



MUNICIPAL BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION/TREE BOARD
July 2, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Time: Tuesday, July 2, 2024, 1:00 pm

Place: Charleston Municipal Parking Building #1

Commissioners: Anna Forbes, Chair
Brenda Craig Ellis, Vice Chair
Marjorie Cooke, Secretary
Donna Graham, Treasurer
Lois Crichton
Marlene Dial
Lisa Dobbins
Jane Powell
Susan Shumate
John Casto
Barbara Rose

Staff and Guests: Mike Davis, City Public Grounds Deputy Director
Brent Webster, City Public Works Director
Sid Gillis, BID Ambassador
Lori Brannon, Planner, City of Charleston
Anne Silbernagel, Kanawha Garden Club
Ditsy Keightley, Kanawha Garden Club
Andy Sheetz, Urban Forester, WV Division of Forestry
Renata Pore
Sally Love
Charlie Love
Louisa Swift

Call to Order: Chair Anna Forbes called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the June 4 and 11, 2024 MBC meetings were circulated to commissioners prior the meeting and presented for approval. Susan Shumate made a motion to approve, Marlene Dial seconded, and the minutes were *approved* as written.

Treasurer's Report: Donna Graham presented the financial report noting that after earmarks (which include an additional \$100,000 from the City of Charleston), the Commission had a remaining balance of \$86,332.27. The Treasurer's Report was *accepted* as presented.

Anna welcomed the large group in attendance and invited Renate Pore to speak on behalf of residents at Park Place about an exciting possibility of a public private partnership to support improvements and maintenance at Ruffner Park. Renata announced that she in in the process of establishing a neighborhood association, Friends of Ruffner Park, that can work in partnership with the Municipal Beautification Commission, the Charleston Garden Club, and the City.

Friends of Ruffner Park proposed to work with the City to complete the work started and support the hiring of a private contractor to assist City workers in getting the work done. The Friends pledged to solicit bids from private landscapers in Charleston for this work to be done. Forren Soil and Valley Gardens have been contacted. Friends of Ruffner Park offered to raise funds to match City funding for the project. Specific recommendations are outlined in the attached memo dated June 6, 2024.

Lori Brannon noted that a bronze interpretive historic plaque is being designed for the Park, but will not be completed before the plantings go in. She noted any plantings should be low, behind the park entry for safety reasons. Brent Webster noted that the proposed recommendations are doable, with contractor help, and that many items on the list are close to completion. Weather, specifically tornados in the region, caused a delay as the City crew was needed for emergency cleanup. Mike Davis said the water fountain, benches, and trash receptacles are ready to be installed.

Anna thanked Renate Pore and her group for their presentation and written proposal for Ruffner Park, and added her opinion that she saw potential for success for a public private partnership. She provided some background, noting the recurring issue of the City's challenge of having more work to do than they have the time and capacity to accomplish. The amount of work and time that has gone into the Ruffner Park plan and the current stage of the plan was discussed.

Over a number of years, commissioners have also been frustrated at the inability to move more quickly on various projects. Anna noted projects where City partnerships with the private sector have proven successful including the Carriage Trail, Spring Hill Cemetery, and the BID District, and shared her opinion that this could also work with Ruffner Park.

Anna provided further context noting that the MBC recently ratified ByLaw changes that allow for the formation of associations or support organizations like "Friends of Ruffner Park" in order to address situations like this. It was envisioned that an association could provide private support in the form of labor and/or funding to plant or maintain proposed landscaping to supplement the City's work. Plans were to be approved by the MBC twice a year, in the spring and fall, prior to the commencement of any work.

Anna recommended the formation of a MBC Subcommittee for Ruffner Park, to be made up of Anna Forbes, Barbara Rose, and Susan Shumate. Plans are to communicate with all stakeholders and discuss the recommendations made by the Friends of Ruffner Park, including watering issues, contemplation paths, plantings, etc. and to come back with recommendations for action by MBC at its August meeting. She noted that she wanted no further delay.

Leon Sullivan Fence Update: Anna reported that three estimates were received, various product samples were evaluated, and a choice was made to purchase faux green panels with small white flowers for installation along the Leon Sullivan Fence. Old vinyl strips were removed from the chain link fence by volunteers recently and the new greenery will be installed soon. Anna noted that the donor is aware of the product lifespan and that there is the possibility to use this green screen as a backdrop for other public art installations or public welcome signage, etc.

BID Report: Lois Crichton called upon Sid Gillis who reported that there are groups of 3 planters in 4 different locations in the district to be placed on July 9. They will be filled with rock and soil and be prepared for future planting.

Living Wall Update: Anna noted that the blooming flowers on the wall were looking good. There was discussion of whether to keep them on the wall longer or remove them and replace with new plants on order. A suggestion was made to try winter pansies next season and commissioners agreed it was a good idea. Jane Powell, Jon Casto, and Donna Graham will coordinate with Mike Davis about further planting decisions.

100 Tree Initiative Update: Lisa Dobbins reported that their work continues and that research is being done into potential Arbor Day Foundation grant funding to assist with planting trees on state or private property. Adding trees in North Charleston was posing some challenges due to restrictions on planting on state-owned or private property.

Tree Inventory Update: Anna shared the excellent news that MBC had received \$50,000 in grant funds through WV Division of Forestry's EquiTree Grant Program for the tree inventory project. The City is required to solicit competitive bids, so that work is in process and will move forward once a vendor is selected. Discussion followed about placement of Tree City USA signs. Consensus was to put one at the bottom of the Carriage Trail, one near Haddad Riverfront Park, one at Spring Hill Cemetery, and one near the Capitol.

Public Grounds Report: Mike Davis asked for advice on colors for winter pansies and tulips. Commissioners agreed to stay with colors from last year's beds and recommended to stagger the removal of bulbs next season, as the purple alliums did not bloom.

Old Business:

Invasive Vine Cutting Project: Marjorie Cooke reported meeting with Beverly Campbell and Chris Higgins on plans to cut invasive vines from trees ten feet on both sides of the South Side bridge. This can be accomplished with a small number of trained volunteers during the winter months. Next step is to obtain a letter of understanding between the MBC and The Army Corps of Engineers, who own the property. They have advised that a permit is not required for this work. The goal is to save trees and improve the health of trees, starting by removing invasive vines from a very small group of trees on the rivers edge near the bridge.

Adjournment: Anna Forbes concluded the meeting at 2:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marjorie Cooke, MBC Recording Secretary