

NOTES FROM MEETING 10 OF LANDSCAPE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE – OCTOBER 19, 2020

Present were : *Gerry Alfano, Anthony Baker, Kimberly Barb, Judson Clinton, Deniece Conway, Debby Davis, Sarah Healy, Steve Galanti, Tim Knowles, Joel Landau, Elizabeth Link, Mark Reaves, Walker Sanders, Judy Stalder, Zach Strickland, Juhann Waller.*

Facilitator Teresa Lockamy welcomed the committee members. She then asked Elizabeth Link to present a recap of the work done in 2020.

Ms. Link, after recognizing that 2020 had been a highly unusual year, congratulated the committee on being able to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and keep their work going despite all. She noted that the committee had been able to achieve majority approval of an amendment to require species diversity and a percentage of native species within required landscaping; an amendment to require a certain distance between light poles and required trees; and an amendment to increase both the number of required trees in parking lots and the size of parking lot islands, while also allowing a percentage of the required trees to be placed adjacent to the parking lots.

She noted that the species diversity amendment was set to go before Zoning Commission and City Council for approval. Steve Galanti said that the amendment would go to Zoning Commission in February and City Council in March. Ms. Link also noted that Planning and Transportation were currently looking at reducing the number of required parking spaces for various uses in order to offset the larger space requirements of the parking lot trees, and that both the parking ratio reduction and the parking lot landscaping amendment would be presented to Zoning Commission at the same time.

Ms. Link then presented maps and zoning requirements of the Central Business zoning district, noting that the district has no requirements for landscaping or tree preservation, no requirements to provide parking, and that requirements for building frontages to be placed at the edge of right-of-way could be an impediment to placement of trees or landscaping. She noted that the ordinance allows the zero front setback requirement to be modified for certain reasons, among which are providing landscaping, wide sidewalks, or courtyards, and that the Downtown Design Overlay also encourages using a greater setback for landscaping and pedestrian plazas. She then went over the Downtown Design Overlay and its regulations. The Overlay review for site and building plans has a series of points that can be awarded for architectural features, building materials, landscaping, signage, etc. Sites must receive 75% of available points to get approved. If other points are awarded that get to 75% then landscaping is not required.

Sarah Healy of Downtown Greensboro, Inc., then presented information about the organization's Strategic Plan for downtown improvements, which include streetscape improvements, mixed use development at the depot, gateways for South End and lower downtown, and other initiatives which will encourage small businesses, provide pedestrian-focused streetscape and activity, and improve sustainability. Many of these will tie in with or be improved by improved landscaping and tree preservation.

Ms. Link then presented some possibilities for and challenges to requiring landscaping and tree preservation downtown. She presented pictures from Greensboro showing the variable results when there are no requirements. Some buildings that provide landscaping in plazas, foundation plantings and planter boxes, and provide landscape buffering for parking lots, while others present a blank building wall next to the sidewalk with no plantings, and bare parking lots with no trees or shrubs. The latter are not pedestrian friendly and do not encourage pedestrian activity in the area. She also presented some pictures of desirable site from other cities which have landscape requirements for downtown.

In the discussion that followed it was noted that any requirements will need to be flexible because of the many issues with utilities, both underground and overhead. It was also noted that the City Transportation department should be involved with streetscape issues. Several people noted the desirability of trees along downtown streets, and that soil root volume for street trees was very important and should be included in requirements. There was some discussion of structural soil and Silvacell for street trees. Kimberly Barb suggested looking at the Greenville, SC ordinance as they had done work there. Mark Reaves suggested looking at the ordinances for Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and Durham for examples. After further brief discussion, it was agreed that Ms. Link would look at other ordinances and report back to the group at the next meeting. With no further comments or questions, the meeting was brought to an end.