

MINUTES

BEAUTIFICATION AND TREE COMMITTEE MEETING
August 26, 2024

VIA ZOOM/IN PERSON

PRESIDING: Janet Kavanagh

MEMBERS PRESENT: Debi Ferrer, Janet Kavanagh, John Nelson

ABSENT: Angel Drinkwine, Chuck Gomez, Jon Chavers

Staff Liaison: Abby Jara, Staff Liaison

Also in attendance: Joshua Chandler, Community Development Director; Amie Ell, City Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Kavanagh called the meeting to order at 4:01pm.

ROLL CALL

Executive Assistant Abigail Jara conducted roll call; Ferrer, Kavanagh, Nelson, present; Angel Drinkwine, Chuck Gomez, Jon Chavers absent

A quorum was not present; it was confirmed no official decisions would be made during this meeting.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Downtown Tree Project Update – Presented by Certified Arborist from Davey Tree Expert

Certified Arborist Michael Spaulding provided an update on the downtown tree project. He covered topics including tree health, retention plans, and previous efforts to maintain the existing trees.

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Kavanagh asked Spaulding to elaborate on the topics mentioned before opening the floor for comments.

Spaulding reported 64 trees were initially planted, and the team is caring for 111 trees, including some previously planted trees. The trees consist of three varieties: Persian ironwood (Parrotia), hornbeam, and hedge maple. He noted that 48% of the trees had been retained, meaning 32-34 trees are being replaced in the fall.

Spaulding said the lack of water on the trees was the main cause of failure, exacerbated by an early heat wave. The initial stress made it difficult for the trees to recover. He mentioned that his team waters the trees once a week, using 2,000 gallons for the 111 trees, which amounts to roughly two gallons per tree well.

Spaulding affirmed and added the weekly watering began in early June

Ferrer asked how the water is being applied to the trees.

Spaulding explained they use deep watering probes and soil drenching techniques.

Kavanagh asked how deep the probes reach.

Spaulding said 2 feet. He also mentioned they renovated the soil, added new dirt, installed bio barriers, and fully utilized the tree wells.

Ferrer asked if they had considered using gator bags for watering.

Spaulding said they have considered it, typically they're emptied within 8-24 hours when full. He also expressed concerns noting in some communities, the bags are damaged or fall apart easily, making them an unreliable solution.

Spaulding expressed his commitment to the success of the project, noting that the upcoming fall planting should yield better results. He explained that the spring planting had to be delayed due to weather, resulting in a late start. The 26 Persian ironwoods did not survive, and the remaining trees struggled, particularly after being hit by a heatwave, which hindered their initial growth.

Kavanagh agreed fall is a better time for planting, but still believes the trees are under watered. She believes less than 48% are healthy.

Spaulding says the ones that look questionable will also be replaced.

Kavanagh asked if the actual retention rate was closer to 60-70%

Ferrer clarified the stressed trees are included in the 48% retention.

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Kavanagh noted that from her frequent walks downtown, she believes more than 48% of the trees appear dead or stressed.

Spaulding said they're bringing in 40 trees on hand.

Ferrer asked about the timeline for the fall planting.

Spaulding said late September, weather permitting.

Kavanagh said the first week the trees were planted she noticed some being stressed. She said on average The Dalles gets 14 inches of rain a year and has been in drought for many years. She also expressed concern that watering the trees once a week might not be sufficient, especially since the wells hadn't been watered in years.

Spaulding assured the committee they will continue watering until the rain season begins.

Kavanagh asked if they're open to watering more than once a week.

Spaulding said yes and affirmed his team stays in regular contact with the city. He assured that his team is on-site in The Dalles weekly, and they also receive photos and diagnosis of the trees, weekly. He noted some of the initial struggling trees have made a full recovery. He also mentioned the trees on the south side of the street has better retention than the northside due to the late afternoon sun.

Kavanagh suggested, given the dry conditions in The Dalles, planting holes should be soaked after the soil or tree in.

Spaulding agreed that this is typically good practice, but explained that the wells in this case contain rocks and construction debris from years of road work, which his team has cleared. He noted that moisture penetration has been limited by the impermeable layers. However, after reviewing soil profiles, he is now seeing better moisture retention due to the weekly watering, which will also benefit the new bare-root trees when planted.

Spaulding suggested using Hydretain, a soil moisture management product that could help reduce watering needs, but it is not yet approved in Oregon. He shared that he has been collaborating with soil scientists nationwide to find a solution for the unique conditions where the trees are located.

Ferrer suggested to monitor the watering of the trees until they're dormant.

Kavanagh asked why the trees died within the first week.

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Spaulding responded due to the lack of proper watering from the start, which caused them to go into shock, especially when combined with the onset of a heatwave.

Kavanagh said she has concern removing the existing soil and putting in high quality soil does not encourage the roots to spread out.

Spaulding said he does not believe this approach does not align with general practice rules. The soils that were previously in the holes needed to be removed.

Kavanagh said it could have been enriched by adding soil rather than completely getting rid of the old soil.

Joshua Chandler, Community Development Director, clarified the soil had to be replaced due to the poor condition of the trees that were removed. The original soil was mixed with asphalt, concrete, and rock, making it unsuitable for reuse.

Ferrer asked given the poor performance of the Persian ironwoods, if they had considered switching to a different tree species.

Spaulding confirmed that they would no longer be planting Persian ironwoods, as the species had not done well. Instead, they plan to replace them with hedge maples and hornbeams.

Ferrer asked what trees were already planted downtown.

Spaulding responded there's a variation of maples, iron woods, and hornbeams.

Nelson asked for his opinion on the size of the planting holes.

Spaulding responded the 3 x 3 sizing is fine, but recommended that, in the future, the committee consider applying a growth regulator to the trees every three years.

Nelson asked if it's common to replace trees every decade.

Spaulding responded he does not think it is, except in rare cases where pests or fungus are present.

Nelson also raised the issue of species diversification, noting some planting sites receive little sun while others get plenty. He wondered whether these conditions were considered during the planning phase.

Spaulding replied that an urban developer should take these factors into account, but he was uncertain whether this had been done in this case. The Davey Tree Company followed the specifications outlined in the RFP (Request for Proposal) but did not select the species

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themselves.

It was believed to be the Forest Service.

Ferrer asked Spaulding whether these species were his recommendations or if he had different suggestions

Spaulding responded that while he agreed with the choice of hornbeams and maples, he had reservations about the ironwoods.

Ferrer expressed her appreciation for the tree company's commitment to creating a healthy tree corridor downtown.

Spaulding emphasized that both he and his company are dedicated to seeing the project through to completion. He apologized for the condition of the trees over the past few months and assured that the situation would be addressed.

Kavanagh inquired about the decision to plant bare-root trees rather than using trees in containers or burlap.

Spaulding explained bare-root trees tend to establish more successfully when planted in fresh soil. He then outlined the plan for September, stating that his team, along with their long-time subcontractors, would be in town to handle the plantings. The following day, a watering team would thoroughly soak the newly planted trees, continuing with weekly watering until the rainy season begins.

Spaulding also addressed questions he had received about why the company was watering the dead trees. He explained that this is being done to ensure the soil is well-hydrated in preparation for the replanting in the fall.

Spaulding asked whether the city has a long-term maintenance plan for the trees.

Chandler said there has been some discussion about what the plan will be after the contract ends.

The committee discussed the benefits of having an irrigation system.

Spaulding encouraged the committee to stop by and say hello if they see his team out watering, noting that they are doing their best.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

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Trevitt Triangle Sculpture Update

Kavanagh reported that Mount Hood Gardens no longer provides commercial services and now focuses solely on residential projects. She reached out to Drew at Humble Roots for recommendations but has not yet received any designs. Currently, there is no professional landscaper available to handle the plantings for the Trevitt Triangle.

The committee explored various alternatives for completing the plantings, including options for moving forward without professional assistance if necessary.

The committee assigned different cities for members to contact in order to explore potential services for the Trevitt Triangle plantings.

Residential Tree Grant Update

Ferrer informed the committee the green infrastructure grant is still unavailable and expressed doubt that it will be secured in time to provide additional trees to residents who have applied.

Jara reported that they currently have 27 applications on file

Work session has been scheduled for September 4th to go over the applications.

Next Meeting: September 16, 2024

Items for Next Meeting:

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:32 pm.

Submitted by/

Abigail Jara, Executive Assistant

SIGNED:


Janet Kavanagh, Chair

ATTEST:


Abigail Jara, Executive Assistant

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