

VERO BEACH TREE AND BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Thursday, December 17, 2020 – 9:30 a.m.

Council Chambers, City Hall, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Chairman, Marilyn Black Dussault; Members: Fran Robinson (via GoToMeeting), Neal Roe, and Katherine Booth **Also Present:** City Attorney, John Turner, Planning and Development Director, Jason Jeffries, Grounds Maintenance Manager, Nanette Haynes, and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Hawkins

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Dussault called today's meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and the Senior Administrative Assistant performed the roll call.

Mrs. Dussault announced that Ms. Schwarz resigned from the Tree and Beautification Commission this week. She stated that she will be tremendously missed and she wishes her well.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) November 19, 2020

Mrs. Booth made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2020 Tree and Beautification Commission meeting. Mr. Roe seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mrs. Dussault stated that Mrs. Robinson is attending the meeting via GoToMeeting, so she suggests that they postpone the Election of Officers until their next meeting. She asked if there were any objections from the Commission members. The Commission members were all in favor of her suggestion.

A) Chairman

B) Vice-Chairman

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

5. NEW BUSINESS

A) Review Draft Annual Report

Mrs. Dussault stated that they all received a draft copy of the Annual Report that the City Clerk's office prepared. She explained that any information from today's meeting and the Tree and Beautification account balances will be added. She would like to allow the Commission members to comment and make recommendations when all the Commission members are present, so she would like to review this item again at their next meeting. She asked the Commission members to send any changes to the

City Clerk's office so they can be included. The Commission members were in favor of tabling this item until their next meeting.

6. OLD BUSINESS

A) **Beautification Weekend Plans and Discuss the Implementation of the Terms of the Resolution adopted by City Council**

Mrs. Dussault thanked Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, and Mrs. Tammy Bursick, City Clerk, for their wonderful work on putting together the Resolution. She said the Resolution states that they are adopting this as a City program, but she informed City Council that they did not have to do anything but put their blessing on it and provide support for the Tree and Beautification Commission. One (1) thing they take great pride in is that they have been a member of Tree City USA for 39 years and a requirement for that is to have a Tree Commission. She would like to invite anyone who is interested in joining the Tree and Beautification Commission to please contact the City Clerk's office. It is important that the Tree and Beautification Commission continue their work in the City of Vero Beach. She stated that she will present a draft copy of the criteria for this program to Mr. Turner to make sure it meets the City's legal aspects. She asked the Commission members to take steps to get the community involved within the City.

Mr. Roe explained that he will approach businesses and organizations and provide them with the concept of the event and the benefits of them being a part of a City program. The local businesses are often giving back to the City, so this is just another way for them to participate.

Mrs. Dussault said that this is not just a program for City residents and businesses to improve their properties. It also applies to landscape and tree companies as a way to increase their business by promoting and supporting this program.

Mrs. Booth said she can reach out to environmental groups and organization to get them to participate.

Mr. Turner stated that they might want to address some type of fundraising, donations, or sponsorships. There will be costs for the awards, the publication of the applications the people will need to fill out, etc.

Mr. Roe said he assumes they will be looking for in-kind donations, such as gift certificates or products.

Mrs. Dussault said she agrees with Mr. Turner and they need to start soliciting funds. She will prepare all the documents and she would like to put together some type of a marketing plan.

Ms. Haynes said it has been a long time since the City held this program. There was participation, but it was on a much larger scale. They just need to get the information out to the public.

Mrs. Dussault said she agrees. This project is more about getting people involved and enthusiastic about taking more pride and care of their properties. In January they will have to be focused on this to get the word out and get the participation from the local landscaping companies. She asked the Commission members to submit any ideas or suggestions to the City Clerk's office so they can be compiled for their next meeting.

B) Landscaping and Tree Protection Ordinance Recommendations

This item was heard before item 6-A).

Mr. Jason Jeffries, Director of Planning and Development, gave a brief recap of what he discussed at previous meetings with the Tree and Beautification Commission. He said the City staff's recommendation is to take aspects of the University of Florida's Ordinance and create more of a development incentive to encourage the use of more native plants. After this analysis, his staff suggested they prepare a *Native Plant Conservation and Endangered Plant Ordinance*. This would codify some of the minimum standards they already have, focus on the protection of native plants and endangered species, and apply conservation and environmental sensitive land use to designated areas in the City. Another recommendation is to create Sustainable Development Incentives, which would promote native plants as per the City's Comprehensive Plan. It will not be mandated, because there is nothing in the Comprehensive Plan to suggest mandating native plants. Other improvements would require that building perimeters be landscaped and the plans are to be submitted by a Landscape Professional. For the Tree Protection Ordinance they recommend adding additional protections for the Oak Tree canopy. They will also add regulations as to the removal of invasive species as per the Comprehensive Plan. Invasive trees do not require a permit to be removed per the tree removal process, but there is nothing in the City Code pertaining to the removal of existing category one (1) invasive trees or plants as stated in the Comprehensive Plan. He said the City staff is looking for the Tree and Beautification Commission's recommendations or changes to be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Board. He stated that a Tree and Beautification Commission member recommended they take elements of the Model Native Plant Ordinance by Florida Native Plant Society and make the City Ordinance more of an incentive program. The City's Comprehensive Plan does not talk about mandating or requiring the use of native plants, so to adopt what is in the Model Ordinance on native plants would not be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Booth asked how often is the Comprehensive Plan revised.

Mr. Jeffries replied that the City adopted the current Comprehensive Plan in 2018. He explained that it is a long process to amend the Comprehensive Plan and any policy changes have to be based on substantial planning, data, and analysis at the time the plan is adopted. The City cannot just change a policy without showing the benefits as they apply specifically to the City of Vero Beach. Other issues are they have to balance them with Florida State Statutes, they have to be reasonable, and in recognition of private property rights, which the Comprehensive Plan does.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth if her recommendation is to mandate the use of native plants, because the City currently encourages it.

Mrs. Booth replied no, not to mandate but incentivize the use of native plants.

Mrs. Dussault said the suggestion of offering incentives for using native plants has already been made by the Planning and Development staff.

Mrs. Booth said that since most of the City land is already developed, when they look at redevelopment some landscaping changes could be mandated and others could be incentives.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth what could be mandated that would meet the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Mrs. Booth could not provide any specific examples.

Mrs. Booth said that Alachua County, Florida made changes to their irrigation permits. When redevelopment occurs and irrigation systems are updated people have to comply with mandatory restrictions to the design and the operation of irrigation systems. Due to the restrictions in watering it encourages people to use native plants that will survive with restricted watering.

Mrs. Booth continued to talk about native plant incentive programs she researched with other counties.

Mr. Roe asked how does this conversation pertain to the Tree and Beautification Commission.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth if the first page of her presentation is her list of recommendations.

Mrs. Booth stated those are some, but she is still gathering more. She explained that she spoke with other cities who made recommendations on what Vero Beach could do.

Mr. Jeffries and Mrs. Booth continued to discuss comparable cities.

Mrs. Dussault explained that the Commission's intent for this meeting was to provide Mr. Jeffries with the Tree and Beautification Commission's recommendations. She asked Mrs. Booth again if the first page of her presentation was her list of recommendations, because they are not going to go through it page by page.

Mrs. Booth asked Mr. Jeffries if she could get a copy of the draft Ordinances showing the strike throughs and additions.

Mr. Jeffries replied that they are not to that point yet. They need to gather all the recommendations and proceed through the proper steps first. Based on his priorities that will not even happen until late spring or early summer.

Mrs. Booth said there is so much that can be done with the Landscape Ordinance, which can be applied to single family residence. This is great opportunity to help restore the Lagoon, because residential landscaping is what created a large portion of the pollution.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth again if the first page of her agenda item 6-B) is a synopsis of her recommendations.

Mrs. Booth replied no. She said the whole document includes her recommendations at this time.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth for the purpose of this meeting does she consider this agenda item her recommendations.

Mrs. Booth replied well, I guess yes.

Mr. Roe stated that he does not have any additional recommendations.

Mrs. Dussault said she does not have any recommendations other than what Mr. Jeffries presented and she knows they meet the criteria of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. John Turner, City Attorney, stated that Ordinance revisions are not normally prepared and sponsored by Boards or Commissions, so this might be out of the Commission's jurisdiction.

Mr. Jeffries explained that he is just asking for the Commission's recommendations along with the City staff's suggested changes so they can be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Board.

Mrs. Dussault stated that they received a recommendation from Mrs. Booth, but they are not going to vote on it until Mrs. Robinson is at the meeting when they can all discuss it and vote on it.

Mr. Turner replied that is correct. The Commission needs a majority of approval on recommendations before they can be submitted as recommended changes.

Mrs. Dussault made a motion to table this item to a later meeting.

Mrs. Booth asked when they do vote on it, will that be to submit their recommendations to the Planning Department.

Mr. Roe seconded the motion to table the recommendations.

Mrs. Booth asked if they can bring it back at their next meeting.

Mrs. Dussault stated that it will probably be at their March meeting.

Mrs. Booth modified the motion to table this item until the March meeting of the Tree and Beautification Commission. Mrs. Dussault seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

7. TREASURY REPORT

Mrs. Dussault reported that the Tree Replacement/Mitigation Fund has a balance of \$112,876.43 and the Tree Planting Application Fund has a balance of \$1,269.21.

Ms. Haynes stated that she will be spending some money from the Tree Replacement Fund next year. The City's Beautification Weekend project is to redo the entrance to Charles Park and the cost of the Palm Trees will come from the account. She said that she is working on updating the medians along A1A and there will be some Palm Trees planted there. She explained that in the Crestlawn Cemetery they will be moving the fence in order to plat some more spaces, so along Seminole Avenue she will be planting a row of native Junipers.

Mr. Roes asked Ms. Haynes if she could put together a list of all her projects from the past few years, because it might help in promoting the Beautification Weekend project.

8. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

None

9. MEMBER'S MATTERS

Mr. Roe said he just learned that the City owns the land next to MacWilliam Park and the office building located there and that area is going to see growth with all the improvements to the Marina and the Yacht Club. He would like to know all the City properties where they could possibly plant trees or beautify. He said the Commission should be informed about projects or development in the City so they could have input on them.

Ms. Haynes stated that all projects go before the Planning and Zoning Board, so just by watching their meetings or reading their minutes you can find out a lot of information.

Mr. Turner explained that the Marina is now working on a Master Concept Plan and it is going to be a beautiful location.

A) Oaks Along Victory Boulevard – Mrs. Katherine Booth

Mrs. Booth said that she put together a case study of the Oak Trees along Victory Boulevard (on file in the City Clerk’s office). She said a resident told her that the trees are dying, so she went and took some pictures. It appears to her that many of them are missing interior limbs and are water sprouting due to harsh pruning. She was told that the City maintains these trees, so she wanted to make sure they are aware of what is going on. There are some young trees that appear to be planted too close to the road and it will be necessary to prune them often and aggressively. She was told that they are Laurel Oaks and they only live about 50 years. She spoke with experts at the University of Florida and they do not have evidence of that. It is possible that the Laurel Oaks are not declining due to their age but from over pruning.

Mrs. Dussault asked Mrs. Booth if she is saying that the City is planting trees incorrectly and not pruning them properly.

Mrs. Booth replied that there seems to be a problem.

Mr. Turner stated this subject matter is not a proper discussion for the Tree and Beautification Commission. If there is a complaint that needs to be made it needs to go through the proper channels.

Mrs. Dussault stated that if Mrs. Booth believes there is a problem then she needs to take action as a citizen, but not at this meeting.

Mr. Turner stated that this discussion is out of order.

10. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) Next Meeting Date – January 21, 2021

The next meeting of the Tree and Beautification Commission is scheduled for January 21, 2021.

11. ADJOURNMENT

Today’s meeting adjourned at 10:52 a.m.

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