

LANDSCAPE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE – NOTES FROM MEETING 3 –  
Virtual Meeting, 3 pm, June 15, 2020

Present at meeting: *Gerri Alfano, Kimberly Barb, Judson Clinton, Deniece Conway, Keith Francies, Steve Galanti, Sarah Healy, Allan Hill, Terri Jones, Tim Knowles, Joel Landau, Christina Larson, Elizabeth Link, Nick Piornack, Dabney Sanders, Tori Small, Jeff Sovich, and Judy Stalder. Teresa Lockamy served as facilitator*

Teresa Lockamy welcomed the group and went over the Zoom protocols and the group charter of how to conduct the meeting. She then introduced Elizabeth Link to go over the amendment revision to require plant diversity within the required planting yards.

Ms. Link presented the amendment as modified to reflect the comments of the group in the previous meeting. Tim Knowles commented on the possible complications of providing diversity in a small planting yard where only one tree would be required. Ms. Link pointed out that the requirements for percentages apply to the entire site, not just to each planting yard.

Keith Francies questioned the percentages provided in the tables in the ordinance amendment. Ms. Link explained the reasoning behind the percentages.

Joel Landau commented on wording of one of the columns and noted that the “shrubs” column said “trees”. Ms. Link acknowledged that this needed to be corrected. Mr. Landau also questioned why the minimum requirement for native species is only 40%. Ms. Link explained that because of fluctuation in the nursery trade that the percentage was intended to get some natives in the mix without providing an undue burden to the landscaper.

The group was asked if they wanted to vote on the diversity ordinance alone or continue to the next agenda item.

Sara Healy asked who has the final say of whether the ordinance is passed after we agree on it. Steve Galanti noted that the ordinance would be considered by the Planning Board or Zoning Commission before going on to the City Council.

At this point Ms. Lockamy asked for any additional questions or feedback, asked if the group would be willing to move onto a vote, and when the group agreed, asked for a vote. The group voted on the ordinance amendment and approved it.

Ms. Link then introduced the amendment to provide a required distance between required light poles and trees. She provided wording from ordinances for Charlotte and Raleigh that cover the same issue.

Mr. Knowles commented that since we don't have any requirements in our ordinance for lighting, the lighting design is usually an afterthought. In this case to meet the ordinance the lighting might need to be put in between parking spaces, which some people consider undesirable. He suggested that lighting should be part of the requirements for the civil plan.

Dabney Sanders noted that we should distinguish between canopy trees and understory trees when setting the separation distances in the ordinance, and possibly allowing understory trees to be closer to the lights, in order to allow people to have the lighting that they need but not require cutting down the trees.

Ms. Small commented that lighting plan generally happens at the end of the project, so it is difficult to get a lighting plan until after TRC has approved. She also asked where the distances between tree and light came from. She commented on the size of the islands and expressed a desire to have smaller islands. Also noted that the utilities end up in the islands, which creates more islands to accommodate utilities and trees.

Judy Stalder pointed out that they had sent out this to their development community to get comments. They got back comments similar to the ones put forth by Ms. Small, in terms of numbers sounding arbitrary. Noted that there may be discussions in progress regarding reducing parking requirements and reducing impervious surface, which would reduce parking lot size, and this seems to be taking it in the opposite direction of making lots bigger.

Ms. Link noted that the distances were probably based on mature size of tree size and asked Keith Francies to comment on the size. Mr. Francies noted that an understory tree may have as wide a spread as some canopy trees even if not as tall, and that trees in parking lots frequently don't achieve the mature size that they do in better conditions. He suggested that we need to look at some existing parking lots to see what they look like.

Deneice Conway said that she had spoken with Kym Smith, the City's streetlight co-ordinator, who told her that their lighting design guide states that the distance of the light from the tree should be based on the height of the pole and the mounting height of the light.

Mr. Francies commented that he agrees with Mr. Knowles that if the lighting plan is not provided with the civil plan that this is very hard to enforce, and wondered if it's really that hard to achieve. He asked about whether the utilities are shown on the TRC plans. Ms. Link replied that while water and sewer utilities are required to be shown, the lighting is not usually required.

Mr. Knowles commented that he has worked with lighting engineers and with Duke Energy to get lighting plans and show them on his plan submittal, so it can be done. He said that designers want to use the island for a number of items of infrastructure, including storm drains, fire hydrants, and other utilities so it needs to be coordinated up front to avoid conflicts.

Judson Clinton commented that some of these could be addressed with notes on the plan and suggested that understory trees could be used in the parking lot instead of canopy trees. He suggested that the soil volume needs to be considered to accommodate canopy trees, and that other ordinance requirements that dictate the conditions under which parking lot trees are installed may need to be examined.

Ms. Link noted that some other cities require larger islands than our ordinance, and have requirements to remove dirt and gravel from islands after they are constructed and bring in clean fill to plant the trees in. She asked Mr. Galanti if it would be possible to require lighting plans with TRC plans.

Mr. Galanti stated if it's something that comes out of this group that it might be possible to require lighting plans for TRC after checking with the development community.

Ms. Sanders said that having the lighting plan could be valuable for all involved, and asked what checking with the development community would require.

Mr. Galanti replied that it would involve getting some involvement from the development community and getting consensus and merge the two together.

Ms. Stalder noted that the development community and the city need to work together to come up with a workable ordinance for all. That the development community isn't necessarily against regulation, just want good regulation.

Mr. Knowles picked up on Judson's suggestion that understory trees could be used in parking lots instead of canopy trees and that we need to look at how the canopy trees are functioning in parking lots – whether they are healthy, and are they really being effective at shading the parking lot.

Ms. Sanders said that she doesn't believe that canopy trees should be eliminated from parking lots because all the intended uses of them – providing shade, cooling effect - are good, and what we need to do is to look at the requirements to see if there are standards – island size, soil quality - we could put in place to make them successful. She said she is not in favor of eliminating canopy trees from parking lots.

Mr. Clinton stated that he was not in favor of eliminating canopy trees either.

Mr. Francies noted that he agrees that we need canopy trees in the parking lot and that we need to look at the requirements to make sure that the trees can survive, including soil quality in addition to soil volume.

Ms. Link asked the group if they felt that we need to take a look at the bigger question of design of islands before looking at the question of distance from light poles to trees.

Mr. Clinton spoke in favor of taking this route.

Mr. Knowles said that he doesn't want to get rid of canopy trees either, but they might go around the edges and put understory in the middle. He suggested that we might look at having larger islands with multiple trees.

Ms. Link noted that we have a part in the ordinance that allows a larger island with more trees and greater distance to the parking space.

Ms. Small stated that the larger islands can be problematic because it gets the parking spaces on the row across from the island row off so that they're not lined up.

Ms. Link then stated that she could provide ordinances from other cities to the group, and asked if someone would want to look at what would be adequate root space.

Christina Larson volunteered to look into the soil medium volume piece.

Mr. Knowles also noted we need to look at soil quality – that contractors frequently use gravel & compacted soil from the site & cover it over with an inch of soil.

Mr. Galanti noted it might help if staff and/or stakeholders would go out & look at some sites, look at conflict between lights & trees, get pictures, take measurements & see if we can come up with some numbers for separation.

Mr. Clinton volunteered to do some of that work.

Ms. Link said she would do more research into other ordinances, and that the group would discuss it at the next meeting.

Mr. Francies asked for a copy of the section of the ordinance covering the parking lot landscaping to be sent out to the group. Ms. Link said that she would provide that.

The next agenda item was a report from the sub-committee to review the Approved Plant List. Ms. Larson noted that she had made some recommendations for invasive plants to be removed from the list. Mr. Knowles and Mr. Francies acknowledged that they are part of the subcommittee, and agreed that they still need time to work on it. They should be able to have something for the next meeting.

The group then discussed when the next meeting would be. Ms. Link suggested that the group meet via Zoom twice a month on the first and third Monday of each month at 3 pm. The group agreed that this would work for them and that the next meeting would be on July 6.

Ms. Lockamy then asked the group for any other questions or comments, and any feedback on meeting on Zoom. There were no questions or comments so the meeting was adjourned.