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Spring 2025 Public Meeting

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

Date: April 8, 2025

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Summary

- Mayor Justin Bibb's 2025 budget looks to spend about \$6 million on forestry-related services and resources in Cleveland.
- The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) [swore in seven members](#), representing a broad cone of industries and organizations across the public and private sectors, ranging from Cleveland Public Power's Ammon Danielson to Jennifer Chandler of CHN Housing Partners.
- UFC Vice Chair Jennifer Kipp shared updates on the city's \$3.4 million grant from the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program, including moving up pruning work planned for later years in the grant cycle to the current year because of uncertainty with federal funding.

Follow-Up Questions

- How much, if any, of the [Cleveland Tree Coalition's \(CTC\) 2023-2028 Strategic Plan](#) is actively defining the work that the UFC or the city's Division of Urban Forestry does? There was no mention of the coalition's strategic plan at this meeting despite the onboarding of CTC Executive Director Sara Tillie as a new commissioner.
- How does the UFC hope to improve public readability of the city's [codified ordinances](#) or the city's charter? How will it promote that language beyond the pages of the codified ordinances in order to encourage tree planting efforts, initiatives or policies?

Notes

Name	Required Fulfillment	Organization	Appointment
Ammon Danielson	Electric Company	Cleveland Public Power	Mayoral
Bay, Xavier	City Planning	City of Cleveland, City Planning Commission	Mayoral
Berard, Jinan	Youth Resident	Student - Hathaway Brown School	Mayoral
Chandler, Jennifer	Developer	CHN Housing Partners	Council
Hernandez, Jose	Public Utilities	Cleveland Water Department	Mayoral
Kipp, Jennifer	Urban Forestry	City of Cleveland, Urban Forestry	Mayoral
Leamon, Dan	Resident	Health Specialist	Council
Long-Jones, Whitney	Environmental Justice	Organic Connects, Inc.	Mayoral
Marks, Laura	Resident	Resident	Council
Schreiber, Tom	Certified Arborists	Western Reserve Land Conservancy	Council
Spencer, Jenny	City Council President Appointee	Cleveland City Council - Ward 15	Council
Swab, Beck	Non-profit	Holden Forests and Gardens	Council
Switalski, Rick	Capital Projects	City of Cleveland, Mayor's Office of Capital Projects	Mayoral
Zaremba, Anna	Sustainability	City of Cleveland, Mayor's Office of Sustainability	Mayoral
Lillie, Sara	Non-profit	Cleveland Tree Coalition	Council

Commission members. Source: [Sustainable Cleveland](#)

The Cleveland Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) plans to use the second half of its second year in operation since Cleveland City Council revived the formerly named Tree Commission to [restore, maintain and improve](#) the city's historic tree canopy. As members sought to learn how future grant requirements and impacts might affect their work, new and old goals and routine business filled the group's second-quarter meeting on April 8, following its first-quarter meeting on Jan. 14.

In accordance with the [agenda](#), the UFC spent portions of its spring meeting finishing its ongoing review and discussion of a drafted policy regarding tree placement near and along city sidewalks. The commission also heard updates from Commissioner and Secretary Anna Zaremba on the UFC's yearly report and updates on grant funding from UFC Vice Chair Jennifer Kipp.

The [meeting](#) started at 4 p.m. and concluded promptly at 5:30 p.m. with all of the previous 10 commissioners joined by six new members in attendance (one additional existing member was re-sworn in as detailed below).

Chair Samira Malone started the meeting by reminding commission members and attendees of the group's goals and mission statement. The commission then voted on and unanimously approved the minutes from the Jan. 14 meeting (Commission Members Xavier Bay and Rick Switalski were absent from the previous meeting and did not vote).

The first matter of unfinished business the group returned to involved sidewalk dimensions. Kipp, who works with the city's Urban Forestry division, said she had initially intended to have a new allowable range of sidewalk widths set by the start of Cleveland's sidewalk construction and repair season in March. She said she would like to see those approved following further discussion at the UFC Policy Committee meeting in

April.

Allowing for sidewalk widths of 36 inches — instead of the city's standard of 48 inches — would prevent damage to roots and encourage growth, [officials said in a previous meeting](#). The [PROWAG](#) (Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines), issued through the Americans with Disabilities Act, also has 48 inches as the standard but allows for 36 inches in some scenarios.

Cleveland Director of Parks and Recreation Alexandria Nichols has completed her review of the draft. Director of Mayor's Office of Capital Projects James DeRosa needs to review it, Kipp said. The Policy Committee will review revisions based on the city's feedback, and the commission could consider adopting the policy when they convene in July. Kipp added that the intent is for the city to use this policy as a last resort to preserve healthy trees during sidewalk construction if all other options are exhausted.

Zaremba presented the second piece of continuing business: Proposed revisions to [rules and regulations dealing with meetings](#). Officials spoke about standards for formation of committees and meeting cadences of committees. The commission currently has three committees (policy, maintenance and budget), but proposed changes will allow UFC members to form new committees as they see fit. Committees will be required to meet at least six times each calendar year and to give notice of meetings to an Executive Committee and the Mayor's Office of Sustainability at least 10 days in advance. The committee voted to approve these changes.

City Council Member and UFC member Jenny Spencer commented that the policy should explicitly say that the public will be granted access to video recordings of committee meetings via the UFC's public [Google Drive folder](#).

The UFC's new business began with Interim Commissioner of the Division of Urban Forestry Toi Porch taking the podium to swear in five new members and a commission member who's taking on a new role. The UFC is now up to its capacity of 15 members after filling five previous vacancies from a pool of 28 applicants.

Malone gave introductions:

Jennifer Chandler, assistant director of real estate development with CHN Housing Partners, joins as a development representative. Collinwood resident **Laura Marks**, who founded the tree planting volunteer nonprofit Heights Tree People, fills a vacant resident role on the UFC. Representing the nonprofit sector is **Beck Swab** in their role as director of Conservation and Community Forestry at Holden Forests & Gardens.

Sara Tillie will bring her experience as the executive director of the Cleveland Tree Coalition, a cross-sector entity partnered with the city as well as various public and private organizations. **Ammon Danielson** will help liaise between the UFC and public energy providers in his role as commissioner of Cleveland Public Power. **Whitnye Long-Jones** replaced Tom Schreiber for her expertise in environmental justice as the founder and executive director of Organic Connects Inc., focused on urban sustainability.

Meanwhile, **Schreiber**, Western Reserve Land Conservancy's manager of community forestry, stays on the commission and will represent a more technical role as the UFC's certified arborist.

All new board appointees then were sworn in to support the constitutions of the country and state and the city's codified ordinances (or the city code) and charter. Their terms go through 2027.

Departing will be UFC Chair **Samira Malone**, who attributed the decision to leave to new obligations after starting a role at the Urban Sustainability Directors Network. Replacing her through the end of the year will be **Jenny Spencer**, whose UFC term expires along with her council term as she is not seeking reelection later this year.

"I also leave ... very, very happy, very excited for all of the amazing brain trust that has joined our commission today," Malone told her fellow commissioners.

"I think the work that we are undertaking, while it's specific to the City of Cleveland, relies on a broad network..." Spencer said, saying she was grateful for Malone's contributions to the commission..

Committee updates began with Dan Leamon, who reported that the Maintenance Committee did not meet during the first quarter of 2025 as most members termed out. Leamon said the committee is seeking new members.

Schreiber said the Policy Committee spent the majority of its most recent meeting on Feb. 12 discussing the aforementioned sidewalk dimensions and PROWAG standards, along with discussion of efforts to rewrite [Chapter 509](#) of the city code dealing with trees and permitting to improve the public's understanding of it.

Spencer's recap of the March 18 Budget Committee meeting broadly introduced the UFC's new members to the creation of a new 28-employee Division of Urban Forestry within a reimagined Department of Parks & Recreation in [summer of 2024](#).

The Budget Committee's next meeting will likely take place after Cleveland City Council

discusses Mayor Bibb's proposed [capital budget](#) on April 28. Forestry operations are expected to comprise just under \$6 million of Bibb's operational budget, [which council approved earlier this year](#).

Zaremba then introduced the possibility of committee members inviting ad hoc attendees, including some of the 20-plus UFC applicants who were not appointed to the commission, to present as subject matter experts as needed at upcoming committee meetings. Varyingly, commission members expressed that ad hoc attendees either should or should not be granted voting power; Spencer suggested one protocol for all committees.

Kipp then presented updates from the Urban Forestry Division, starting with the latest on the \$3.4 million grant the division received from the USDA last September. The division has received six proposals from a site-specific [RFP](#) process involving tree projects; selection will be made from four finalists the week of April 21.

Three sub-award contracts are under review of the Law Department, with these entities set to get \$125,000 each: Cleveland Metroparks, Cleveland Tree Coalition, and Cuyahoga County.

Due to the current national uncertainty surrounding grant funding, Kipp said the division decided to move the planned tree pruning activities covered by the grant to year one (the current year). In the initial proposal, \$570,666 was set to be distributed for pruning each year in years three, four and five of the grant cycle.

Separate from the grant funding, pruning efforts have already begun, Kipp said. Kipp said oak pruning season ended on April 4, so now the division is beginning a systematic street tree pruning pilot program under which certified arborists went out in the winter months and surveyed trees most in need of pruning. Crews will start hitting those streets in hope of getting the city to a five- to seven-year pruning cycle (right now, she said, we're on 26).

The general removal of dead, dying or structurally defective trees is continuing while the division sets out to plant 150 new trees over the springtime.

The division is also gearing up for park tree assessments this summer set to identify and, if necessary, rehab trees that attract attention or congregation at public parks.

Zaremba then presented highlights of the UFC 2024 Annual Report, outlining changes to policy and membership as well as maintenance milestones.

Then public comment started. Malone outlined UFC's policies for receiving and addressing public comments, which can last a maximum of three minutes per speaker.

The only commenter to approach the podium identified himself as Michael Armstrong. "Recently, the Ohio Department of Transportation clearcut hundreds of mature trees along Cleveland's portion of I-90," Armstrong said. Armstrong spoke of other tree removals and the overall health of the tree canopy.

In closing remarks, members discussed upcoming events. Malone informed attendees of a volunteer event scheduled in honor of Earth Day at Rid-All Green Partnership in Kinsman on April 10 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Kipp invited attendees to the [Ohio City Tree Tour](#) from 3-5 p.m. on April 22 to see what she described as a rare canopy of mature ash trees.

The next Policy Committee Meeting is on April 10, open to the [public virtually](#), though no public comment will be taken.

Questions and comments can be submitted via [a Google form](#) to be answered at the UFC's summer quarterly meeting, set for 4 p.m. on Tuesday, July 8, in Room 514 at City Hall, 601 Lakeside Ave.

If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at cleDOCUMENTERS@gmail.com with "Correction Request" in the subject line.