

Urban Forestry Committee Minutes

February 12, 2026 – 4:00 p.m.

City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids Public Service Center – 1500 Scribner Ave NW

Room 2106

Committee Members Present:

Becky Pobst, Jonathan Wilson, Tommy Allen, Dan Chase, Annabelle Wilkinson, Joe Sulak

Others present: Michelle Slykhouse, Christy Brunsell (City staff)

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: 4:06 pm
2. Determination of Quorum
3. Approval of Agenda
Motion made by Annabelle Wilkinson, supported by Jonathan Wilson, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.
4. Approval of Minutes from the January 8 meeting
Motion made by Joe Sulak, supported by Jonathan Wilson, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried.
5. Public Comments – none
6. Old Business
 - Tree awareness items and communication
Tommy stated the subcommittee still needs to meet. Christy offered to send out some potential dates and times. Becky requested that Amy from Friends of Grand Rapids Parks be added to the subcommittee meeting.

Christy stated the City is getting a new website in March, and gave the Committee a look at the new Forestry section of the website. Tommy asked whether the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section could be adjusted, possibly add some information about droughts or other items. Christy stated the FAQs are starting at a high level with short answers. Either more FAQs can be added, or an additional webpage could be created during an active drought that would contain more information and links to other resources. Annabelle stated her department is hoping to build a climate resiliency page and some directs could be put into place when there may be overlaps between forestry and sustainability.

7. New Business

- Mayor's Monarch Pledge

Tommy asked about a spring event. Christy stated an event was supposed to be held last year and the timing became an issue. Joe stated he has been working with Travis from John Ball Zoo (Zoo) and a report from last year was submitted. A new sign-up period is now open for renewing the pledge, and the Zoo is taking the lead on the application. No discussion on a public announcement has been had. Tommy asked if a public announcement event could be coordinated with something the Zoo already has scheduled later this summer. Joe, Travis, Tommy, and Christy will meet to discuss.

- Urban Forestry Committee strategy plan for 2026

Jonathan stated he brought up this topic as it seems the meetings have been more updates-focused rather than action-based. How does the Committee measure success.

Joe stated he has been a part of the Committee since he's been with the City and having been with other municipalities in the past this Committee has been most successful. The strongest component for the Committee is advocacy. The Committee helped get tree canopy studies done and provided input regarding the Planning Department's development code in 2015/2016 (requirement for certain amount of trees to be planted per project). The Committee also provided input on the Tree Ordinance rewrite.

Joe stated he recently got an email from the Planning Department that they will be looking at the development code again. This will be an opportunity for the Committee to provide input before the new code is approved by City Commission.

Action on the Forestry Operations and Management Plan is still in process. The scenarios outlined in the Forestry Operations and Management Plan is something that the committee can advocate for. The idea is to get Forestry to a proactive state of work, the Committee can advocate for where they would like resources to go during City budget cycles.

Joe stated he will forward the upcoming development code meetings. Jonathan and Daniel stated they are interested.

8. Partner Reports

- City of Grand Rapids

Joe stated that young tree care is in the budget request. Every year a tree is not addressed, the risk rises. The Parks and Recreation Department's budget presentation is scheduled for next week Friday. Approximately \$1.5 million is being requested for Forestry.

A new Tree City USA application was submitted. This will be the 29th year of the program. The City is spending about \$200 per capita for forestry work in the City (this is above what the Tree City USA minimum requirement is). Planting to removal ratio is 4:1.

Annabelle stated that The Climate Plan will be presented to City Commission in March.

- Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP)

Becky stated FGRP is working with Arden from Engineering and coordinating better so that planting FGRP does will not interfere with upcoming construction projects. FGRP neighborhood conservation program cohort is finished. There is a luminary walk at Huff Park tonight. FGRP has a new forestry technician who is overseeing watering and structural tree pruning. Applications for the Green Team will open in March.

9. Agenda Items for future meeting
 - Zoning change and effect on canopy
 - Approved species list (April 2026)
10. Adjournment – 4:40 pm

**Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, March 12, 2026 – 4:00 p.m.
at Grand Rapids Public Service Center, 1500 Scribner Ave NW**