

Urban Forestry Commission
April 24, 2014
Meeting Summary

Attendance

Dean Amel
Kelly Criswell
Caroline Haynes
Steve Campbell
Nora Palmatier
Paul Campanella
Ed Hilz
Karen Kumm Morris
Elizabeth Rives

State and County Staff

Vincent Verweij, DPR
Jim McGlone, VDOF
Kirsten Buhls, Extension

Guests

Steve Finn

Guests, Commissioners and Staff – Introductions and Sign-in

Dean Amel introduced a new commissioner, Kelly Criswell. Kelly lives in the Donaldson Run neighborhood, and knew Larry Finch (former UFC Chair) prior to joining. Everyone introduced themselves for her benefit.

Dean spoke with Per Midboe, who may be interested in joining the commission

Steve Finn was present to observe, to see if he is interested in joining.

Public Comment

No public comment

Courthouse Square Planning Process and Memorial Trees – Vincent Verweij, DPR

Karen Kumm Morris sent out the following email prior to the commission meeting:

“If you read through the correspondence that Steve Campbell and I have been having about the memorial trees at Courthouse Square, you will see that we both realize that the Mother Tree, planted by the a Clarendon women's club well before the 1950's, is in decline and efforts to save it might not be worth the money given that it may not survive much longer especially after all the construction. But, the Soldier's Tree is capable of making it, healthy, well-formed and magnificent. This assessment is backed up by Vincent.”

Next Wednesday, April 23, is the 2nd Courthouse Square public workshop where more voices are needed to speak up for preservation of the Soldier Tree. Also, there is a need to advocate for a significant tree canopy in the plaza to keep the sense of greenery, seasonal change and shade in this area. There were many voices at the first workshop calling for the memorial trees to come down because they were in the way of redevelopment.

Can you send this message to our UFC members and ask them to attend the Courthouse Square workshop? Here is the link: <http://projects.arlingtonva.us/events/envision-courthouse-workshop2/>“

Vincent Verweij updated the commission on the Staff side of Courthouse Square planning. Most questions from staff were regarding the memorial trees. A constant comment from Vincent to other staff has been that other trees in the study area, i.e. the trees along Clarendon Blvd, are of high value, as well.

Karen reported on the Courthouse meeting, and saw a great turnout from the UFC. Steve Campbell, Paul Campanella, Mikaila Milton, and Karen Kumm Morris were all present. The workshops created lots of ideas, but this leads to a lack of consensus. Lots of people were pointing out that they want lots of trees. Nobody mentioned removing the memorial trees, this time. Karen concurs with Vincent that the Mother's tree is not in great shape, but still highly valued by the community. It may be a hard sell to save this tree. The Soldier tree is of questionable age, but in good shape. Underground parking may affect the trees at the plaza. It is possible, given a reasonable size of the parking garage, and staying away from 15th St., to preserve the trees. The point was made to make the open space a space of civic presence.

Paul Campanella started at the Energy and Environment table, where the staff focused on energy. Green roofs were mentioned, but not much else about plants or trees. The discussion was changed at one point to a conversation on grey water and/or wastewater to filter down through the planned areas. A point was made to design the open space correctly. Paul then joined Karen on the open space discussion. Most groups mentioned they wanted lots of open space, not too many structures. Other suggestions were made, such as changeable art projects. There was not much talk about trees at the open space discussion.

Vincent noted that he sent suggestions to Jason Beske of possible templates for the Courthouse open space, such as the High Line, and Portland's civic square.

Paul supported this; “The High Line in NYC provides connections to the past and adds civic engagement.”

Steve heard that almost everybody at the discussion at Steve's table wanted open space, with passive space and trees.

Dean asked whether the parking garage going to be taking all of the space.

Karen speculated that that is probably not necessary, but UFC needs to send a letter on this issue as soon as possible (at the May meeting), before the next meeting on Courthouse planning.

Dean noted that Mikaila sent an email:

"They broke up the public into tables according to theme. I visited the "open space" and "energy and environment" themes.

The large potential open space is where the current Court House parking lot is. However there are lots of competing ideas for that space, such as a large concert venue, cafe-style tables, water feature, and permanent farmer's market stables like Eastern Market. There were other ideas floated such as blocking 14th and 15th streets for at least weekends, rows of food trucks, perhaps on one of the blocked streets on weekends, and incorporating a cultural/community center in the proposed new County building.

I think we could easily end up with a large plaza with very few trees and would advocate for a more park-like setting with groves of trees with perhaps a trail meandering through and park benches for sitting.

At the energy and environment table the County folks were almost assuring us a parking garage would be a part of the mix for the open space that is now the parking lot. Of course this would make it difficult to have a true park with groves of trees, as the intensive green roofs that can support canopy trees are expensive and probably difficult to maintain. This group was also suggesting rain water catchment systems and highlighted the Sidwell Friends School in DC. They have a planted garden with underground tanks and filtration systems that feed the garden. That too seems expensive to maintain and would preclude having a park with groves of trees - and it's unnecessary if we're replacing impervious surface with pervious. Green roofs and solar panels on West-facing facades may be possible to cut energy use. I suggested looking at the Oberlin Environmental Science Center as a model for the new building - both in terms of energy efficiency (exporting power to the rest of the campus) and in terms of water recycling (re-using all water that exits the system) and in terms of data visualization - a huge educational tool. Check it out:

<http://buildingdashboard.net/oberlin/ajlc/#/oberlin/ajlc>

Another idea brought up was the possibility of using the current sunken Verizon mini park for the proposed future County building or the site of the current County-leased building on the SW side of the Court House parking lot as the sites for the new square footage. I think keeping any new building on the periphery of the new open space/park would be preferable.

The process could always use feedback from folks who appreciate trees and I would suggest that the urban forestry commission writes a letter in support of both trees (including the two historical oaks - always ask for more than you're willing to settle for) and open space with groves of trees for the proposed open space.

As Karen mentioned, there are many desires for the proposed open space. Some are advocating for amphitheaters, cafe style tables for eating lunch and water features that all speak towards concrete rather than trees. I think one needs to consider the everyday uses rather than a once a week concert. I'd rather have a park like setting with mature canopy trees rather than a lawn with trees around the edge or a water fountain that can't have trees around it and is too hot in the summer to enjoy. Also from working for NPS, I see what the National Mall is going through with their water fountains. They are a bear to upkeep (and expensive), need algaecide and other chemicals added (not safe for children), contain lots of concrete, and no trees can be planted around them, as leaves will fall in and clog it. There are examples of great interactive water features such as Chicago's Millennium Park, but that element certainly needs to be thought through before just throwing up another concrete fountain.

It's an important process that will shape the center of Arlington for years to come. Now's the time to give feedback. The June 19th meeting will present designs from the contractors. I propose that our letter includes:

- keeping the two historic trees*
- advocating for settling the proposed new County building on the periphery, either at the site of the current leased building or the Verizon plaza site*
- advocating for keeping food trucks on the closed street on the weekends rather than creating bump outs from the park*
- proposing groves of trees rather than amphitheaters, concrete fountain and cafe-style chairs and tables (I see Penrose Square Plaza every day, and it's not green and shady enough to be inviting on a hot summer day and will most likely never get that way with the scattered honey locusts in tree pits - yes I know they're young trees and yes I know there are Silva Cells underneath, but it will never be a park-like setting, and it would be cool to see such for at least a large chunk of the proposed park/open space component of the Court House development)"*

Karen mentioned going to the building discussion first, because it tends to define the open space.

Nora Palmatier was concerned about tranquility with the street noise, as opposed to a plaza inside buildings.

Ed Hilz requested information on percentages of occupied area by buildings.

Karen replied that there are no specifics. She suggested making a pavilion in the space where the old county building stands now, with restaurants backing up to the theater, and more open space, maybe a beer garden. Proper access to metro should be emphasized, as well.

Dean noted that there is already an amphitheater there, and questioned the need for another public space.

Vincent explained there are design flaws involving sound reflection. CPHD can answer this question better, if there is a need for further explanation.

Dean asked who should be contacted for the letter. Karen suggested Jason Beske and Bob Duffy.

Dean reminded everyone that the commission reports to the county board, and that they should be the primary recipients of comments.

Steve mentioned that the 1997 plan shows nothing but trees in the parking lot area, with a space for concerts. Some buildings on the side are shown. Staff at the meeting gave a lot of elements, which were mostly rejected in favor of open space. Steve also asked about how much canopy can you get from planting on a parking garage?

Paul replied that this has proven problematic. At the EPA, they researched rooftop tree planting, and littleleaf lindens that were heavily pollarded every year would work, according to their study.

Vincent and Jim McGlone replied with options for rooftop planting. Research has improved significantly, and if a parking garage can be underneath an entire building, it can probably support some trees.

Karen suggested setting a percentage of canopy for the area in the letter. She suggested an extra 30% of canopy on the plaza.

Dean expressed a need for large trees with sufficient soil space.

Karen mentioned an example across from the Bethesda metro station.

Dean stated that a letter will be drafted before the next meeting, to be sent out right after.

Tree Preservation in Urban Areas, Webinar Summary – Vincent Verweij, DPR

Vincent summarized an existing recorded presentation on tree preservation.

A link to the presentation is available through the Deeprout website and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41cFWbTQEvM&list=UUT_qootiUJRsH6Ksa6KG8DA

Input on VDOF Agency Focus – Jim McGlone, VDOF:

Jim McGlone provided background on the VDOF work plan. Citizens in NoVA may not have the same requirements as the citizens of Lee County, and VDOF wants to understand what different parts of the state are asking for. For the first time in the history of VDOF, the state forester was not reappointed by the new governor, so this process has slowed down. The new state forester just joined.

The NoVA Urban Forest roundtable was asked for input at the winter roundtable. Jim then asked what Arlington County looks for from VDOF. There is no clear deadline yet. VDOF will

continue to do legislative mandates, such as wildland fire control and timber harvest, before this is resolved.

Dean mentioned assistance on concerns about infestations, such as Emerald Ash Borers. Dean asked whether VDOF has power to prevent landscape organizations from importing pests.

Jim replied; “No, the Virginia Department of Agriculture does have that power.”

Karen asked whether VDOF deals with urban forestry much.

Jim replied that it tends to be only consultative. The counties are given the authority to oversee land development.

Ed asked about the work Jim has done in Fairfax

Jim talked about being on the tree commission as a vice chair. He has talked with the Urban Forestry department about tree canopy, and the tree action plan. He is part of a team covering the NoVA area. Many counties do not have a tree commission.

Nora praised Jim for his help with all the volunteer groups.

Jim provides forest management plans, also for neighborhoods.

Caroline Haynes noted that education and outreach is very important, and should be VDOF’s major focus. Dean concurred.

Ed wondered what precipitated the reflection on the department.

Jim replied that people were reporting on things they weren’t involved with, such as fire fighting in urban areas, and water quality. The regional forester also realizes how many people live in this area.

Dean asked everybody to gather input for VDOF, and send them to Jim McGlone.

Approval of March Minutes

The minutes were approved by consensus.

Staff reports

Vincent reported on his methods of assessment for historic trees at the historic commission, and also provided the commission with his tree lists.

The Williamsburg School addition project has started, and Vincent has been on site to inspect the first phase’s tree protection.

The budget for the county was released, and it showed a retention of the invasive plant program, as well as extra trees to be planted. The invasive plant budget stays at \$100,000, there is a new urban agriculture initiative being funded at \$115,000, and 150 extra trees will be planted.

This year's notable trees were recognized on April 22. 13 trees were given awards.

Arbor Day was held at Barcroft Elementary school this year. Walter Tejada, several members of the school board, the Parks director, and several hundred kids and staff experienced a last-minute rescue of the tree planting effort.

Member reports:

Caroline Haynes, NRJAG: Northern Virginia trust came to the April meeting. NRJAG suggested providing tree protection as an alternative to conservation easements. The Trust was not as interested in using the very urban areas for targets. When Mike Nardolilli was there, they focused more on Arlington, but not so much anymore.

Caroline Haynes, Park and Recreation Commission: The Bill Thomas award was given to Keith Fred, Peter Jones, and the Arlington Master Naturalists. Peter Harnick with Trust for Public Lands presented for the commission. The trust for public lands includes Arlington now, because it's in the top 100 cities. The trust doesn't feel like we need help too much, because we spend a lot of money on preservation already. A discussion followed on smart growth for parks. They discussed Lubber Run being used for affordable housing. Lubber Run Civic Association strongly objected. There was a report on the Ashlawn School project, regarding the proposed ramp. Parks and Rec will write a letter. Concerns were noted about hydrology around the ramp. Issues also remain with Dominion Hills property, and their easement.

Dean asked the commission to draft a letter on Ashlawn.

Caroline further reported that Bluemont Civic Association is considering naming the Mary Carlin Woods.

Karen Kumm Morris, Planning activities: site plans moving through:

1. Wilson Blvd in Rosslyn
2. Berkeley near Four Mile Run (already written a letter)

Ed Hilz and Karen Kumm Morris, Public Facilities Review

Ed focused on McKinley School. There is a concern about the parking lot and the impact on trees. Karen is investigating whether a tree of concern is being removed for a good reason. The parking lot, according to staff, needs to be expanded. Karen described the addition on site. Zoning ordinance requirements conflict with recommendations by the consultant. Some staff is pushing for on-street parking. It was argued that we want to reduce impervious surfaces, but the zoning ordinance counters this. Schools' arborist stated trees were in good health, but will not

survive currently discussed construction. Ed is concerned about drainage. A stormwater structure is impacting one of the trees, because a rain garden was changed out by another filter system on the parking area.

Dean asked whether a letter will be drafted.

Karen provided a draft letter, and asked the commission to review.

Dean did not like the idea that we need to build more parking, when there is enough on-street parking.

Ed asked whether county staff supports more parking.

Karen acknowledged this.

Vincent mentioned that he has not been brought into the conversation.

Kirsten Buhls mentioned that the potential farmer's market at Fairlington was also discussed.

E2C2:

No report, did not meet

Champion trees:

No report

Tree Stewards, Nora Palmatier:

Email:

“Tree Canopy Fund - The spring planting is happening this week for Black gums and White oaks. The first set of white oaks were root bound in a 15 gallon container so were refused. (Thanks Vincent for reviewing photos) Smaller white oaks of 1” are now being planted and look good. Planting should conclude on Monday. Now that no small trees are in program, the contract could remove the mention of container grown and require all B&B? Or move to only planting only 1” caliper?”

2014 information Night is Monday, May 5 at Arlington Central Library. 7PM. Plan on coming if you can. (and 2 TS are doing similar program at Nauck Civic Assoc. the same night)

TreeStewards – The class has graduated and folks are already seeking to volunteer with Shirlington Dog Park, RIP, and programs with NPS, Alexandria and Falls Church. Earth Day Saturday has TS in 5 different locations...

Neighborhood conservation, Elizabeth Rives:

Email:

“This month's NCAC meeting featured another relatively new County staff member fielding a range of questions from NCAC reps on everything from streetlights to traffic cameras to the new traffic notification boards and system. Larry Marcus, Transportation, Engineering and Operations Bureau Chief, was very patient with the many questions from reps and imparted a greater desire to work with citizens than his predecessor (Wayne Wentz), at least according to several reps' comments. Reps continued to express frustration with reaching the right person to communicate with in the Bureau, and asked for some sort of personnel chart (as the Committee did with last month's guest, Bo Bloomer, DES Deputy Director for Facilities and Engineering, who has yet to provide said chart). The streetlight issue seems to be improving, perhaps only because many neighborhoods have decided not to submit projects that include streetlights because they don't want the new LED lamps. Mr. Marcus said his staff has been conducting some neighborhood demonstrations that show how the lights are dimmed at certain times, which seem to be helping allay concerns. Reps also had concerns about pedestrian crossing signs not being at the correct height, increased numbers of traffic lights, particularly around Ballston, traffic cameras not operating properly and slowing the main flow of traffic in favor of small side streets, and how dedicated the Bureau is to the complete streets initiative. Mr. Marcus made great promises of cooperation and communication, and said he is completely open and accessible to residents' concerns.”

Jim McGlone: Talked about the NoVA Roundtable May 22 on iTree. This roundtable will take place at the Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun Campus.

Jim McGlone: VDOF: Virginia has a new state forester. Urban forest strike team training will be in the beginning of June. Vincent will be there. VDOF, along with NVRC, Extension, and other organizations, are starting with a program on native plants in urban landscape.

Jim Meikle: Not here. Nothing to report.

Nora mentioned that two staff from schools graduated the Tree Stewards class.

Kirsten Buhls, Extension: Fairlington Arbor Day celebration will on Friday. 100 Swamp white oaks will be given away.

May 3, there will be a tree selection workshop from 1-3 PM, Supporting the Tree Canopy Fund

May 17th 10-2 PM, there will be a tour of trees on Fairlington grounds

New Business

Dean mentioned the Wilson school. Schools and the county board initially had the idea to sell the land. School board is now not selling it. A new middle school is proposed to be built on the property, with retention of open space, by the school board.