

**Urban Forestry Committee (UFC)**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**January 9, 2025**

**Members Present:**

Tommy Allen, Dan Chase, Cindy Irving, Geoff Kempter, Joe Sulak, Jonathan Wilson, Annabelle Wilkinson

**Others Present:** Lauren Davis, Evie Džomba, Brent Geurink, Michelle Slykhouse, Nick Hitchcock, Hannah Mico

**Mission:**

*To provide guidance to the City Commission and City staff to promote and maintain a vibrant and healthy urban treescape and canopy for citizens of Grand Rapids.*

**Agenda:**

1. Call to Order: 4:05 p.m.
2. Determination of Quorum
3. Approval of Agenda  
Motion made by Jonathan Wilson, supported by Annabelle Wilkinson, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.
4. Approval of Minutes from the November 14 meeting  
Motion made by Jonathan Wilson, supported by Joe Sulak, to approve the November 14, 2024 minutes as presented. Motion carried
5. Public Comments  
None.
6. Chair/vice chair election  
Joe Sulak nominated Tommy Allen for chair. Tommy accepted the nomination. Motion made by Jonathan Wilson, supported by Annabelle Wilkinson, to elect Tommy Allen as chair. Motion carried.

Tommy Allen nominated Jonathan Wilson for vice chair. Jonathan accepted the nomination. Motion made by Joe Sulak, supported by Annabelle Wilkinson, to elect Jonathan Wilson as vice chair. Motion carried.

7. Community Master Plan presentation and Nature Based Solutions from Climate Plan  
Community Master Plan presentation: Brent explained the objectives and recommendations in the Plan are intentionally broad, as it is a long-range document to grow with. There will be ordinance updates made in the next couple of years to make sure these align with the new Plan.

Tommy asked about the Kent Country Club and if that property was to be used for something other than green space what the map would look like.

Brent stated the Plan was developed with current property uses and stated that former golf course property, The Highlands, was initially going to be developed as housing and ended up being preserved with the Land Conservancy. The Plan will balance growth with policy and overlaps with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Tommy stated the planning process was very intentional and commended everyone on the committee.

Joe stated the UFC worked to update some ordinances a few years ago regarding tree canopy and asked how that will fit into the new Plan and ordinance re-writes. Brent stated the expertise from UFC will be used as a resource again.

Motion made by Annabelle Wilkinson, supported by Joe Sulak, to move the Climate Plan presentation to the February meeting. Motion carried.

#### 8. Old Business

- Tree awareness items

Evie stated Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP) created content for winter tree care tips, pruning information, and other seasonal items (drought, spongy moth). FGRP developed an annual plan for these types of messages to be sent in newsletters and put on social media pages. Blog posts will be written such that they can be re-posted annually. Some of the content will be printed in English and Spanish.

Dan suggested talking to the neighborhood associations to see whether they can help get the word out about some of these items as well.

- Mayor letter

Tommy stated the intent was to encourage Mayor LaGrand to continue supporting forestry goals as it was a priority for former Mayor Bliss. Tommy will re-send the letter to UFC and asked for input due by Tuesday for Tommy to finalize and send. Motion made by Geoff Kempter, supported by Jonathan Wilson, to send a welcome letter to Mayor LaGrand and thank you letter to former Mayor Bliss. Motion carried.

- Native landscape ordinance update

Joe stated the no mow definition and references were removed, per Code Compliance input. Cindy asked whether the ordinance change would roll into the Planning Department's process of ordinance updates due to the new Master Plan. Brent stated the nuisance code change would be separate from the zoning ordinance updates and moving forward now would be appropriate.

Motion made by Annabelle Wilkinson, supported by Dan Chase, to approve the suggested changes. Motion carried.

#### 9. New Business

None.

10. Partner Reports

- City of Grand Rapids

Nick stated there will be a Tree Trimmer I vacancy. Geoff stated he taught a TRAQ (tree risk assessment) class and the city employees who attended were exemplary.

Joe stated comments from the first draft of the Forestry Operations and Management Plan and a full draft will be given to the UFC when available. Joe stated preliminary numbers show that the tree canopy increased about 3% from the last study, to about 37%.

Cindy stated Engineering is in design phase for street projects and some of these will require tree removal and new planted.

- Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP)

Lauren stated Arbor Day work will be in the Boston Square neighborhood this year. Love Your Parks event will be in February at Richmond Park.

11. Agenda Items for future meeting

- Zoning change and effect on canopy
- Approved species list
- Forestry operations and management plan
- Climate presentation
- Tour des Trees

12. Adjournment – 5:13 pm

**Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, March 13, 2025 – 4:00 p.m. at City Hall**