

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE OF THE CITY OF GROSSE POINTE WOODS HELD ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025, IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS/COURTROOM OF THE ROBERT E. NOVITKE MUNICIPAL CENTER, 20025 MACK PLAZA DRIVE, GROSSE POINTE WOODS, MICHIGAN.

Mayor Bryant called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Bryant
Council Members: Brown, Gafa, Granger, Koester, McConaghy, Motschall
ABSENT: None

Also Present: City Administrator Schulte
Assistant City Administrator Como
City Attorney Walling
City Clerk Antolin
City Treasurer/Comptroller Schmidt
Director of Public Services Kowalski

Motion by McConaghy, seconded by Brown, that all items on tonight's agenda be received, placed on file, and taken in order of appearance.

Motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: Brown, Bryant, Gafa, Granger, Koester, McConaghy, Motschall
No: None
Absent: None

Tonight's meeting was to discuss Community Tree Commission inquiries. Paul Lechner, Chair of the Tree Commission, provided an overview of his letter dated February 19, 2025. He stated that the Tree Commission was present in spirit for collaboration and teamwork with energy and interest in moving the city forward regarding forestation education and enhancement.

Mr. Lechner commented that, although trees on Mack Avenue is Wayne County property, it is still perceived as Grosse Pointe Woods. Some businesses are reluctant to have trees planted as it obstructs their business signs for those passing by. However, U.S. Forest Services and the Department of Agriculture states that consumers shop more frequently and longer in tree line commercial areas and are willing to spend more. Mack Avenue is the "Front Door" or "Main Street" of the community.

Mr. Lechner continued to provide the following benefits when having a healthy tree canopy for the city:

- Valuable assets are 3x the initial investment
- Healthier environment
- Homeowner savings to cooling/heating costs
- Increase in property value
- Curb appeal
- Prevent erosion and flooding
- Cleans our water/provides water and habitat for animals, etc.

The Master Plan was addressed as it references the enhancing of the city's tree canopy and the need for collaboration between the Tree Commission, City Council and City Administration. The Tree Commission is here to gauge how the city would like to move forward with the commitment to Tree City USA. Currently, the Tree Commission implements the poster contest, 3rd grade sapling giveaway, and the memorial tree dedication program, however, there is still a need to educate and help the city build and enhance the city's tree canopy.

Tree Commission Member, Christine Pitts, was introduced and stated that with the approval of the Master Plan, now is the time to clarify a path forward for the trees to grow and sustain a thriving urban forest. This will attract and retain residents and businesses while enhancing the health and well-being of the community.

Ms. Pitts addressed the following questions to city council:

- Are trees treasured as a primary resource of investment of time and dollars?
- Are trees a forethought for proactive planning and action or more of an afterthought?
- Is the Tree Commission a valued partner with the forestry division in planning and decision making about trees in the community?

Ms. Pitts continued with a historical background of the city regarding the creation of the Tree Commission and the relationship with the objectives of the Master Plan. She described some of the benefits of a healthy tree canopy such as stress/anxiety reduction, provides beauty, delivers useful environmental impact and increase of property value. There is a need for a long-term strategic plan with short-term actions that have immediate impact. She also stated that the Tree Commissions' presence today was to promote clarity between the them and city council and administration.

The following key questions were addressed from Paul Lechner's letter:

- What is the Council's commitment to abide by Master Plan Goal 5 to "Increase healthy tree canopy throughout the city," and create a strategic plan to be implemented by the Forestry Division?
- What are strategic priorities guided by the Master Plan, including healthy tree canopy, education, community engagement and resources?
- What are the roles & responsibilities necessary to successfully complete the strategic plan?
- What is a reasonable budget to support fulfilling the strategic plan?

Mr. Lechner stated that the city's tree canopy is at 33% with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) recommending 40%. Discussion commenced regarding the city's tree inventory and what is needed to assess a plan and move forward. The Tree Commission invited council and administration to the strategic planning process.

Councilmember Koester stated that the Tree Commission may be looking for council's blessing to move forward with knowledge-based programs to implement with collaboration from city council, administration and the community. Creating the framework of a strategic plan and presenting it back and forth between the commission, council and administration will provide a pathway towards a common goal of all parties involved.

Councilmember Granger stated that the Tree Commission branched off from the Beautification Advisory Commission as a result of increased tree maintenance responsibilities. She suggested that the commission may benefit if the membership increased from 11 to 15. Also, in support of the tree sale idea, she suggested to piggy back off the BAC's flower sale setup. Educating the community regarding trees through website updates and including information on the 2026 city calendar would be beneficial.

In Addition, Councilmember Brown commented on the importance of educating the community about trees and that the handbook titled "Celebrating the Trees of Grosse Pointe Woods" is a huge resource and would be beneficial if updated.

Councilmember Koester addressed the Memorial Tree Program. Since it's a matured program, he asked how the city should move forward with designating areas throughout the city.

Tree Commission members, Stevan Skorupski and Gary Lechner, provided statistics and financial information regarding the forestry budget and reiterated the needs of the city's tree canopy such as:

- Replacement of dead trees on Mack Avenue in a timely manner
- Planting of more trees
- Sale of trees similar to Grosse Pointe Farms
- Active management to protect viability, health and utility of the tree canopy
- Collaboration with City Council and Administration

The Tree Commission's discussion has centered around the following:

- How many trees should be planted annually?
- How to fund tree and canopy growth?
- How to increase community engagement?
- How the Commission can be more effective?

The Tree Commission was pleased with the Master Plan addressing tree canopy growth and management, Mack Avenue beautification and community grounds/parks improvement. Funding goals and objectives coinciding with the Master Plan will need to be strategically planned and compared with other communities.

Councilmember McConaghy requested clarification regarding the request for \$125,000. Paul Lechner stated that the funds requested is to allocate not only for the Tree Commission, but also for the Department of Public Works to support the needs to improve the city's tree canopy. The initial step is to get a tree inventory and provide greater detail of budgetary line items to more efficiently allocate the funds.

Mr. Lechner reiterated the importance of tree education programs and that the partnership of the Commission, City Council and Administration would enhance that process. He suggested a tree give-away for the 75th Anniversary celebration.

Collectively, the Mayor and City Council thanked the Tree Commission for their time and effort in preparation for this meeting.

Mayor Bryant stated that in about six months (around September) this item will be revisited with a possible drafted plan to move forward.

Under **New Business**, no one wished to be heard.

Under **Public Comment**, the following individual was heard:

- Lawrence Law, 22944 Gaukler St., St. Clair Shores, MI – Representative of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Urban Forestry Division, provided grant information and additional resources regarding trees.

Motion by Granger, seconded by Koester, that the meeting of the Committee-of-the-Whole be adjourned at 8:26 p.m. PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul P. Antolin
City Clerk

Arthur W. Bryant
Mayor