



MUNICIPAL BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION/TREE BOARD
November 6, 2024, Meeting Minutes

Time: Wednesday, November 6, 2024, 1:00 pm

Place: City Services Center, 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 (absent)
John Casto (absent)
Barbara Rose
Jason Testman

Staff and Guests: Brent Webster, Public Works Director
Mike Davis, Public Grounds Deputy Director
Sid Gillis, BID Ambassador
Renate Pore, Friends of Ruffner Cemetery & Park
Chris Higgins, City Arborist, Spring Hill Cemetery

Call to Order: Anna Forbes called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm. She circulated a note of thanks to Fonda Elliot and the Elliot Foundation for their generous support for the greenery wall for the fence on Leon Sullivan Way.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: The minutes of the October 1, 2024, MBC meeting were circulated prior to the meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded, and the Board *approved* the minutes noting one name spelling change (Renate Pore's first name).

Treasurer's Report: Donna Graham presented the report, noting that Davis Park benches were paid for with earmark funding in the amount of \$16,907.65. Interest earned was \$787.95 for a total balance of \$204,052.80. Earmarks total \$96,230.89 with a remaining balance after earmarks of \$90,914.26.

MBC GENERAL MATTERS

Nominating Committee Report: Lois Crichton presented the 2024-2025 slate of officers, noting that all current officers agreed to serve another term:

Anna Forbes - Chair
Brenda Craig-Ellis – Vice Chair
Marjorie Cooke - Secretary
Donna Graham – Treasurer

Anna Forbes asked for any nominations from the floor, and there were none. It was noted that Brenda Craig-Ellis has been vice chair for three years and is willing to serve a fourth term, which is generally disallowed under the MBC bylaws. Anna noted the bylaws permit an exception to this policy if the chair's or the vice chair's work on one or more substantial projects is ongoing, which is the case for Brenda and her work on the tree inventory. There was no objection by the commissioners for Brenda continuing on as vice chair for a fourth year.

Barbara Rose made the motion to approve the 2024-2025 slate of officers, which was seconded by Marlene Dial. The motion carried on a voice vote of commissioners present. Anna thanked the commissioners willing to serve again, as well as members of the nominating committee for its work. Anna noted that this would be her last year as chair.

MBC Re-Appointments: Anna reported on the fact that the mayor reappointed Marlene, Jane, and Brenda to the commission, subject to confirmation by city council.

MBC Annual Report: Anna previously emailed the draft 2023-24 MBC annual report. Anna received some minor edits, which she incorporated into the report. She plans to have the final report printed and submitted to the mayor and city council. Upon a motion made by Donna, seconded by Brenda, the report was approved. Commissioners praised Anna's work and thanked her for her effort preparing such an attractive, thorough report.

Wehrle Landscaping Plan: Anna reported that she, Lois, and John visited the Wehrle property on McKinley Avenue in Fort Hill to assess the landscaping design. Anna discussed matter with the city's engineering office, whose staff was seeking guidance on the plant choices. The three commissioners' only concern was making sure no plants would obstruct the line of sight approaching and through the curve in the roadway on the eastern edge of the property. Tim Forren assured Anna that no shrubbery or other plantings would be planted in that area and that drivers would have a clear line of sight around that curve. Anna relayed this information to Brent Webster and the city engineers' office and advised them to have Tim Forren and the Wehrles confirm this.

Ruffner Park: Anna reported on the private sector landscaping firm update. Because Valley Garden was one of the two vendors who submitted proposals, she asked Jason Testman to step out of the room while the commission deliberated on the proposals.

Anna reminded commissioners that she reached out to five landscaping companies. Three of the five opted not to submit proposals. Valley Gardens submitted a proposal of \$17,500. Terra Care submitted a proposal of \$11,700 (\$9,800, plus \$1,900 quarterly maintenance). The scope of work is limited to consulting with Mike and Brent on plant sourcing and the planting, fertilizing, watering, weeding, and general upkeep of the plants through late spring 2025. Anna submitted the two bids to the city manager's office, which ultimately makes the final decision based on the lowest bid. It is assumed Terra Care will be awarded the contract. The hope is that the city will make this decision quickly so work can commence soon. It was agreed that Mike Davis' work on the walking paths should wait until after a firm was selected and for a meeting to be scheduled to determine a timetable.

Arbor Day/Tree City USA Signs: Anna reported plans to order four more signs by the next MBC meeting. It was noted that the sign at the bottom of the Carriage Trail looks good. A sign at the top of the Carriage Trail and at the new Jones Woodlands Trail might be top locations to consider.

Capitol Connector Subcommittee: Anna received word from GAI that it was time to collaborate on the Capitol Connector project. Jason, John, Donna, and Anna will serve on a subcommittee to advise on plants for the design of the project. A meeting with GAI is scheduled for December 5, 2024.

BID Update: Lois reported on recent BID improvements including sod installation at City Center, flowering planters, new living wall pansies, electric boxes wrapped with public art, and an upcoming presentation to TGKVF for \$25,000 worth of new trash cans. BID seeks MBC's input on their chosen design. One idea is to possibly swap out all old Jeff Fetty designed trash receptacles throughout the city in order to maintain continuity of design. Cost is a consideration.

Lois reported that the BID has expressed interest in doing a tree inventory for the BID area. It was noted that MBC is in the bid process for a city-wide tree inventory and all the eligible public trees in downtown Charleston will be part of that inventory. It seemed to the commissioners that this is a question of timing and prioritization. MBC is optimistic that its inventory will commence within the next year. Chris Higgins offered his assistance to the BID for tree assessment and possible work moving forward.

City Hall Planters/George Snyder sculpture juniper: Anna thanked Jason for his help with designing the City Hall planters. Mike Davis's team planted with grasses, fall plant material, and pumpkins. The commissioners thanked Mike and his team for their work on this.

Anna reported that the juniper under the Snyder sculpture will be replaced. It died over the summer with the intense heat.

TREE BOARD MATTERS

Charleston Tree Initiative Update: Lisa Dobbins reported that she, Brenda, and Donna met and walked the new Riverview Park on Wertz Ave. They have suggested recommendations for grading and other improvements for City Parks & Recreation and recommend MBC plant seven trees along the fence line for some privacy and beauty. The subcommittee continues to investigate ways to leverage grant funding for citizens to plant trees in certain qualifying neighborhoods.

Community EquiTree Grant (Tree Inventory) Update: Anna reported on Brenda's continued work on this project, noting that the city originally put out bid specs, but changed gears and plan to go forward with an RFP process. MBC is pleased to see movement by the city on this project.

Public Grounds Report: Mike Davis reported on planting new winter pansies on the living wall. He plans to watch the weather and turn off irrigation prior to the first freeze. His crews are preparing for the Holly Jolly tree installation, rip rap winter projects, and planting tulips and alliums will start Tuesday. Mike was asked to remember to leave the allium bulbs in the Court Street beds until after they bloom. Commissioners offered to assist in bulb planting again this year.

Marjorie Cooke made an appeal to Mike and his team to include the Dickinson Street bed as a location to plant tulips and alliums as part of the city bed planting. A redesign of the bed at the corner of Dickinson and Quarrier Streets was suggested as a possible improvement.

Additional Business:

Donna raised the issue of a local resident not picking up after their dog near the Lee Street triangle bed. A homemade sign was suggested as a first solution to the problem.

Marjorie reported on the invasive vine cutting project near the South Side Bridge. Bev Campbell and Chris Higgins and a small group will assess the terrain and commence after the first frost. She noted that a letter will be written to the Army Corps of Engineers advising them of our work. A contact with the Army Corps advised that permission from the federal agency to do the work was not needed.

With no further business, Anna Forbes adjourned the meeting at 1:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marjorie Cooke, MBC Recording Secretary