

DRAFT

DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Thursday, December 12, 2019
Minutes of Meeting

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes called the meeting of the Community Development Committee to order at 10:03 a.m. in Council Chambers.

Committee members present: Ms. De Rosa, Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes, Mr. Reiner via telephone.

Staff members present: Mr. Earman and Mr. Hammersmith.

Discussion re. Streetscape/Tree Selection in Historic Dublin

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes stated that she, Ms. De Rosa and staff completed a walk-through in the Historic District this morning. The goal of this meeting is to capture their thoughts about having an attractive streetscape in the urban areas of the City. Specifically, the discussion is focused on High Street, but the thinking is this could be applied to all urban streets in the City.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes outlined what the Committee viewed: Sawtooth oak trees and a number of other trees have been planted over the course of time, including crabapples. The City Forester explained that the Sawtooth oaks are all failing, largely because of the soil quantity and quality available to its root zone. There were other issues raised by the Committee – the building setbacks from the street on the east side of High Street are relatively consistent. But on the west side, it is less consistent. The question is how to make the sidewalk feel more consistent given the inconsistency of the building setbacks – maybe a low stone wall, perhaps bookshelved, or a low, stone seat wall would be appropriate as this is on the parade route. When the City does plant the proper street tree in the proper location along an urban area, how can we ensure it has the capacity for survivability? The street trees in Bridge Park were referenced as there was really not sufficient root zone area for the trees and the decision was made that those trees would be replaced every 5-7 years.

The Committee then walked up to the northern part of High Street near the new library and the new Z1 and Z2 buildings and viewed the Ginkgo tree installation. One of the components needed in the policy update relates to clear trunk heights at time of installation – it should be in the neighborhood of seven feet. Some of the lateral branches on the Ginkgos start between 30-40 inches off the ground, particularly on the west side of High in front of the library.

She asked Mr. Reiner as Chair about what he wants to discuss next – fixing South High Street, fixing North High Street, or the general topic of urban street trees in the City.

Mr. Reiner stated that the first discussion should be about the current issue on S. High Street. The cadence of the trees could be increased. He did recently flag this area out. All are in agreement that unanimity of trees - a singular tree type -- would be best. Between the curb and the brick sidewalks and the utilities, the installation must be done very carefully. The lilac trees could be the best option. (He outlined the reasons he believes this.)

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes asked what he is thinking in terms of the ultimate size of those lilac trees.

Mr. Reiner responded that, hopefully, these will remain at a height underneath the power lines. Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes noted that Mr. Hammersmith is present and there has been discussion about the removal of existing power poles along High Street as part of the 2021 South Franklin Street improvements in the CIP. What are his thoughts about changing the lilac trees out if there were not overhead power lines to accommodate?

Mr. Reiner responded there could be a more interesting streetscape and better canopy if the power lines are eliminated. It would be possible to use a larger tree, with better bed preparation and good installation in this small space between the curb and the sidewalk.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes stated perhaps a pyramidal hornbeam or Fastigiata tulip tree could be used. What is his opinion of the volume of soil that needs to be available to such trees?

Mr. Reiner responded that the hornbeam grows very large and he would not recommend the Fastigiata tulip tree.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes agrees about the hornbeam, but the space between the street and the building façade is 8-12 feet. To get a canopy tree, it would have to be a largely one-sided canopy, which likely would have a negative impact on the tree overall. She agrees that the hornbeam is not the right tree, but perhaps something slightly more Fastigiata would be appropriate. Otherwise, the head of the tree will be significantly out of balance.

Discussion continued.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes summarized that discussion about the specific tree itself could take place later, but the Committee should focus more on what urban street tree visuals should be in the City.

Mr. Reiner stated that the trees on the east side of the S. High street are big, old and look great – effective in filling up the space and softening the buildings. The ones just cut down on the west side of S. High bring up an entirely different issue. He does not advocate cutting down the east side trees.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes state the goal is to come up with a comprehensive plan.

Mr. Reiner stated the question is if the Committee wants to plant smaller trees due to the power lines, or wait until 2021 and plant a larger scale tree? That is the first issue to be resolved.

Ms. De Rosa asked for clarification about the future utility pole modifications planned for 2021.

Mr. Hammersmith responded that the intent is not to bury anything along S. High Street, but rather removal of the poles. The service to the properties will then come from the rear.

Ms. De Rosa stated she would prefer to plant the larger tree now, if it does not impact the movement of the poles in 2021. If we assume that we can do the movement of the power lines in 2021, planting the larger tree now makes sense. The sooner that vegetation can be planted, the better.

Mr. Reiner stated she raises an excellent point. Why install temporary trees and then remove them? The City should consider installing larger trees now, as they will take three years to begin to grow -- a bigger tree with a nicer canopy that arches over the street, softening the entire streetscape. This is a great solution. Between now and 2021, these trees will not grow significantly.

Ms. De Rosa deferred to the landscape expertise of Mr. Reiner and Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes. There was other discussion about the streetscape – the walls, shrubbery, etc. A question was raised about who would have maintenance responsibility? From a policy perspective, what could and should be done with items beyond the trees? Some discussion about this is warranted.

Mr. Reiner stated that there are limitations to the properties – the elevation of the buildings, the end of the property lines and what right-of-way the City owns. He is not clear about all of this.

Mr. Earman stated that, basically, the City has maintenance responsibility from the edge of the sidewalk nearest to the property to the street. Therefore, the property owner is responsible for the landscaping from their building to the edge of sidewalk.

Mr. Reiner stated that we are talking about the streetscape and the aesthetics, and whether some walls should be added. He is not certain, and believes a landscape architect would need to review this. Would this interfere with on street parking? As far as adding amenities, he is not certain of the feasibility, given all of the elements involved.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes stated she is not certain there is sufficient soil going in there to support new trees. She does not want to hire a consultant to prepare a plan. She believes the City can do this. Perhaps a list of three to four different street trees to be used in different areas of the City could be prepared. A soil volume should be assigned to each of those trees necessary for it to meet a 60-year mature height. It is necessary to determine the soil volume in place so that whatever is planted will be successful. A price tag needs to be assigned to the different urban streets in the City – Historic Dublin, Bridge Park – reflecting the cost associated with achieving the right soil volume for long-term plant success. Then, let's have a conversation about the total number and where this is prioritized in the CIP. This would provide a number for the various urban streets – S. High Street, N. High Street, John Shields Parkway, Riverside Drive, and Banker Drive, etc. Congruently, the City needs to upgrade the specifications per whatever these calculations indicate for all the streets being constructed in urban districts in the City as soon as possible. It is 85 percent more expensive to do after the fact than during. Even if that means a change order needs to be submitted for streets under construction today, it should be done.

Mr. Reiner stated those are good suggestions. These calculations are easy to do for the preferred trees. Along with that, another important issue for the CIP is how to replace the buffering in the City and at what point is it replaced? The original intent was to have someone driving through Dublin see only green and not the back of houses or play equipment. Now that 40 years have gone by, those screening elements are starting to dissolve and Dublin is not as attractive. This is as important as building a new City Hall – retaining the visual aspects and quality of the City. A long-term program is needed to address this view shed issue.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes recalled that an update about the Muirfield Drive landscape screening is pending from staff. The intent is to re-establish the screening/buffering that has diminished over time. She agrees this is an important item -- maintaining aesthetics going forward. A status report from staff is needed. She does recall a schedule about engaging the neighborhood along Avery-Muirfield for this discussion.

Mr. Earman responded that the idea is to engage the neighbors along Avery-Muirfield where the condition of the screening is inconsistent with the development text. The City also has certain areas of refinement needed to make sure consistency with the Code is maintained, as well. The neighbors need to be informed of their obligations. The concept of gathering the neighborhood to discuss the responsibilities, the intent of the Code, etc. was to have it scheduled last fall after the leaves were down. This meeting has not yet been scheduled, but is on the radar.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes added that the vision 30-40 years ago for the screening was good, but the execution left much to be desired as the City did not acquire easements in order to access the properties.

Mr. Reiner stated that is a good point. He added that the responsibility rests with Council for not requiring the consistent large setbacks in the face of development pressure. The mounding on Brand Road that screens Asherton is 14-foot in height. The problem with screening is that the spruce trees must be replaced in perpetuity every 30 years.

Ms. De Rosa stated that from that perspective, one of the goals of this discussion is to update some of the policies. To his point about what has been codified and what needs to happen to go forward, some draft language should be brought forward by staff as the policies are being updated for setbacks and coverage replacement. She concurs with his observations about the screening along the roadways. Perhaps in the interest of time, more discussion should focus on the streetscape on S. High Street in order to give direction to staff about what the Committee wants to see.

Mr. Reiner agreed. For S. High Street, he, too, would advocate the larger shade trees as these will require time to develop. It makes more sense than installing temporary trees and removing them later.

Mr. Reiner asked about Dublin's Code requiring all parking lots to be screened. In driving around, he is not observing screening around some car dealerships. Perhaps this is a Code enforcement issue, or perhaps landscape screening has died out and has not been replaced. Has the City screened the parking lot for Avery Park on Avery Road appropriately? Do we meet our own standards? The City needs to address these questions.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes suggested that the Committee focus on the issue before them today. She does not believe pictures or renderings are necessary for the South High Street treescape.

Mr. Reiner agreed. There is no need for a master plan to be prepared for this. The forestry staff and landscape architect, together with the Committee, can stake out the area for planting shade trees as the Committee has discussed.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes stated she would like to see a list of a dozen or less proposed trees for urban areas in the City. Six would be for areas where a canopy width is 40 feet and under, and six would be for areas where a canopy width is 40 feet and over. From that, a calculation is needed for the quantity of soil necessary for the 40 feet and under list, and a quantity of soil necessary for the 40 feet and over list. Next step is to determine the urban streets in Dublin and what is the available soil to a tree in a given area. If the calculation indicates 95 cubic yards of soil, and there are 65 cubic yards available, recommendations are needed in order to achieve the next 30 cubic yards necessary, including where is it available -

under the street or under the sidewalk? Due to the urgency, the S. High Street area will be the first priority, but the same process would be used subsequently to do all of the urban street trees – having a formula to apply to any street. Once a tree is selected, we will know the cadence as we will know the canopy on said tree. Additional enhancements can be discussed next, perhaps a stone wall that would retain some soil. She would like to see something accomplished in the next three weeks.

Mr. Reiner agreed. Regarding the cubic yards of soil, if the math is done based on a sidewalk system like Bridge Park, it requires a huge amount to make that tree grow, as it is completely encased by brick pavers, etc. For South High Street, trees will grow with the soil underneath the brick sidewalks.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes stated that, per the conversation earlier, if there are areas where a section of street needs to be removed to amend what is underneath the street and make it available to the trees, it should be considered.

Mr. Reiner summarized that the Committee has requested that staff provide lists of trees as outlined (40 feet and under canopy, and 40 feet and over canopy) and a calculation to make this doable. The other issues discussed tonight are the buffers and screenings, as well as the parking lot screenings. Staff can report back on this.

Ms. De Rosa stated that in the short term, it will take these trees a few years of growth to have an impact on S. High Street, correct?

Mr. Reiner responded that depends upon the cadence, the tree and its spread.

Ms. De Rosa asked what is a viable suggestion for the additional streetscape items beyond the trees? Are there opportunities to work with property owners on these? She encouraged the Committee not to use the current constraints for potential visioning. If the property owners see some fantastic options, they will be interested, given their dissatisfaction with the loss of the trees. As a phase 2, she encourages bringing back some ideas of what makes sense and then figuring out how to apply that to other urban streets. If we could collectively accomplish that, it would be fantastic.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes asked Mr. Earman if the Committee has provided clear direction.

Mr. Earman responded he has the direction needed to go forward. He is looking at this in three phases: phase 1 is the immediate treescape on S. High; phase 2 the streetscape; and phase 3 to apply this to Code going forward. He does have a question related to timing. Staff can work on this within a reasonable period of time, but given the next opportunity for a Committee report is January 6, he will discuss with the City Manager the next steps in the process.

Ms. De Rosa asked about the east side of Bridge Park and the treescape planned for the park edge. We should incorporate some of the thinking per today's discussion. What a wonderful opportunity to create something magnificent and breathtaking.

Mr. Earman responded that the area along Riverside Drive will eventually be the promenade with trellis and landscaping. It is not programmed in the CIP yet.

Vice Mayor Amorose Groomes asked if staff could provide a list of pending plantings currently in process so that it is not necessary to retrofit later.

Staff agreed to do so.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

Deputy Clerk of Council