

CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MINUTES

January 13, 2022

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 4:00 p.m. in the Conference Room on the 13th day of January, 2022, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Holman, Schueler, Studley and
Chairman Hall

ABSENT: None

OTHER STAFF PRESENT: Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager
Ms. Kathryn Walker, City Attorney
Ms. Jeanne Snider, Assistant City Attorney II
Ms. Heather Poole, Assistant City Attorney II
Mr. Anthony Purinton, Assistant City Attorney I
Mr. James Briggs, Park Planner
Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation
(via Zoom)
Ms. Syndi Runyon, Administrative Tech IV
Ms. Lisa Webb, Administrative Tech III

Item 1, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING A TREE CANOPY MASTER PLAN AND A TREE PLANTING PROGRAM:

Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks and Recreation, introduced Ms. Dana Karcher with Davey Resource Group who made a presentation on "Growing an Urban Forestry Program for Norman, OK". She discussed what performing a tree inventory would involve. The Urban Master Plan is a roadmap based on community needs. A Steering Committee would need to be created to determine what updates and/or changes that need to be done with the ordinance.

The Urban Forest Master Plan involves community input to develop a road map and data from either a Canopy or iTree eco Inventory as well as what goals need to be set for the future.

Chairman Hall commented that this project has been on the agenda twice in 2020 but the pandemic has affected the ability to act on this. The tree ordinance was adopted in 2018 and was well received by the Council and the community even though the City did not have a Forester position at that time. Tim Vermillion, Forester for the City, was at the last two meetings of this committee and definitely supported a tree canopy plan. She asked, where the canopy study fits in to the Urban Forest Master Plan.

Ms. Karcher answered that you can choose to do a sample inventory by using iTree Eco and determine what the value of the urban forest is. A Canopy study helps determine where to plant trees, what percentage of the city is canopy, what species of trees are included and what are best for the cost. Also, an operations review would be included as part of the Master Plan and would look at what equipment is available, what employees are needed versus what are available and a sustainability plan (using electric versus gas powered machines).

An ordinance review was suggested using Davey Resource Group. A team needs to be built with the developers and utility companies. Chairman Hall said Ward 4 is passionate about the tree canopy as it includes the Historic Districts. The question was posed, is it possible to break down the canopy percentage by Ward versus the entire City? Councilmember Holman brought up the fact that in different wards there are a lot of new developments versus other wards which include older areas of the City, so the percent of canopy or canopy goals should vary amongst wards. Also mentioned was to have a management plan to find a way to not lose trees to storms, etc. Ms. Karcher mentioned getting advocacy groups involved, e.g., Keep Norman Beautiful, Sierra Club, Tree Board, etc.

Committee members discussed how to best work with the utility companies in the future when they have a project that would take out a lot of trees or do any project that alters the canopy. Councilmember Holman said a lot of residents had no idea this project was happening and now they are left with decimated back yards, no shade from the sun and reduction of property values. Chairman Hall suggested having the tree trimming companies register/license through the City, as other cities require licenses to prune trees, etc. Council also discussed the possibility of having private property owners being able to designate trees on their property as historical with the help of the City Forester and have it deed restricted.

Councilmember Holman asked whether Ms. Karcher had any experiences with other cities and how they deal with the utility companies. She said the utility companies are doing the greatest harm to the trees in Norman.

Ms. Karcher suggested utility companies be allowed to prune to ANZI standards and the cities would put this in their tree ordinance. Utilities do have the right-of-way to cut trees because of fire safety, etc., and it usually does not matter if the tree or the utility wires were there first. Getting the utility companies involved in the discussion is an important part of the process. She said for trees that are cut down by utilities, developing an Urban Wood Network to utilize the wood from trees is very beneficial. Recent storm damage to the canopy in Norman has been catastrophic and maintenance needs to be done.

Councilmember Studley expressed frustration with the right-of-way use with the utilities and would like to see them forced to coordinate with the City via an Ordinance. There are some cities that require ALL tree removals to be permitted. Ms. Karcher said larger cities do have it in place but they also have eight or nine Forester positions and that is all that they deal with. It is a lot of work for staff.

Mr. Olsen said the job description for the new Forester will need to be clarified as this person was spread too thin previously. A "Naturalist" position is going to be requested in the future as the City is seeing more requests for pollinator gardens, beautification projects and landscaping. Ms. Karcher is willing to provide example job descriptions from other cities for the Urban Forester, City Arborist and Naturalist positions.

Chairman Hall mentioned that we had tried to do a Native Garden at the Central Library and have had push back on that as it was not communicated well with the public. She would like to see pollinator gardens along I-35 and in our Parks.

Chairman Hall recommended moving forward with the Master Plan, Tree Inventory and Ordinance Review. Councilmember Studley asked what the cost of using Davey Resource Group would be. City Manager Pyle indicated that there would be budget development meetings coming and the next step would be putting this as a line item in the budget process. Mr. James Briggs thanked Ms. Karcher for being here at the meeting today with no contract in hand yet. Councilmember Holman said that the things this Urban Master Plan will bring us will be, Quality of Life, Property Value and Economic Development. Jason Olsen indicated that the price tag for this project is approximately \$100-\$200,000, depending on the options. Chairman Hall commented that the tree canopy does add property value for residents so this is a worthwhile project.

Item submitted for the record:

PRESENTATION ENTITLED, "GROWING AN URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAM,
IDEAS FOR NORMAN, OK" BY DAVEY RESOURCE GROUP

* * * * *

Item 2 being:

STAFF REPORT ON HOMELESS ACTIVITY

City Manager Pyle said that the shelter has been at capacity a few nights recently but no one has been turned away. There is a capacity of 35 persons at the City shelter. Staff used reception space for people to come in out of the cold on the bitterly cold nights.

Chairman Hall wanted to know when the Homebase Gaps Analysis Report would be ready to present to the City Council. City Manager Pyle will report back to the City Council on when the Gaps Analysis report will be ready to present. Councilmember Holman wanted to know what our process was for when we are at capacity. City Manager Pyle reported that, as stated before, there have been no nights that we turned anyone away needing shelter so we have not had to resort to an alternate plan.

Item submitted for the record:

SHELTER QUARTERLY REPORT
(OCTOBER 2021-DECEMBER 2021), HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

* * * * *

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor