

Urban Forestry Committee Minutes

April 9, 2026 – 4:00 p.m.

City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids Public Service Center – 1500 Scribner Ave NW

Room 2106

Committee Members Present:

Tommy Allen, Dan Chase, Joe Sulak, Geoff Kempter, Hannah Mico, Becky Pobst, William Vassilakis, Nate Henschel

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 Geoff Kempter, supported by Joe Sulak, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.
4. Approval of Minutes from the February 12 meeting
Motion made by Dan Chase, supported by William Vassilakis, to approve the minutes as presented. Motion carried.
5. Public Comments – none
6. Old Business
 - Tree awareness items and communication
Christy stated the communications subcommittee met and discussed long-term education needs and consistent messaging. The goal is to empower residents to know more about the trees on their property and in their neighborhood, know why trees are important, and how to properly care for trees. The tree canopy in general and threats to the City's tree canopy (invasive species, droughts) are also education items that the communications subcommittee discussed providing education around.

A measurable goal the communications subcommittee discussed is the amount of calls to 311 (less is better). Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP) is already sending out tree care tips and newsletters to their email subscribers. Christy stated forestry is getting more attention on social media and this will continue as part of the education effort.

The communications subcommittee discussed having a tree of the month (each Urban Forestry Committee member would select one tree) with the 12th tree potentially being chosen by the Mayor, if FGRP decides to bring the Mayor's tree of the year designation back.

Tommy stated that Christy's approach to communication on the City's website, social media, and assisting the subcommittee is beneficial and looks forward to continuing the subcommittee discussions.

- Mayors' Monarch Pledge

Tommy stated a meeting was held with Travis from John Ball Zoo. An application has been submitted to renew the pledge for another year. One of the items being added this year is to add monarch plants in the Calder Plaza redesign. An event to promote the Mayors' Monarch Pledge will be held on September 9 from 4-6pm.

7. New Business

- Consumers Energy Tree Pruning

Tommy stated one of the subcontractors has a different work plan than what has been discussed at Urban Forestry Committee meetings in the past. Nate stated that no overhanging the power lines is the goal and that funding to go to a 5-year prune cycle is approved. There are 60 miles in the City with about 20 miles to go for pruning this year. Three phase pruning is being done.

Geoff stated it's difficult to get management or engineers to understand arboricultural practices. Joe stated since the utility pruning conversations started years ago during Urban Forestry Committee meetings that things have come along well, more frequent pruning has occurred and there are less complaints from the public.

8. Partner Reports

- City of Grand Rapids

Joe stated pruning projects continue with about 100 more trees to finish and 400 stumps to grind. Tree plantings have started for this year. Joe stated the preliminary budget does not appear to have enough funding for additional pruning (contract dollars), the priority 2 project is wrapping up and that money came from the parks fund, not general fund. The projected \$500k in the proposed budget is more than what was allocated prior to priority projects, but less than the recent previous years. A new tree inventory is projected to be approved in the budget.

Hannah stated the Parks and Recreation Department will be updating the department master plan and in 2030 a more robust planning process will occur. Land management practices will be included in the plan. Work will begin towards the end of the calendar year.

Hannah stated Max Gibbs will become the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board representative on the Urban Forestry Committee.

- Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP)

Planting season started. Arborfest is coming up April 24 and 25, 250 trees will be planted.

Heather Bell is working on pruning schedules, young tree training, watering routes, and staking.

FGRP is testing a new planting method with Bartlett Tree.

9. Agenda Items for future meeting
 - Zoning change and effect on canopy
 - Approved species list (May 2026)
10. Adjournment – 5:04 pm

**Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, May 14, 2026 – 4:00 p.m.
at Grand Rapids Public Service Center, 1500 Scribner Ave NW**