

City of Apalachicola Tree Committee
Meeting Summary
June 16, 2020, 3:00 pm
Covered Stage at Battery Park

1. Attendees:

Alfred and Willa Goosby, Apalachicola property owners,
Anita Grove, City Commissioner,
Pam Richardson, Committee member,
Bob Seaborn, Committee member, and
Dennis Winterringer, Committee chairperson and note taker for this meeting.

2. Draft summary of Committee's February 28, 2020, meeting (prepared by Mr. Seaborn).

The Committee adopted without revision the draft summary for the February 28, 2020, meeting.

3. Holly Brown's departure from the Committee.

Ms. Brown resigned from the Committee on April 29.

4. Unpermitted tree removals.

On June 15, the day before this meeting, Code Enforcement Officer Revena Ramsey visited two residential properties where protected trees had been removed without permits.

At 246 7th Street (Frederick S. Humphries), the new owner of the property (David Cerrato, according to the Franklin County Property Appraiser's website) removed a mature live oak on City property in front of the house.

At 139 9th Street, Mr. Winterringer happened upon Joey Ward who was cutting up a large pecan tree trunk. Large pecan trees and one of the trunks of a multi-stemmed water oak were removed or severely trimmed for property owners Alfred and Willa Goosby. Mr. and Ms. Goosby attended this meeting to discuss their situation. They were advised to talk to City Manager Travis Wade.

Mr. Wade will need to decide whether to fine the property owners up to \$500 per removed tree.

5. Code Enforcement Officer's departure.

Code Enforcement Officer Revena Ramsey, who processes tree applications, recently submitted her resignation. Her last day is tomorrow (June 17).

City Manager Travis Wade was unable to attend this meeting. Therefore he was not available to talk about his short-term and long-term plans for processing tree applications.

6. Reforestation Fund.

Recently Mr. Wade agreed to set up a separate budget account and line item to ensure that Reforestation Fund monies are not mixed with other monies and spent on things other than planting and maintaining trees on City property (e.g., parks, squares, and the rights of way along the highway and streets).

The City Commission adopted revisions to the Tree Ordinance, including a schedule of Reforestation Fund fees, on February 5, 2019, but they didn't go into effect until May 16, 2019.

For the partial May month and 4 months afterward, Mr. Winterringer tracked the number of tree permits that were issued and the Reforestation Fund monies that were collected. That information follows below.

He stopped compiling the information when it became difficult to find it after the departure of Wilbur Bellew, the former Code Enforcement Officer (CEO), when EPCI was assisting the City on a part-time basis in processing tree applications and more recently after Revena Ramsey was hired when visits to City Hall were discouraged because of the coronavirus outbreak.

City staff should review tree removal permits issued from May 16, 2019, to present to determine how much money should be deposited in the Reforestation Fund account.

a. Tree permits.

May 16 thru 31	2019				Total
	June	July	Aug	Sept	
3	4	5	2	1	15

b. Reforestation Fund.

Size of tree	2019					Total
	May 16 thru 31	June	July	Aug	Sept	
Non-patriarch trees (4" to less than 35")	\$105	\$460	\$415	\$120	\$25	\$1,125
Patriarch trees (35" and larger)						

Total	\$105	\$460	\$415	\$120	\$25	\$1,125
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------	---------

7. State law concerning dangerous trees.

A State law, which went into effect on July 1, 2019, forbids the City from requiring a tree removal or trimming permit if a residential property owner obtains documentation from an arborist certified by the International Society of Arboriculture or a Florida licensed landscape architect that the tree presents a danger to persons or property.

At its January 21, 2020, meeting, the Committee decided that as a temporary alternative to amending the Tree Ordinance, which is a lengthy process, the simplest approach is to acknowledge the preemption on the City's Building Department webpage and to modify the City's tree permit application to make applicants aware of the State law.

The Committee discussed the draft webpage document and draft revised tree application that Mr. Winterringer had prepared. No one suggested any revisions. Mr. Winterringer will send the documents to Mr. Wade and recommend that the City use them.

8. Tree applications not involving new building construction.

In the last few months, tree applications where property owners requested permission to remove or substantially alter protected trees in the absence of new construction have, in contradiction of the Tree Ordinance procedures, been sent to the Planning and Zoning Board for decision.

In Mr. Winterringer's conversations with interim City Manager Chris Holley, Mr. Holley said this was being done until newly-hired Code Enforcement Officer Revena Ramsey became familiar with Tree Ordinance requirements.

Ms. Ramsey has since submitted her resignation, but Greg Harris, Superintendent of Public Works, has been doing field reviews of proposed tree removals and alterations for several months. He's capable of making recommendations to City Manager Wade on whether or not to approve proposed tree alterations and removals.

Doing this would speed up the tree application process because applicants would no longer have to wait until the next monthly Planning and Zoning Board meeting and show up at the meeting in order to have their applications considered.

9. Clearing of damaged trees in the aftermath of any tropical storm or hurricane that strikes this year.

Hurricane season officially started June 1.

The Tree Ordinance requires a property owner to obtain City "permission" to remove or substantially alter any damaged, dangerous patriarch tree (any tree of the 10 protected species greater than 35 inches in diameter) during a declared emergency caused by a storm. I suggest that the City interpret "permission" to allow an oral signoff in the field by the Code Enforcement

Officer, City Manager, or other designated employee rather than a written permit, which would be onerous to obtain in the immediate aftermath of a storm. If an oral signoff is given, City staff should later enter written documentation in the City's files.

The Committee discussed Mr. Winterringer's draft summary of the City's tree removal and trimming requirements that apply during a hurricane emergency. No one suggested any revisions. Mr. Winterringer will send the document to Mr. Wade so that it may be posted on the Building Department's webpage. The document contains information about tree trimming and removal operations that the City could incorporate into an emergency storm declaration (tree trimming and removal activities not requiring City permission and those requiring City permission) for an approaching storm.

10. Tree donation.

An anonymous donor has contacted Commissioner Grove with an offer to buy and plant trees in Battery Park.

A plan (e.g., species, number of trees, size, and locations) needs to be developed before the Tree Committee contacts the Recreation Committee and Seafood Festival Board to talk about it.

11. Two dangerous trees in Battery Park.

In Battery Park along 6th Street there are two laurel oaks that have severely rotten trunks and branches. They pose a danger to persons (especially during the Seafood Festival) and any vehicle that parks under them.

Ms. Grove will talk to the City Manager about the City removing them.

12. Next meeting.

July 21, 2020, 3 p.m., regular monthly meeting of the Tree Committee.