



MUNICIPAL BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION/TREE BOARD
June 6, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Time: Tuesday, June 6, 2023, 1:00 pm

Place: Charleston Municipal Parking Building #1

Commissioners: Anna Forbes, Chair
Brenda Craig-Ellis, Vice Chair (absent)
Marjorie Cooke, Secretary
Donna Graham, Treasurer
Lois Crichton
Marlene Dial
Lisa Dobbins
Jane Powell
Susan Shumate
John Casto
Alex Franklin

Staff and Guests: Mike Davis, Public Grounds Deputy Director
Brent Webster, Public Works Director
Barbara Rose, Kanawha Garden Club Member
Lewis Payne, BID, business owner
Jeff Pierson, City Public Arts Director
Lisa Fisher-Casto
Mary Ellen O'Farrell

Chair Anna Forbes called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the May 2023 MBC meeting were circulated to commissioners prior the meeting and presented for approval. Lois Crichton made a motion to approve, Lisa Dobbins seconded, and the minutes were ***approved*** as written.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Donna Graham presented Treasurer's report for May of 2023. The Treasurer's Report was accepted as presented.

George Snyder Sculpture Site Proposal: Lisa Fisher-Casto proposed Shanklin Park, a small passive park on Kanawha Boulevard within MBC's oversight, as a possible site for artist George Snyder's stick sculpture. She noted that the park was designed by Henry Eldon, in honor of Mayor Shanklin. She noted further that Bill McKee purchased this sculpture and wants to donate it to the city in honor of his deceased wife, Martha McKee. Lisa noted that Mrs. McKee was the first chair of the Charleston Regatta, another connection to this location. Lisa noted the artist fully supports this location for his sculpture.

The consensus of the commissioners was that Shanklin Park was a good site for the sculpture. The commissioners, however, discussed at length the aesthetics of using the existing water fountain, which currently is not operational because of a leak, as the base for the sculpture. Several commissioners suggested the idea of removing the water fountain altogether. Another idea was—if the fountain did serve as the base and if the sculpture were mounted in the top section of the fountain—for rocks be placed around the base of the sculpture. There was also discussion of painting the fountain black, removing the terra cotta tiles, and planting flowers and shrubs at the base to complement the colorful sculpture.

Mike Davis said he thinks this installation is doable. Jeff Pierson expressed support for the site proposal being taken to the Public Arts Commission for its review and said the fountain might be able to serve as a foundation. Some commissioners noted that the fountain is an eyesore, has not worked for years, and has a severe leak.

Despite a lack of consensus on how the statue would be mounted, the commissioners unanimously agreed that Shanklin Park was a good site for the statue and that the site proposal could be advanced to the Public Arts Commission for its approval—with the understanding that, if Public Arts Commission approved the site, Jeff would return to MBC with his commission's proposals for the mounting of the sculpture in the park.

Jane Powell made a motion to approve this sculpture's placement in Shanklin Park and permit the proposal to be advanced to the Public Arts Commission for its consideration. Ms. Graham seconded the motion, and the motion was **approved**. Jeff Pierson agreed that, in the event the Public Arts Commission determines that Shanklin Park is a suitable site for the Snyder sculpture, his commission will then consider the practical and design aspects for mounting the sculpture. Jeff will then return to MBC with his commission's proposal for how the sculpture should be mounted in the park.

MBC General Matters:

Ruffner Park Update: Ms. Forbes reported on meeting with Marlene Dial, Susan Shumate, and James Yost of GAI. She reported that plants had still not yet been ordered, that it was now too late in the season to plant, and as a result, park planting has been delayed until the fall.

Ms. Forbes proposed the formation of a private-sector volunteer group, (called something like "Friends and Gardeners of Ruffner Park" or the "Ruffner Park Gardening Association") with Ms. Dial serving as the initial organizer of this group. The association will provide private funding and labor to fund, plant, and maintain proposed landscaping, supplementing the work done by the city. The group's plans must

be approved twice a year (spring and fall) by the MBC prior to any work commencing. Part of the reason for forming the association is the recognition that the city is unable to address all the landscaping needs in the park with its current public grounds staff.

Donna Graham made a motion to approve the formation of a new association for plant maintenance, funding, and programming for Ruffner Park. Lisa Dobbins seconded the motion, and the motion was ***approved***.

Regarding park planting, Susan Shumate reported that the Kanawha Garden Club \$10,000 restoration grant funds needed to be spent for native plants soon, with a concern about grant funds expiring. Ms. Shumate suggested pre-ordering the plants now for planting in the fall, allowing her to transfer KGC funds to MBC soon. Mike Davis agreed that this was possible.

Ms. Forbes noted that the \$24,800 park entrance stonework estimate exceeded the \$14,000 pledged by Kanawha Garden Club. There was discussion about MBC possibly filling the funding gap. After receiving revised material and installation budget estimates from GAI for the entire project, Ms. Graham suggested that we allocate an additional \$30,000 to fund the Ruffner Park project, increasing our earmark from \$45,000 to \$75,000. Susan Shumate made the motion to allocate an additional \$30,000 to supplement the Ruffner Park budget. Lois Crichton seconded the motion, and the motion was ***approved***. It was noted that MBC will receive another \$100,000 in funding coming at the beginning of the fiscal year.

The commissioners discussed the need for more city resources to meet MBC's various initiatives, such as Ruffner Park, Davis Park, the City's flower baskets, and the living wall. Ms. Forbes offered to assist Brent and Mike in lobbying for the additional resources they need from the city.

Living Wall Update: Jane Powell and John Casto reported on how well the blooming flowers on the living wall were looking, and thanked the City for getting those plants in prior to Mother's Day.

Tree Board Matters:

100-Tree Initiative Proposal: Ms. Forbes proposed a "100-Tree Initiative" to plant trees across the city, but with a focus on low-income neighborhoods. She noted that this initiative would start in the fall and continue, if necessary, into the spring of 2024. She previously discussed this idea with Mike and Brent. They indicated it was workable, partly because the work would be done in the fall—a time when they have more labor available. The initiative would serve as a basis for applying for federal grant monies. Brenda Ellis would serve on a committee spearheading this effort. Ms. Forbes and Lisa Dobbins also agreed to serve. The committee would identify other areas in the city for tree placement. Dixie Park was a good location for tree planting. Other pocket parks on the West Side and other neighborhoods will be considered.

John Casto made the motion to approve the 100-Tree Initiative. Alex Franklin seconded, and the motion was ***approved***.

BID Update: Lois Crichton reported on the last BID meeting. She shared that they are seeking a new full time BID ambassador. The job includes administrative duties, assisting at public events, customer

service, maintenance, cleaning, and serving as a liaison between the committee and the administration and various committees. She also noted that BID is considering the same lighting fixtures for the downtown area as we will be installing in Ruffner Park.

Mary Price Ratrie Greenspace: Alex Franklin, who leads the effort to improve the Mary Price Ratrie Greenspace, asked the commissioners for advice about where to start with this project. He expressed frustration with the current state of the park. He plans to meet with Al Najjar to discuss the Clay Center's potential interest in helping improve the park given its proximity to the park. It was recommended that Susie Salisbury come talk to the commission about the project. The vagrancy is especially troubling now that the men's shelter is shut down temporarily.

Commissioners discussed the issue of vagrancy in the city's parks. While MBC agreed earlier this year to oversee Mary Price Ratrie Greenspace for a trial year in 2023, it is currently not one of the parks formally assigned to MBC under the city ordinance. Ms. Forbes suggested that perhaps Kevin Baker might offer advice. Ms. Graham suggested a rock garden possibility.

Davis Park: In light of the length of the meeting, Ms. Forbes suggested the discussion about improvements to Davis Park be deferred to our next meeting. There was no objection.

Public Grounds/Public Works Report: Mike Davis reported that his crew is all working on Regatta preparation. Fifty flower baskets have been hung; the rest will be hung soon. Brent Webster reported on the addition of 26 trash cans on Kanawha Boulevard. He noted that the tree inventory training at Spring Hill went well. He apologized for the delay in ordering plants for spring planting in Ruffner Park and explained his staffing challenges. He also reported that Derek Lambert, who previously petitioned the city to cut down two chestnut trees on his property, was given approval to remove them, at his own expense. Mr. Lambert agreed to plant appropriate replacement trees in the city's right of way.

Additional Business:

Marjorie Cooke requested that the topic of maintenance and upkeep of Dickinson and Quarrier Street flower bed be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting.

Because the next MBC meeting falls on the July 4th holiday, our meeting will take place on a different day, which Anna will confirm shortly.

Anna announced there will be no MBC meeting the month of August with no objection by the commissioners.

Submitted by Marjorie Cooke,
MBC Recording Secretary