

**KNOXVILLE TREE BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
**December 7, 2023**

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The meeting was called to order by Dan Steinhoff at 8:30 am. Other board members present were Charles Kwit, Sylvia McLaurin, Brian O'Connor, Melissa Hinten, Gordon Coker, Elaine Reed, Charlotte Rodina, Kayla Stuart, and Jessica Rodocker.

Ex-Officio members present were Kasey Krouse, Sophie Carter, Lee Rumble, Aoife Whitaker, David McGinley, Ben Nanny, Brian Pickett, John Shockley, Tim Hester, Brandie Jackson and Melanie Overall.

**Action Items for December**

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- Motion to approve November minutes made by Dan Steinhoff. All in favor, none opposed.

**City Update: Kasey Krouse**

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- Introductions were made around the room.
  - Two (2) regulatory issues this past month: 1808 Thunderhead Road permit and 1915 Forest Avenue tree removal. Has had dozens of permit requests this year. There was a violation at Suttree Landing.
  - Maintenance requests are up over 20% from last year, highest ever.
  - Trees are coming in.
  - Reaching out for bids for plant maintenance.
  - With capital funding budget, the City will possibly have 2 new positions in UF, new equipment and project budget. Looking at some reorganization in Public Service.
  - Volunteer Forester class starts the end of January. Need one more instructor.

**Trees Knoxville Update: Sophie Carter**

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- Trees Knox is partnering with Dogwood Arts for tree plantings, Saturday at 11:30 and 12:30. Demonstrations will be videoed and posted.
  - Tree planting Saturday, 12/16 at Caswell Park from 9:00-12:00 for 20 trees. These plantings are through the Challenge Grant.
  - Tree walk this past Saturday with Dan was good, but cold and rainy.
  - Sophie will be meeting with Keep Knox Beautiful tomorrow to see how they can be involved with plantings.
  - Looking for one more school for Canopies for Campuses.
  - Trees Knoxville has an opening for Executive Director. Funded for 5 years and hoping to become full time by the end of the 5 years.

## Education Update: Gordon Coker

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- Sent out another neighborhood email but only received one response.
- Bob has this month's article
- Add Sylvia to the education committee.
- Jessica suggested a snip it about the proper way to put brush at roadside. Current brush piles are causing flooding on the streets. Maybe KUB could also put a note in their billing insert and PSD put in a note when pickup is announced.

## Urban Forest Master Plan Update: Kasey Krouse

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- UFMP released to Steering Committee. After the holiday, will be sent to public and Advocacy Committee. There are 3 main documents: budget, executive summary, and the main bulk with case studies.
- Once it is released, we need to make sure we stay on top of it – updates, monthly meetings with committee to oversee, etc.

## Ex-Officio Reports and Others

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- Jessica spoke about the landscape ordinance. She met with Amy Brooks, Tim Hill, and Kasey. Brian, Jessie, Jessica and Kasey are meeting next week to look at ordinance and put in proposed changes to be ready by end of January. Jessica asked for Advocacy to be added to the agenda. Dan also suggested the Tree Board review a part of the UFMP each meeting.
- Tim – P&R quiet this time of year.
- Ben/Ijams – pulling weeds January 8-12. Americorp workers will be coming to town for weed removal on trails, using cut stump methods, leverage devices, etc. They will be removing the 4 main invasives in our area. 2/24 Weed Wranglers at Collier Preserve and Citizens Cemetery. Meeting with Sophie and Kasey on Monday to pick spots to clear to get ready for plantings. Dan made comment that Ijams looks good.
- Lee/UT Extension – Grounds Management short course is January 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>.
- Elaine/KUB – 200 service requests a month. Bazillion Blooms is tomorrow. Will be there to distribute education packets.
- Jessica mentioned Missing Middle and parking requirements that will lead to tree removal. Tree Board needs to get involved. Brian mentioned on street parking last month and there was discussion. Brian will draft a letter to vote on via email. Charlie Kwit mentioned this only affects certain parts of the city and people may think canopy is already too low. Can't afford to lose any more canopy and we need to use UFMP as a way to help move in right direction.
- There was also discussion on minimum parking lot regulations.

Meeting adjourned at 9:32 am.

## Upcoming Events

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- December 16<sup>th</sup>, 9:00-12:00 – tree planting at Caswell Park
- January 18-19, 2024 – Grounds Management
- End of January – next Volunteer Forester class begins

## After meeting business

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Brian drafted a letter to the Commissioners regarding the Middle Housing Traditional Neighborhood Residential designated areas. The letter was sent out to the board members. The following members voted on and approval of the letter: Jessica Rodocker, Kayla Stuart, Gordon Coker, Charlie Kwit, Melissa Hinton, Charlotte Rodina and Elaine Reed. Copy of letter is attached to the December 2023 minutes.



December 13, 2023

Dear Commissioners,

Trees are invaluable assets to our community and Middle Housing Traditional Neighborhood Residential (MHTNR) designated areas. It is well-documented that trees provide numerous environmental and societal benefits. Trees capture carbon emissions and storm run-off, reduce and mitigate the urban heat island effect, and positively impact mental health.

A common feature of MHTNR neighborhoods are homes with small front yards and larger rear yards that adjoin alleys. Consequently, it is not unusual that some of the oldest trees in these neighborhoods are located behind homes. Buffer yards and building setbacks provide further opportunities for critical greenspace. Further, due to the size and density of urban lots, the loss of one large canopy tree can significantly impact these communities.

One principal goal of the proposed Urban Forest Master Plan is that residents of Knoxville deserve equal access to the benefits of trees, a term commonly referred to as tree equity. Another goal is to increase the urban canopy from 38% to 40% by 2040. This community-driven strategic plan is in the final draft stages and is expected to be released for public comment in January 2024.

The Middle Housing ordinance stands to impact tree canopy coverage in several ways. First, the proposed regulations remove the percentage of lot coverage for new structures; in its place, the width and depth requirements for new structures will allow for less tree space. Second, off-street parking requirements could further impact a neighborhood's canopy coverage due to the nature and size of urban lots.

Therefore, the Knoxville City Tree Board respectfully asks the Planning Commission to more fully consider the potential tree loss in MHTNR neighborhoods, including but not limited to proposed width and depth requirements for new structures and off-street parking requirements. The Tree Board further supports ordinance provisions that promote greenspace and canopy coverage and are consistent with the goals of the Urban Forest Master Plan. For example, tree protection should be explicitly considered as a hardship for a zoning variance case. Other opportunities to preserve canopy coverage include requiring applicants to plant trees on a development that exceeds a certain number of dwelling units and encouraging curb bump-outs for street trees.

Trees are sanctuaries in urban environments, and balancing growth and preservation is always challenging. We hope the Planning Commission considers these factors when deliberating this proposal.

Sincerely,

Members of the City of Knoxville Tree Board