



Source: City Manager

Agenda Item No: REP 6-14

To: City Council
From: City Manager and Staff

Council Meeting Date: January 21, 2014

Re: Exploration of the concept of a Tree Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

City council has asked for an overview of our approach to managing the urban forest, to inform a discussion of the possibility of creating a tree board.

DISCUSSION:

The city uses four main ways to provide tree related services.

1. Trees in City owned parks are managed by the Parks Department.

To document the necessity of the tree's removal, the practice has been to complete a tree hazard evaluation form prior to removing the potentially controversial park tree of significant size or importance. This is usually done by either the department Forester or the Park Natural Resource Supervisor, both being certified arborists. The evaluation is important to the department as the removal of the tree is the last choice of action. Every effort is made to take corrective measures in cases where the possibility of recovery or hazard abatement is favorable. If trees are scheduled for removal due to park development, staff follows the Columbia Tree Preservation Ordinance and in nearly all cases, exceeds the requirements for tree preservation and restoration. The Parks and Recreation Department tree care program encompasses the management of trees throughout 78 parks and recreation facilities. The Parks and Recreation program for tree care is divided among four work groups: Forestry Staff, Horticulture Staff, Mowing Staff, and Golf Course Staff. Together, the Horticulture and Forestry programs represent the P&R Department's Natural Resources Division. The Horticulturists and Foresters report to a P&R supervisor who is also an ISA Certified arborist and municipal tree specialist.

Parks and Recreation Commission

In addition to significant public and council input on tree removals in new development plantings, the commission also provides many of the services of a tree board for the Parks Department.

2. If trees are impacted by a public improvement process, the Public Works Department has purview.

The Public Works Department manages the majority of public improvement projects throughout the city. Through that process, trees are removed, or preserved based on the particular needs of each public improvement. Much of the recent tree removal and replacement has occurred as part of trail construction projects. In these projects the City Council has significant involvement, both through the project planning stages and throughout the construction phase. Outside of the public improvement process, operations personnel occasionally use a tree removal service when circumstances warrant a removal. The department consults with the City Arborist in the decision-making process. Public Works spends less than \$15,000 annually on tree management.

3. Trees that become an issue for power lines or water lines are managed by the Water & Light Department.

It is very rare that a tree is removed to maintain a water main or water service. When this occurs, the City Arborist is called for evaluation of the condition of the tree and its value to the location. If private property, the department will communicate with the property owner prior to removal and come to an agreement between the owner and City. The most common reasons for removal for electric distribution lines is upon the request of the customer. Trees recognized during routine maintenance as possible threats and areas known

for recurring outages are common reasons for removal. The Water and Light Department utilizes several programs that deal with the removal, conservation, and planting of trees within the City of Columbia.

Tree Power: this program provides one free tree to any electric customer and includes a landscape audit that will assist the customer for proper placement of the tree to maximize shade during the summer.

Trade-A-Tree: this program removes existing trees from under power lines and provides a replacement "decorative" tree that won't grow into the power lines.

Tree Trimming: Water & Light currently contracts for 13 tree trimming crews that maintain the overhead system. Crews were added in recent years because of a period of wet summers that increased growth and staff could not keep up with trimming which resulted in higher outages. The drought of 2012 caused a significant amount of tree deaths that now present falling hazards for our lines, so both trimming and removal have increased in the last two years.

Water & Light Advisory Board

The Water & Light Advisory Board has been involved in creating the programs listed above through their advisory role to City Council.

4. The Community Development Department also has role in managing the urban forest.

The Community Development Department administers the City's development ordinances as they relate to tree preservation and forest management. Chapter 12A (Land Preservation) includes tree preservation requirements. The ordinance requires preservation of a minimum of 25 percent of the tree cover that is classified as "climax forest" to be preserved during construction. The department inspects sites and determine how much of the wooded cover on a development site is "climax forest" as defined in the ordinance. The department requires developers and builders to delineate tree preservation areas and reviews and approves preservation plans. During and after construction, the department inspects development sites to insure the tree preservation areas are in fact preserved. The department also responds to complaints regarding tree removal or damage; determines the health and degree of hazard in diseased or weakened trees; approves landscape plans (regulated by section 29-25 of Chapter 29, Zoning Ordinance) to determine that they meet City standards, including the planting of new trees. The City Arborist in Community Development serves as a resource to other departments that need the advice of a certified Arborist if there are any questions regarding trees affecting City operations.

For trees within a preservation area, the department will consider a request to remove a tree if it is diseased or weakened or could become a hazard; if it is an undesirable tree species; if good forest management practice recommends its removal; or if the tree creates conflict with public infrastructure that was not anticipated when the tree preservation plan or landscape plan was approved. If the tree is damaged by construction or by other negligence of the property owner, the department can require replacement trees.

The Planning and Zoning Commission

All development plans that require Commission approval are reviewed by the Arborist prior to staff reports being prepared. The Arborist is also included in all concept review requests for their comments. The protection of the climax forest on sites that have such areas are dealt with separately prior to the building permit issuance phase of any development.

The Vision Commission & The Environmental Energy Commission

In Imagine Columbia's Future, the community visioning process had a discussion on tree board. It can be found under the Community Character topic - "Strategy 1: Establish a landscape/tree board to develop and implement landscaping policies, provide outreach and education, and promote sustainable native and edible plantings". In response to a letter from the City Manager requesting that the EEC perform the role of the tree board, the EEC responded, "this suggestion is consistent with our mission and our capacity to advise the Council on environmental matters." The EEC letter can be found here: <https://www.gocolumbiamo.com/Council/Commissions/downloadfile.php?id=4861>

FISCAL IMPACT:

Parks and Recreation

Forestry and Trail Program FY13- \$369,150

Water and Light

Tree Power: FY13 - \$17,291; FY12 - \$5,920; and FY11 - \$11,953

Trade-A-Tree Program: FY13 - \$25,235; FY12 - \$34,550; FY11 - \$36,198

Tree Trimming Program: FY13 - \$2,007,903; FY12 - \$1,931,799; FY11 - \$1,778,102

Public Works

In the public improvement process, the cost for tree removal has not been collected in the past as a specific project cost. Staff estimates that outside the public improvement process, Public Works spends less than \$15,000 per year on tree related services.

Community Development

The cost for managing the tree canopy is difficult to separate from the plan review process. However, the total cost of the City Arborist position is \$62,486

Total estimated cost for tree related services for FY13: \$2,497,065

VISION IMPACT:

<http://www.gocolumbiamo.com/Council/Meetings/visionimpact.php>

SUGGESTED COUNCIL ACTIONS:

Discuss the role of a potential tree board. What would the mission of the tree board include? Should the EEC play that role?

FISCAL and VISION NOTES:					
City Fiscal Impact Enter all that apply		Program Impact		Mandates	
City's current net FY cost	\$2,497,065.00	New Program/ Agency?	No	Federal or State mandated?	No
Amount of funds already appropriated	\$2,497,065.00	Duplicates/Expands an existing program?	No	Vision Implementation impact	
Amount of budget amendment needed	\$0.00	Fiscal Impact on any local political subdivision?	No	Enter all that apply: Refer to Web site	
Estimated 2 year net costs:		Resources Required		Vision Impact?	Yes
One Time	\$0.00	Requires add'l FTE Personnel?		Primary Vision, Strategy and/or Goal Item #	
Operating/ Ongoing	\$0.00	Requires add'l facilities?		Secondary Vision, Strategy and/or Goal Item #	
		Requires add'l capital equipment?		Fiscal year implementation Task #	