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## Urban Forestry Commission

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Agency: [City of Cleveland Urban Forestry Commission](#)

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## Summary

- The individual committees of the commission reported to the entire group and shared their next steps.
- There is nearly \$3 million worth of uncompleted complaint-driven work orders pertaining to trees in public rights of way and stump grinding.
- While the city has applied to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) for grant funding, the city needs a sustainable and reliable source of funding to carry out the work of the city's Urban Forestry unit.

## Follow-Up Questions

- Why is the [Youth Resident position](#) vacant? What has the commission done to fill this vacancy?
- If awarded the \$975,048 ODNR grant, why are only 100 trees being planted?
- Would it be more prudent for the City of Cleveland to complete the work outlined in the ODNR grant instead of contracting out for these services?

## Notes

What is the Urban Forestry Commission? From the [presentation](#): "The City of Cleveland's Urban Forestry Commission will serve in an advisory capacity to assist the Mayor, Cleveland City Council, Urban Forestry Section of the Division of Park Maintenance and Properties, and the City Planning Commission in ensuring the many benefits trees provide to the citizens of the City."

The session began with a call to order for the first quarterly meeting in 2024 of the Urban Forestry Commission. Sarah O'Keeffe, director of sustainability and climate justice, completed the roll call. In attendance were Xavier Bay, Jose Hernandez, Mikal Jeanbaptiste, Jennifer Kipp, Daniel Leamon, Tom Schreiber, Cleveland City Council

Member Jenny Spencer and Rick Switalski.

Commissioners absent for roll call were Bernie Jakson, Roger Tokars, Divya Sridhar, Grai Oleksy, and Samira Malone. It was noted that the “Youth Resident” position is vacant. Sridhar and Tokars did join the meeting after [quorum](#) was called, about 10 minutes later. Kipp, who heads the city’s Urban Forestry unit, filled in as chairperson in Commissioner Malone’s absence.

The speaker then reviewed the duties of the Urban Forestry Commission:

The minutes from the prior meeting (in October) were unanimously approved with three minor edits for clarification. Under “budget committee” #2, item 3, the phrase “owned” was replaced with “on city owned LandBank properties.”

In the same section, under #2A General Fund, it was rephrased to say: “the departments are planning now for budgeting, no Urban Forestry budget snapshot is presented to council currently, as part of the annual budget process, since Urban Forestry does not budget on its own.”

Under General Fund, “parks/mx” was changed to Parks, Maintenance and Properties (PMP).

There was no “old business” for the commission to address, as per the printed [agenda](#).

O’Keeffe then moved on to new business and the next agenda item, VI A: “Review of sub-committee structure.” She noted that the commission changed “sub-committee” to “committee.” There are four committees currently: Executive, Policy, Budget, and Maintenance. She explained that the executive committee consists of the commission’s chair, vice chair, and secretary.

O’Keeffe [said](#) that the committee meetings are internal to the Urban Forestry Commission and are not subject to public meeting laws because the committees will not constitute a full quorum of commission members (eight or more members) and will not be discussing business. These committees, composed of commission members, are to report at the Urban Forestry Commission’s quarterly meeting.

O’Keeffe went on to say that non-voting members may participate in committees at the determination of the committees themselves, to advise on research and best practices.

“Basically how the committees work, is that they will advance recommendations to the full commission, if it is warranted at the committee level,” she said. “... At the commission level, is the only level where decisions are actually voted upon and made, and then

recommended to the mayor and the council, in accordance with our rules and regulations.”

Sridhar asked for clarification on deliberations within the committees and non-voting members. O’Keeffe said deliberations are to take place between commission members only and not between the commission and non-voting members who have been invited to participate in committees to offer professional opinions.

Each individual committee then reported to the whole commission, starting with Tom Schreiber, the chair of the Policy Committee. He said they last met on Nov. 27, when they “mapped” the Tree Protection Ordinance, creating a flowchart to examine where the triggers for enforcement are.

He also said there are two ordinances not in their catalog, the Sidewalk Ordinance and one for Water Pollution Control.

Schreiber said the committee found inconsistencies with the Tree Protection Ordinance and other ordinances related to development and building permits. The committee is meeting again, this Friday, Jan. 12, to discuss said inconsistencies.

The Maintenance Committee followed with Chair Dan Leamon reporting that the committee’s next step is to hear from residents through neighborhood walkabouts. Leamon said that the Maintenance Committee will be performing neighborhood walkabouts, modeled after Mayor Bibb’s Safety Walks.

“We want to put boots on the ground and talk to residents and committee groups where they are,” said Leamon. “We want to hear their concerns ... to help drive the agenda towards positive change.”

Kipp, who is on the maintenance committee, stated that they will begin within the footprint of Burten Bell Carr Development, followed by the coverage area of Slavic Village Development.

Finally, City Council Member Jenny Spencer reported on the Budget Committee, which met on Dec. 15. Spencer said there is a \$2.4 million backlog of right-of-way and critical tree pruning work orders, and a \$400,000+ backlog of stump grinding.

She said, “\$2.9 million in work orders that still need to be funded in order to just catch-up with what is in the right of way currently.” Going forward, the committee will be exploring options on resources to address these needs. One option Spencer discussed was using unallocated funds from the 2023 General Fund.

The Budget Committee did not make any formal recommendations.

Next, the commission discussed the city's application to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) for [funding](#) as part of the Inflation Reduction Act. The city applied in December. The focus of the application was for disadvantaged communities, as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening [Tool](#) (CEJST).

The city applied for \$975,048; \$165,048 is earmarked for a "Field Operations Forester Program Manager" and \$810,000 would be for contractual services for tree pruning, 100 tree plantings, and 100 tree stump removals.

Awards are to be announced by Jan. 31.

A letter of support was required as part of the ODNR grant. The Executive Committee submitted letters of support for the city's application, as well as for support of applications by Cleveland Metroparks, Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC), and Holden Forests and Gardens.

- Cleveland Metroparks applied for a \$120,000 grant to plant 200 trees in the [southern portion of Gordon Park](#).
- WRLC applied for \$300,000 to plant 400 trees in Cleveland (unspecified area) and provide care for 1,500 previously planted trees.
- Holden Forests and Gardens applied for \$350,000 to provide agricultural workforce development training for disadvantaged communities.

The dollar figures stated were not exact, according to O'Keeffe. The commission then voted unanimously to formalize the Executive Committee's letters of support for the applications.

Schreiber recused himself from the vote for WRLC due to a conflict of interest. Sridhar asked the commission to explore creating an official process for providing letters of support.

The last item of new business on the agenda was to discuss whether the Urban Forestry Commission should weigh in on the City Planning Commission's pilot implementation of [form-based code](#). A speaker said that form-based code encourages walkability and provides for a mix of property uses within a specific area. Part of form-based code pertains to tree laws.

The commission voted to have Shannan Leonard of the City Planning Commission address the Urban Forestry Commission on form-based code in a virtual special meeting.

The meeting concluded with public comment. One person asked commission members to consider how the implementation of form-based code would affect residents.

Three people [submitted comments online](#) through Sustainable Cleveland's website. They came from Wards 3, 4, and 7, all comments expressed concern about the lack of tree maintenance.

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