City's landscaping practices should be the model for its citizens to follow, she is going to make a motion.

Mrs. Booth made a motion that the City spend no more than \$2.00 per capita on tree care for the next fiscal year of the Tree City U.S.A. designation in 2023. Ms. Nelson seconded the motion.

Mrs. Robinson asked how much is the City currently spending.

Mrs. Booth answered \$11.49 per capita (per City resident).

Mrs. Robinson asked what is the per capita number.

Mrs. Booth answered approximately 16,000. She reported that the City spent \$187,000 last year. She said it seems to be whatever they want to spend on tree care. She said the bulk of the spending was on tree pruning. She said they have all complained about how egregiously the trees are being pruned. She would like the City to model best management practices when it comes to pruning and that would be to leave the mature native trees alone unless they need to be pruned for clearance so that they can absorb the stormwater, every leaf can release oxygen, take in carbon dioxide, provide shade, reduce the temperatures in homes and parking lots, etc. That is the reason she believes that they need to limit the amount of tree pruning that the City is doing. Right now the sky is the limit and they can spend as much as they want on tree pruning. She thinks that the Commission has the authority as the holder of that Charter and as the entity that permits

the City to have a Tree City USA designation that they could hold the City to \$2.00 per person.

Mrs. Robinson said the egregious pruning comes more from Florida Power and Light (FPL) than anyone. She said that she was not aware of egregious pruning by the City. She does not see the pruning in the City like she sees with FPL.

Mrs. Booth said since she started on this Commission in 2019, they have repeatedly shown trees that were egregiously pruned. She said if they limit the amount of dollars that can be spent on pruning the City's trees they are going to be healthier.

Mrs. Robinson said then this is a recommendation.

Mrs. Booth said that she would bring this before the City Council and tell them that this is what they recommend as an Advisory Commission.

Mrs. Booth showed the Commission members a copy of the 2021 application for Tree City USA (copy on file in the City Clerk's office). She said they cannot make an impact this year because it has been done, but they can impact going forward for next year. She referred to the itemized list of costs attached to the application. She said that she did not have any trouble with the City purchasing new trees or watering new trees. If the City wants to put in new trees that would be great, however she has been told over and over again that the City doesn't have anywhere to plant new trees. She said the City spent \$31,000 for new trees and she was not sure where those trees went. She then referred to the fertilizer expense for trees. She said native trees do not need fertilizer and they don't need that fertilizer going into the Lagoon so she did not think the City should put any money at all towards fertilizing. She said if a tree can't make it without fertilizer then they should not be planting them.

Mrs. Robinson said that she would like a copy of the application to give herself a chance to look at what Mrs. Booth is proposing.

Mrs. Booth said that she would prefer not to table her motion.

Mrs. Booth called the motion and it passed 2-1 with Mrs. Robinson voting no.

5. OLD BUSINESS

Mrs. Booth said Mrs. Sue Gromis, of MainStreet Vero Beach, reported at their last meeting that the stage that they use during Downtown Friday was being impeded by some limbs from an Oak Tree. She recently spoke with Mrs. Gromis and was told that there were no issues with the stage during this past Downtown Friday. Mrs. Booth said to her knowledge the Oak Tree would be left intact.

Mrs. Booth reported that the Planning and Zoning Board has been working on revisions to the Landscape and Tree Protection Ordinances. She previously reported that the Tree and Beautification Commission was told that they would have workshop meetings with the Planning and Zoning Board about those revisions. Unfortunately, City Commissioners generally follow staff leadership when making decisions and at the November 3, 2022, Planning and Zoning Board meeting Mr. Jeffries asked the Board to decline having a workshop. She said that she takes exception to the title "tree protection" of the Ordinance because all trees could still be gutted by pruning and also clear cut. She

reported that attached to the minutes of the Planning and Zoning Board meeting is a copy of the current recommended revisions of the Ordinances. She said the pruning section of the Tree Protection Ordinance remains intact and as long as trees are mitigated and money is put into the City's coffer, trees can be clear cut from a property. She said the only conclusion that she could come to was that the trees would not be protected even though they supposedly have a Tree Protection Ordinance. She said that she asked Mr. Jeffries to add Laurel Oak Trees to the list of protected trees, however he declined even though she provided scientific evidence that they endure as long as Southern Live Oak Trees. She reported that Mrs. Siplak mentioned at a previous meeting that she would like three (3) different pine species protected and Mr. Jeffries has added them.

Mrs. Booth reported that the Commission previously passed a motion to recommend to City Council that they purchase a lot that is for sale that has two (2) giant Loblolly Pine trees and she would be bringing that before the City Council.

Mrs. Booth reported that she recommended to Mr. Jeffries that the Florida Native Plant Society be included as an authoritative source for recommending trees to be planted by private property owners, however when she reached out to them they declined being referenced.

Mrs. Booth reported that Section 38.114 of the City's Fertilizer Ordinance states that it can be enforced. She said that she was going to continue to follow-up on this until she gets the information on if the City has ever enforced the City's Fertilizer Ordinance. She said that she would put in a request to the City Clerk for this information. She said it was her understanding that the Fertilizer Ordinance and the Irrigation Ordinance were required to be put into the City's Ordinances if the City was going to receive any grants from the St. John's River Water Management District (SJRWMD). She said it only makes sense that if they are required to have those Ordinances that they are actually making people follow them. She wanted to make sure that they were doing their due diligence in educating property owners that they must abide by the Fertilizer and Irrigation Ordinances. She said they are not put on the books to be ignored. They are put on the books for homeowners to follow so they can help protect the Lagoon from nutrient pollution and also conserve potential drinking water stored in the aquifer.

Mrs. Robinson said it was her understanding that there were two (2) Code Enforcement Officers and they are very overwhelmed.

Mrs. Booth questioned so why is it if the City has Ordinances to regulate these things that they don't put money towards code enforcement. She said Ordinances have to be written in such a way that they can also be enforced and both of these Ordinances do have to be enforced. That being the case, the City must put money into whatever it takes to enforce these Codes and if that means more people that is what they should be doing.

Mrs. Robinson said it was her understanding that people used to be able to report something anonymously, but that has been changed. She thought that would discourage people from reporting things.

Mrs. Booth said that is up to the Code Department to develop a procedure.

Mrs. Robinson said that was a change made by the State.

Mrs. Booth said that still doesn't advocate the Code Department from the responsibility of making sure Codes are enforced. They shouldn't have to rely on neighbors reporting other neighbors to find these violations. They should have a process to follow to find these violations. That is their responsibility. They should know how to do that and the City should put the money towards it to enforce the Code. She said these are very critical Ordinances that must be followed if they are going to have any chance at all of restoring the Lagoon. She said that she needs to know if there have been any violations and if there are then they know that the Code Enforcement Officers are doing their job.

A) Landscaping Award / Recognition Program

Mrs. Booth reported that she was trying to find information on who is responsible for the Turf SWAP Program that is being done in Alachua County. She called the SJRWMD with the hope that they could find out who did the grant for Alachua County so they could talk to them about doing a grant for the City.

Mrs. Booth said that she spoke with Mrs. Siplak after she heard that she resigned and Mrs. Siplak said that she would still be available to validate properties if the Commission wanted to initiate a Florida Friendly landscaping award. She reported that Florida Friendly Landscaping already has a recognition landscaping program that is very involved. She said the Commission could start a facebook page and have an application for property owners to fill out to receive recognition and then Mrs. Siplak would go out and look at their property. She said they need to make sure that the property owners understand that even if they come in at the minimum level, which might mean that there is a yard of 90% turf grass, that within one (1) year they would have to be bumped up to the next level where they reduce their turf grass. She said that would be a component that the Commission might want to veer off the Florida Landscaping program and make it more rigorous.

Mrs. Robinson said that she put Mrs. Siplak in contact with some friends who have a conservation area and Mrs. Siplak was going to evaluate it.

Mrs. Booth said that she spoke with Mrs. Tammy Bursick, City Clerk, and was told that they could have a facebook page created. She said that she would go ahead and ask Mrs. Bursick to create a facebook page with an application and if any property owners want to be recognized they could fill out the application and have the evaluations and then at their February meeting the Commission could look at those who have met the criteria and they could discuss how they were going to recognize them.

Mrs. Robinson said that she is not in an HOA, but many of them have conservation areas. She felt those would be logical places to start.

Mrs. Booth said that would be great, however everyone that she spoke with said there is no way to get contact information on HOA's. She said if they want to participate they could fill out an application just like any other property owner.

Mrs. Robinson said when the facebook page is created, it might be a good idea to note that conservations areas are eligible.

Mrs. Booth said that she was following up on the green friendly landscaping that the City of Sebastian recommends and they have an application for property owners to participate. However, when she spoke with them in person she found out that they have not

implemented the program. She said they told her that they would be interested in the City of Vero Beach's results if they implemented it. She felt that since Mrs. Siplak was willing to do certifications for Florida Friendly landscaping that they should start with that program.

B) Beautification Weekend

Mrs. Booth reported that Mrs. Siplak is no longer interested in having a cleanup of her neighborhood for the Beautification Weekend. She felt that since the Commission was not going to meet in December and January that they should keep Beautification Weekend as simple as possible, which would be to revert back to the original activities, which is to hang the banner and put out signs. She said the Hibiscus Festival is going to take place on March 25th and 26th and would probably be hanging their banner advertising the Hibiscus Festival a week before the event. She recommended that the Commission hang their banner advertising Beautification Weekend one (1) week prior to that. She felt that their banner and signage could encourage homeowners to have the behaviors that they want to see property owners implement, which would be whatever would protect the Lagoon, the aquifer, etc. She reported that the cost of the banner was still averaging about \$900.

Mrs. Robinson said that she thought they already had a banner.

Mrs. Booth said the reason that they wanted a new banner was because they wanted to have the City's website on it. She said that she received three (3) quotes, which were Fast Signs at \$962.50, Image360 at \$875 and Minute Man at \$841.25.

Mrs. Booth made a motion that the Commission chooses the Minute Man quote, that Minute Man Press is the maker of their new banner.

Ms. Nelson said that she knows someone from Minute Man Press very well and she would see if she could get a better quote.

Mrs. Booth amended her motion that the Commission accept the Minute Man quote of \$841.25 to create a new banner that includes the City of Vero Beach website or a lesser price. Ms. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mrs. Booth reported that the Pelican Island Audubon Society said that they would pay for the signs, as well as gift them with time with whoever they choose to print the signs to also design them. She said that she has not been able to come up with the background for the signs. She then gave a few examples of some phrases that she found online. She said since they have design time they could get a draft design emailed to them and then they could bring it back before Commission at their February meeting for approval.

Mrs. Robinson made a motion that the Beautification Weekend for the City of Vero Beach be held on March 25th and March 26, 2023.

Mrs. Booth felt that they needed to hold Beautification Weekend one (1) or two (2) weeks prior to the Hibiscus Festival so they could get people in the mindset to plant native trees, reduce irrigation, etc., and then at the Hibiscus Festival people would be looking for drought tolerant plants, etc. She asked Mrs. Robinson if she would amend her motion that they would hold Beautification Weekend one (1) or two (2) weeks before the Hibiscus Festival.

Mrs. Robinson thought they were going to incorporate Beautification Weekend with the Hibiscus Festival.

Mrs. Booth said they were going to hang a Hibiscus Festival banner across 14th Avenue. She said the Beautification Weekend signs could be put out during that time frame, but they could not hang their banner. She said if they want to encourage people to consider their landscaping practices before they purchase plants at the Hibiscus Festival then they would need to promote it before the Hibiscus Festival takes place.

The motion died for lack of a second.

The Commission took a break at 10:36 a.m. and reconvened at 10:37 a.m.

Mrs. Booth made a motion that the Commission holds the Annual Beautification Weekend prior to the Hibiscus Festival with the date to be determined.

Mrs. Booth amended her motion that the Commission holds the Annual Beautification Weekend prior to the Hibiscus Festival in March with the date to be determined.

The motion died for lack of a second.

Mrs. Robinson said so that she understands, Mrs. Booth wants Beautification Weekend to be held prior to the Hibiscus Festival.

Mrs. Booth said that she would like to have it at the same time, however they could not hang their banner, unless they decided not to have the banner. She said the only input they would have would be the signs, which would have the City Seal, as well as the Pelican Island Audubon Society's Seal because they are paying for the sign.

Mrs. Robinson asked why would they spend \$850.00 for a banner if they were not going to do other events.

Ms. Nelson said they discussed at their last meeting that they were going to incorporate Beautification Weekend with the Hibiscus Festival and she mentioned that they could have a booth at the Hibiscus Festival. She felt it was a good idea to incorporate their event with the Hibiscus Festival and that way they would not have to spend money on a banner. She said they could have a tent, put the signs out, and hand out brochures.

Mrs. Booth said the signs are usually placed in strategic places throughout the City.

Ms. Nelson said that she could ask for volunteers from the Rotary Club to help them put out the signs. She said that she would need to speak with Mrs. Gromis of MainStreet to be sure that they would not have any objections.

Mrs. Booth said that they would put this item on their February meeting agenda.

Mrs. Booth made a motion that the Commission removes the prior motion made to purchase a banner for Beautification Weekend. Mrs. Robinson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Ms. Nelson said that she has a tent and a table. She said they would need to discuss what color table cloth that they want.

Mrs. Booth asked Ms. Nelson to come up with a design and bring it back before the Commission at their February meeting.

Mrs. Booth said they would need something stating that they are the Tree and Beautification Commission.

Ms. Nelson suggested that they order a small banner from Vista Print.

Mrs. Booth explained that they would have to have a design and get bids. She asked Ms. Nelson to come up with a design and bring it to their meeting in February for approval. She said that she could get the bids in a few days and then they could get it made.

Mrs. Booth reported that the Clean Water Coalition was going to produce a brochure so she did not see any need for the Commission to have one unless the Public Works Department wanted to have input on a brochure.

C) Goals 2022

This item was not discussed.

6. TREASURY REPORT

Mrs. Booth reported that the funds available to the Commission was \$1,569.21.

7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

Mrs. Booth reported that Mr. Matt Mitts, Engineering Director, gave a presentation to the Planning and Zoning Board about landscaping rights-of-ways in front of single-family residences. She explained that some of the homeowners have requested native plant ground covers or pervious stone in place of sod in the rights-of-way. She said the Planning and Zoning Board declined to vote on it. She said that science tells them that the health of the Lagoon is at stake and she would prefer that they have native plants or pervious stone rather than turf grass that the City has to maintain with fertilizer, chemicals, and mowing. She said that she would like to invite Mr. Mitts to give his presentation to the Commission with the expectation that the Commission would advise the City Council to approve the project.

Mrs. Booth made a motion to invite Mr. Mitts to give a presentation to the Commission at their February meeting. Ms. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

8. MEMBER'S MATTERS

None

9. CITY CLERK'S MATTERS

A) Cancellation of December and January Meetings Because of Renovations to the Council Chambers

Mrs. Booth reported that the Commission would not be meeting in December and January because of renovations to the Council Chambers.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Today's meeting adjourned at 10:56 a.m.

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