



**MUNICIPAL BEAUTIFICATION COMMISSION/TREE BOARD
May 6, 2025, Meeting Minutes**

Time: Tuesday, May 6, 2025, 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 (absent)
John Casto
Barbara Rose
Jason Testman

Staff and Guests: Brent Webster, City Public Works Director
Mike Davis, City Public Grounds Deputy Director
Sid Gillis, BID Ambassador
Renate Pore, Friends of Ruffner Memorial Park
Ashley Perham, Gazette Reporter
Anne Silbernagel, Kanawha Garden Club President
Rev. Jack Lipphardt
Lisa Barnhart Reed
Maliah McCann-Coles

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

Approval of Meeting Minutes: The minutes of the April 1, 2025, MBC meeting were circulated prior to the meeting. **A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded and the Board *approved* the minutes.**

Treasurer's Report: Donna Graham presented the report noting interest earned of \$655.55 and a total balance of \$284,007.32. Current earmarks total \$79,041.51. There remains a balance after earmarks of \$204,965.81.

MBC General Matters

Cherry/Flowering Tree Initiative: Anna Forbes proposed MBC undertake a flowering tree initiative that aims to plant flowering trees (predominantly cherry trees) throughout the city. A few years ago, MBC members discussed significant city project ideas. One of those ideas was to plant cherry trees throughout the city beginning with Kanawha Boulevard. Because of the Capital Connector project was in its planning phases, development of the cherry tree project was paused until the Capital Connector plans were finalized. Now that the Capital Connector plans are formalized, Anna proposed MBC move forward with this initiative. She advised this idea has great community support.

In attendance at the meeting were Reverend Jack Lipphardt and his daughter, Lisa Reed, who both spoke in strong support of the project and suggested creating a cherry blossom festival to promote the city. Reverend Lipphardt, a former mayor of Wheeling, recently met with Anna to explore this initiative. Anna advised the vision includes connecting public spaces such as the Kanawha Boulevard, Patrick Street and Daniel Boone Park, while also encouraging tree planting on private properties. A maintenance endowment might be needed to support the ongoing care of the trees. Additionally, there is interest in offering memorial or honorary tree plantings, which could include commemorative plaques.

Anne Silbernagel, president of the Kanawha Garden Club, also expressed strong support for this project on behalf of her club.

Anna is in contact with Casey Trees, a Washington, D.C.–based organization with expertise in flowering cherry trees. Anna has formed a subcommittee for the project, which includes Jason Testman, Donna Graham, Lisa Dobbins, Brenda Craig Ellis, with Anna serving as chair. Anna expressed a wish to have a ceremonial tree planting this fall.

Potential funding opportunities exist through private donations, state grants, and the Kanawha Garden Club (KGC) Founders Fund Grant (\$40K or \$10K). One funding idea is to establish a tree fund through The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, including funding for long-term maintenance. Brent Webster suggested a field trip to identify potential planting locations.

Brenda Craig Ellis made a motion to approve moving forward with the Flowering/Cherry Tree Initiative; Marlene Dial seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Charleston Tree Initiative Committee: Brenda Craig Ellis, Lisa Dobbins, and Donna Graham continue to explore potential tree planting locations and reported on a recent field trip to North Charleston. The committee is considering incorporating cherry trees into the broader initiative. Suggested locations include the old Stallard project site and property along the railroad, if approved.

Beautification Project Updates:

- **Living Wall:** Jane Powell and John Casto reported red, white, and purple petunias will be installed in early May.
- **Greenbrier Street Garden:** Barbara Rose, Marlene Dial, Jason Testman shared updates on this long-term project, noting the presence of invasive weeds and beautiful evergreen trees. A suggestion was made to plant 3–5 additional trees. Jason has contacted Davey Tree.
- **City Hall Urns:** Jason Testman, Lisa Dobbins, and Barbara Rose reported the urns have been planted. American flags are still needed for the upcoming bike race.

- **City Gardens Committee:** Lois Crichton, Lisa Dobbins, Donna Graham, and Barbara Rose noted that red, white, and blue bunting and flags are ready for installation. Mike Davis and his crew will aim to complete planting and flag installation by May 16th.
- **Hanging Baskets:** Baskets are expected to go up soon. A suggestion was made to spray paint white watering tubes green for improved appearance.
- **Additional Beautification Efforts:** Bunting will be added along Wertz Avenue fence and shelter area, and across Elk River Bridge. A new Charleston WV bike race banner for the greenery fence near the Clay Center has been printed by Charleston Blueprint. Thanks to Jeff Pierson for his design work. Appreciation was expressed to Hartline and city crews for their work planting window boxes in city parking garages.
- **Dickinson Street Garden:** Marjorie Cooke, Jane Powell, and Donna Graham reported the removal of a split magnolia tree in garden bed. Red and white plant material has been ordered and will be installed before the upcoming bike races.
- **Mary Price Ratrie Greenspace:** Jason Testman suggested planting creeping thyme and creeping jenny—durable, colorful groundcovers that can withstand foot traffic. Creeping thyme will take 3–5 years to fully establish.
- **BID Update:** Lois Crichton shared BID’s request for planting ideas in the shady area on Brawley Walkway. Options discussed included pachysandra, boulders, and hellebores. Sid Gillis reported Terra Care will soon begin planting. MBC requested preserving the dogwood tree, if possible.
- **Ruffner Park:** Mike Davis reported that the concrete urns delivered are too large for Ruffner Park. Donna Graham requested one of these urns be placed in the Lee Street Garden near Capital Street. Terra Care will plant materials already in the City’s possession, with planting to begin in early May. A memorial cherry tree will be planted in the park by the city.

Tree Board Matters

- **Tree Inventory:** Brenda Craig Ellis reported that the City is finalizing a contract with Davey Tree, approved by the WV Division of Forestry. Once signed, Davey will begin inventory and identify planting locations.
- **Arbor Day Ceremony:** Brenda Craig Ellis, Lisa Dobbins, and Donna Graham shared highlights from the event. Six commissioners attended the tree planting. Brenda was commended on her work on this event. Wertz Avenue residents held a fundraiser. A proclamation was announced recognizing Charleston as a Tree City USA.

Public Grounds Report: Mike Davis noted that his crew will be focused on preparations for the upcoming bicycle race over the next several weeks.

With no further business, Anna Forbes concluded the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Marjorie Cooke, MBC Secretary