

Columbia City Tree Board
Minutes

March Meeting
March 19, 2024

The March meeting of the Columbia City Tree Board was called to order at 6:09 p.m. in City Council Chambers.

Attendees included Tree Board members Brent Bockelman, Janice Daniel, Bryan Smethers, Jennifer Zartman Romano and city liaison Chip Hill. Larry Walter and Jeff Bleijerveld were absent.

Minutes from the last meeting were shared. Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Bryan Smethers. Those in attendance unanimously approved the minutes, except Jennifer Zartman Romano who abstained as she had not been present.

Old Business:

A finance report was not given as Chip Hill did not bring any documents to share. The commission members stated it had been several months since they had seen a financial report.

Janice Daniel shared that Jeff Bleijerveld is investigating Tree Steward Training, but no new information was available to share during the meeting.

Brent Bockelman has been reviewing guidelines used by other boards. He shared that Magical Meadows has a set of guidelines that could easily be adapted to suit the Columbia City Tree Board's use.

Chip Hill shared that of the trees set for removal this winter, just one was left to remove. He said the city was waiting for a good day to cut it. The last tree slated for removal is located at Chauncey and Spencer Streets. Once the trees are all removed, the stumps will be ground down.

This year, bids are out for 45 sites where 56 trees will be pruned. Lumber Jack and On Site Tree Service are expected to submit bids. Chip Hill said he still was not sure how the project will be funded this year. Janice Daniel suggested that we may need to reduce the amount of work we are actually able to afford to do this year. Chip Hill said that he and his intern had gone out to mark trees for pruning, but that might have created more resident concern than necessary. Janice Daniel verified that all of the bids for the work are expected to be in by April.

Janice Daniel shared that grants are potentially available and that the Tree Board should look for some of this type of funding to pay for training for a certified arborist for the city. She said that perhaps the city's grant writer, Lori Shipman, could help with writing a grant for this purpose. Chip Hill said that any potential grant leads could be forwarded to him and he would send them on to Lori.

This year, the City of Columbia City will mark 30 years as a Tree City USA. Flags and signs are planned to celebrate the milestone.

New Business:

A recap of the Executive Meeting of the Tree Board in March was shared. The meeting was held on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at the home of Larry Walter. Janice Daniel shared the minutes which were compiled by Jeff Bleijerveld.

Plans are in the works for Arbor Day 2024. Janice Daniel said she believes a Frontier Elm or another type of shade tree could be planted at the elementary schools in honor of the day. This year, since both Mary Raber Elementary School and Little Turtle Elementary School are within city limits, both will likely want a tree planted for Arbor Day.

The Tree Board members talked about the upcoming First Friday events in Columbia City and expressed interest in having a booth for the May and September First Fridays in downtown Columbia City. Possible activities that could be shared with the community at the booth included a survey, signup opportunity for volunteers, as well as possibly games and stickers for children. Brent Bockelman said he would dress up in an inflatable tree. Plans for the booth will need to be determined by the April meeting of the Tree Board. The survey might ask residents' interest in having trees planted in their yards. A pamphlet could also be created to explain how to successfully plant a tree. Janice Daniel suggested handing out tree-oriented candies.

Continuing a discussion from the Executive Meeting, the Tree Board members talked about the possibility of giving a presentation to the City Council to talk about their activities. They would like to do this at the May 14, 2024, City Council meeting. Brent Bockelman offered to share some photos of Tree Board activities for use in the presentation.

Brent Bockelman offered to gather information to include in the Tree Board pamphlet that could be used at First Friday. He said he would assemble the brochure and share it with the Tree Board. Chip Hill said he had some good information that could be included in the pamphlet.

Looking to the future, the Tree Board discussed advocating for adjusting ordinances so that future developments within city limits would require a certain amount of trees to be planted by the developer for public enjoyment. The Tree Board members felt it was important that we advocate for street trees that will shade streets. These would be deep rooted trees that would not impede or damage sidewalks. The Tree Board could make a list of approved trees for developers to choose from.

The Tree Board members also discussed increasing the city's overall Tree Inventory. An idea that could be great to help accomplishing this would be to work with the local funeral homes to replace their existing "Plant A Tree" programs (which are non-local) with a program that could be local. Through such a program, people could purchase trees in memory of someone and those trees could then be planted in the city. Brent Bockelman previously talked to Smith & Sons Funeral Home and they were receptive at the time. Janice Daniel said she would speak with Jacie Worrick to see if Smith & Sons Funeral Home would still be interested. Jennifer said she could talk with Demoney-Grimes if we decided to do this. Chip Hill said he would talk with Rosie Coyle about setting up a funds with the city (similar to what was created for the Patriotic Park brick project) to facilitate collecting funds to buy trees.

Members of the Tree Board were informed about a property at 308 South Chauncey Street - the St. Paul of the Cross Catholic Church Rectory -- where Father Fernandez has voiced

concerns about a tree there that needs trimmed. Chip Hill confirmed that this particular tree is on the trim list for 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 6:48 p.m. after a motion to adjourn was presented by Brent Bockelman and seconded by Bryan Smethers.