

Environmental Sustainability Committee

September 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Leslie Kepler (Chair), Rich Sampson (Co-Chair), Dan Fogel, Dana Hicks, Mary Ann Sprung, Trisha Knight, Jeremy Shook, Kerem Saral

Members Absent: Diana Truman

Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Jennifer Hunt (board liaison)

Staff: Pam Escobar- Lead Communications Specialist (staff liaison)

Chair, Leslie Kepler called the meeting to order – 3:31 p.m.

Approval of August Minutes – Approved unanimous vote

Public presentation from [Treasure Tree Program](#), Diane McLaine and Anne Marie O'Neill

- Ann Marie O'Neill discusses the process of nominating and recognizing trees in other towns like Davidson. The program aims to identify and label heritage trees, which are trees that meet certain criteria. The program includes a QR code system for learning more about the recognized trees.
- Diane McLean emphasizes the potential for the program to bring pride and excitement to the community. The program also encourages community involvement through events, public art, storytelling and community engagement.
- The costs associated with the program are discussed, including the development of a website and volunteer labor.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

New Business

1. Staff presentation on Tree Save Ordinance and Mitigation from Director of Planning Brian Richards and Assistant Planning Director Brad Priest (Shared via email on Sept. 13)
 - Brad Priest presents an overview of the town's tree mitigation ordinance
 - The ordinance includes requirements for canopy tree save and specimen tree save, which vary based on zoning districts
 - The process for tree mitigation is explained, including the option for developers to plant trees or donate funds
 - The challenges and evolutions of the tree mitigation process are discussed, including the recent changes to make it more equitable
 - The committee discusses the need for community input and consensus on potential changes to the ordinance
 - Mayor Pro Tem Hunt highlighted three questions for committee to consider:
 - i. Only half of required specimen trees should be mitigated?
 - ii. No mitigation for heritage trees?
 - iii. Conditional rezoning modifications?

Action Items: Committee members will email Co-Chair R. Sampson by Oct. 3, 2024 regarding items they would like to come to a consensus about at next meeting on Oct. 10, 2024.

2. Day without Driving on Thursday, October 3 (Sustain Charlotte) – Approved unanimous vote

Action Item: Mayor Pro Tem Hunt will connect with town communications regarding support for Day without Driving and actionable steps to share with residents.

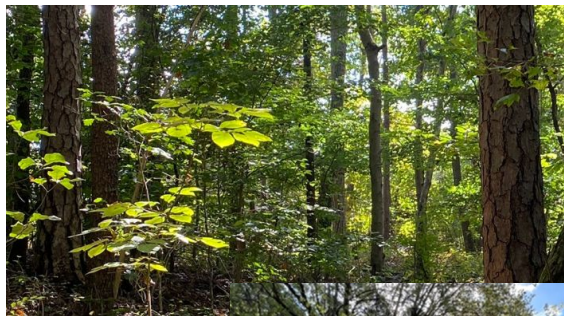
3. Planet Book Club

- D. Fogel – Invited committee members to join and promote new book club. Proposed first meeting, Wednesday, Nov. 6 at 6 p.m. to 7:30 pm. The first book is a recommendation from Co-Chair Sampson, *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug Tallamy (Shared via email on Sept. 13)

Old Business

1. Carbon Dividend Act (HR 5744)
 - M. Sprung – Brought climate clock to the meeting. She will work on a draft presentation for the board and a draft resolution to Congress, saying ‘we urge you to pass this resolution’ because time is running out to reduce emissions.
2. Community Engagement
 - L. Kepler – Liked the ideas of Treasure Tree Program presenters on community engagement
3. Pollinator Garden- no update
4. LEED options for new town hall
 - Mayor Pro Tem Hunt shared there will be a post construction meeting Tuesday, Sept. 17
5. Hybrid Meetings- Committee voted to hold next meeting in person on Thursday, Oct. 10, 2024

Meeting adjourned – 5:10 p.m.



Tree Canopy Huntersville

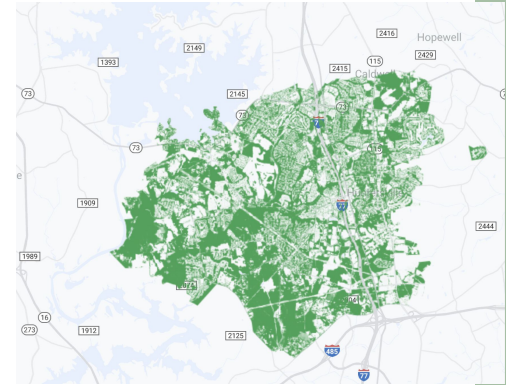
Goal

Increase focus on
preservation of the
Huntersville Tree
Canopy



The 'Need for Green' & Tree Canopy Benefits

- Stormwater and Erosion Management
- Air Pollution Control
- Temperature Reduction
- Property Value Increase
- Noise Reduction
- Natural Buffers
- Beauty and Appeal
- Carbon Capture and Greenhouse Gas Reduction
- Wildlife Habitat and Diversity of Species
- Community well being



Development Impacts to Community and Landscape

Full lot clearing,
loss of buffers, and
large tree removal
are often the
development
impacts causing the
most community
distress



Opportunities and Benefits

- **Baselining the current canopy** and having a **tree canopy goal** will help in making informed decisions when trees are being impacted
- **Preserving existing tree canopy** is the most effective means for securing future tree goals
- Creating a landscape of trees with a **broad age distribution and variety of species** ensures a healthy tree canopy is maintained over time
- **Planting new trees** in areas where tree canopy is low or trees have recently been removed helps to overcome losses
- **Educating residents** about the value of trees and tree care principles will keep a knowledgeable focus on the canopy
- **Engaging the community** in tree plantings and special tree designations will increase community appreciation of the canopy

Recommendations

- Actively Designate **Heritage Trees and Treasure Trees**
- Review the **Huntersville Tree Ordinance** for possible updates
- Baseline and set goals for tree canopy coverage
- Consider forming a '**Trees Huntersville**' chapter or sub-committee
- Become a '**Tree City USA**'



Actively Designate Heritage and Treasure Trees

- Encourage residents to identify trees with a special history or background
- Provide residents the opportunity to dedicate trees
- Create an application and review process
- Label and register approved Heritage and Treasure Trees
- Provide a method for passers-by to understand a Heritage or Treasure tree's history or special story



Update the Huntersville Tree Ordinance

- Adjust requirements for % of trees saved and/or % of required tree coverage
- Define an **overall tree canopy** coverage **baseline** and **goal**
- Advocate for **diversification of tree species and age**
- Consider extending **Tree buffer zones**
- Provide **Planting recommendations** for native, drought resistant trees
- Engage an **Arborist** for qualifying projects
- Improve **Parking lot shade** recommendations
- Include **Tree care** principles
- Partner and **create policies that are workable** long term considering
 - Maintenance (i.e. tree species, root depth, proximity to sidewalks and roads, planting strips)
 - Development (stormwater management and building)
 - Best Practices

Consider Forming a 'Trees Huntersville' Chapter or Sub-Committee

Partner with the town to address opportunities like:

- Heritage and Treasure Tree Designations
- Ordinance Review and Update Recommendations
- Baselineing of the Tree Canopy
- Education and Tree Care
- Tree City Qualification
- Tree Plantings
- Internship program liaison
- Sponsorships

Consider Becoming a 'Tree City'

Arbor Day designation focused on providing the framework necessary for communities to manage and expand their public trees



Requirements:

- A tree board or department
- A tree care ordinance
- A community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita
- An Arbor Day observation and proclamation

Benefits:

- Builds cooperation between public and private sectors
- Encourages, supports, and strengthens effective urban forestry programs
- Provides education to improve current practices

Next Steps

- Work as a catalyst team starting with one or two objectives for research
 - Start small, focus on things like a Treasure Tree program, understanding the current ordinance, understanding tree canopy baseline information
- Present options and partner to move initiatives forward
- Allow the partnership to evolve and determine the appropriate structure for a tree canopy focused entity



Appendix

Huntersville Definitions

<u>Heritage tree (Huntersville)</u>	A tree that is listed in the North Carolina Big Trees List, the American Forest Association's Champion Tree list, the Mecklenburg County Treasure Tree List or any tree that would meet 80% of the points of a tree on North Carolina's Big Tree List.
<u>Specimen tree. (Huntersville)</u>	A tree (or group of trees) that may be considered important community assets due to their unique or noteworthy characteristics or values. A tree may be considered a specimen tree based on its size, age, rarity or special historical or ecological significance and may also meet the following criteria: Large hardwoods (e.g. oaks, poplars, maples, etc.) and softwoods (e.g. pines sp.) in good or better condition with a DBH of 24" or greater. Smaller understory trees (e.g. dogwoods, redbuds, sourwoods, persimmons, etc.) in good or better condition with a DBH of 12" or greater. Lesser-sized trees of rare species or special intrinsic value as approved by staff.

****Note - Heritage trees and Specimen trees can have different definitions per township**

Huntersville Tree Save Requirements

Zoning District	Minimum Tree Preservation Required			
	Existing canopy $\geq$ 10% of total site area	Existing canopy < 10% of total site area	Heritage Trees	Specimen Trees
R	50% of existing trees	10% of total site area (existing and planted)	100%	50%
TR	35% of existing trees	10% of total site area (existing and planted)	100%	35%
GR and NR Districts	10% of total site area (existing and planted)	10% of total site area (existing and planted) ,	100%	10%
TC, CI, TND, NC, TOD, HC, SP, CB, VS Districts	0%	0%	100%	30%

Huntersville Zoning Areas

Rural R	Neighborhoods and rural compounds that set aside natural vistas and landscape features for permanent conservation
Transitional Residential TR	Bridge between rural zones and more urbanized development.
General Residential and Neighborhood Residential GR/NR	GR - conventional residential subdivisions already existing or approved NR - residential infill development around the Town Core, Activity Centers and Mixed Use Centers
Neighborhood Center NC	Location of shops, services, small workplaces, civic and residential buildings
Town Center TC	Huntersville's traditional town center.
Campus Institutional CI	Large institutional complexes already in place and new institutional complexes on 15 acres or more
Transit oriented Residential, Employment Led TOD - R, TOD-E	Higher density residential communities with a mix of retail, restaurant, service, and small employment uses within a pedestrian village format. General office, characterized by 40 to 70 employees per acre, in a highly pedestrianized setting
Highway commercial HC	auto-dependent uses in areas not amenable to easy pedestrian access
Special Purpose SP	accommodate uses that may constitute health or safety hazards, have greater than average impacts on the environment, or diminish the use and enjoyment of nearby property by generation of noise, smoke, fumes, odors, glare, commercial vehicle traffic, or similar nuisances.

Huntersville Zoning Areas, Continued

Corporate business CB	large business or light industrial uses and parks which are already in place and for new business parks which cannot be fully integrated into the fabric of the community
Traditional Residential, Traditional Neighborhood Development Urban/Residential TND-U, TND- R	new neighborhoods and the revitalization or extension of existing neighborhoods, which are structured upon a network of interconnecting pedestrian-oriented streets and other public spaces

High Level Ordinance Comparison

	Huntersville	Davidson	Matthews	Charlotte	Cornelius	Pineville	Mint Hill
Requirements							
Tree Save	0-50%	20-40%	8-20%	15%	Buffer reqs	Tree size - 12" DBH	No
Coverage	0-10%	15-60%	8-20%	15%	Buffer reqs	No	No
Buffer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Speciman Tree	35-50%	Require arborist care plan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Heritage Tree	100% - 2 designated	Yes - 99 designated	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Diversity	Yes - age and species	Yes	Some - species	Yes	No	Yes without specifics	Some
Funds in Lieu	Can contribute to a tree fund	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Parking Lot	Yes	Yes	Yes	No?	Yes	Yes	Yes

High Level Ordinance Comparison, Continued

	Huntersville	Davidson	Matthews	Charlotte	Cornelius	Pineville	Mint Hill
Requirements							
Street Trees	Yes	Yes	Yes	No?	Yes	No	No
Arborist	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Review Process	With staff	With arborist	with arborist	With Forester	Environmental survey	Yes	No
Tree Protection during development	Yes	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes with penalties	No
Permit required for tree removal	Land disturbing permit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	No
Other							
Tree Commission	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Tree X organization	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Tree City	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Resources

1. Tree City: https://www.ncforestservice.gov/urban/tcusa_programs.htm
2. Tree Canopy Assessment: <https://treescharlotte.org/news/urban-tree-canopy-assessment-results/>
3. Huntersville Ordinance:
https://huntersville.municipalcodeonline.com/book?type=zoning#name=7.4_Tree_Preservation,_Protection,_And_Removal
4. Waxhaw Ordinance Update: <https://www.waxhaw.com/Home/Components/News/News/484/16>
5. Huntersville Trees Research:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PJy5kifHnBxCqOTxwn_3B4OU3ydWpZs3T68Er5K-5Gw/edit#gid=14248161
6. Huntersville Trees Meck County Comparison
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ofOZisHIEcgkDjbT41gtNb-cwvWzHz1Q4ri59KVZOhQ/edit>

Tree Save Requirements

- Based on zoning district, a percentage of both the wooded area (canopy) of a site and the individual number of large mature trees (specimens) on a site are required to be saved.

Zoning District	Minimum Tree Preservation Required			
	Existing canopy ≥ 10% of total site area	Existing canopy < 10% of total site area	Heritage Trees	Specimen Trees
R	50% of existing trees ^{2, 3, 4}	10% of total site area (existing and planted) ^{1, 2, 3, 4}	100% ²	50% ^{2, 4}
TR	35% of existing trees ^{2, 3}	10% of total site area (existing and planted) ^{1, 2, 3}	100% ²	35% ²
GR and NR Districts	10% of total site area (existing and planted) ^{2, 3}	10% of total site area (existing and planted) ^{1, 2, 3}	100% ²	10% ²
TC, CI, TND, NC, TOD, HC, SP, CB, VS Districts	0%	0%	100% ²	30% ²

Tree Mitigation Allowance

- Developments have the option to “Mitigate” or remove the required trees, if they plant new trees on their site or contribute funds for the new trees to be planted elsewhere.

² Where circumstances prevent locating the required tree plantings or preservation standards on site, the developer may mitigate protected tree canopy removal by planting new trees on the site whose canopy equals that of the canopy to be removed (new tree canopy credits are described above). If site conditions are not conducive for healthy tree replacement planting on site, the developer may contribute to a Tree Fund/Bank set up by the town for the planting and maintenance of such trees elsewhere in the community. A combination of planting and contribution in lieu of planting is acceptable. The amount of contribution is based on the total cost of the required mitigation trees plus that of their installation. Planning staff will be responsible for reviewing and approving all tree mitigation plans consistent with the mitigation standards of this section.

For Specimen Tree Mitigation, the developer may mitigate the removal of specimen trees by planting new trees on the site whose total caliper (DBH) equals 100% of the total caliper of trees (DBH) to be removed above the ordinance requirement. If site conditions are not conducive for healthy tree planting on site, the developer may contribute to a Tree Fund/Bank as described above. Newly planted street trees, parking lot trees, and buffer trees do not count toward the mitigation calculation.

Evolving Specimen Tree Mitigation Requirements

- Pre-2015 : Planning Board Review Required – Large tree removed / one small tree planted mitigation allowed
 - *Issue:* Development very quick to remove trees and mitigate, very little mitigation contribution.
- 2015 Text Amendment : Planning Board Review Required – 30% of tree caliper to be mitigated
 - *Issue:* Development still quick to mitigate, inequitable mitigation
- 2020 Text Amendment: Planning Board Review Required - 100% of tree caliper to be mitigated
- 2021 Text Amendment: Planning Board Review changed to staff review

Why the changes...where are we now?

- Careful effort to increase mitigation cost to encourage mature tree save, while balancing development feasibility.
 - Too much mitigation required = difficult to develop
 - Too little mitigation = loss of tree canopy and specimens
- With 100% mitigation required and no thresholds to review, there was no reason for the Planning Board to review mitigation requests.
- **Current Staff Observations:**
 - Development is still quick to mitigate specimen trees, but mitigation is equitable (trees removed = trees to be replaced).
 - Canopy tree save is often met in residential districts; due to streams and open space requirements.
 - Staff is actively identifying tree planting opportunities to use mitigation funds.

Moving Forward...

- Mitigation contributions for tree removal has greatly improved.
 - However, development is still quick to pay mitigation costs rather than design their development to save mature trees.
- *Is there a desire for the Town to more strongly encourage saving mature large trees, and discourage mitigation?*
- For instance:
 1. Only allow ½ of the required saved specimen trees to be mitigated?
 2. No mitigation for Heritage Trees?
 3. Conditional Rezoning Modification needed? If so when?