

NOTES FROM MEETING 13 OF LANDSCAPE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE – MARCH 1, 2021

Present were : *Gerry Alfano, Judson Clinton, Deniece Conway, Debby Davis, Sarah Healy, Steve Galanti, Joel Landau, Christina Larson, Elizabeth Link, Nick Piornak, Mark Reaves, Dabney Sanders, Walker Sanders, Judy Stalder, Zach Strickland, Juhann Waller.*

Facilitator Teresa Lockamy opened the meeting with greetings for the attendees, and reviewed the agenda. The first item was a report on the survey of the Downtown Residents Association on attitudes towards trees in the downtown area. The number of survey participants was small – only 27. While the current state of trees downtown compared to other cities was generally rated mediocre, the majority of respondents rated the importance of trees to attracting people to downtown as 7 or above in a scale of 1-10. In response to the question whether trees should be required as part of new construction, the majority rated it at 10, with only a few rating it below 7. The results were less definite for landscaping along the edge of parking lots, but still the majority gave it a rating of 6 or greater.

Dabney Sanders suggested that she could send the survey out to her Downtown Greenway group, and it was agreed that the survey deadline would be re-set so that she could do so. In further discussion for the survey it was agreed that expanding the audience for the survey to people outside of downtown residents and businesses.

The next agenda item was a report by Deniece Conway on the progress of developing reduced parking ratios to accompany the ordinance amendment for parking lot trees and tree islands. Ms. Conway noted that they are continuing to review parking ratios from the national manual, and are also researching requiring bicycle parking, reviewing bicycle parking ratios and ordinances from other cities and deciding on how this might be implemented in Greensboro.

Ms. Link then reviewed the framework ordinance for requiring street trees in CB zoning. This included requirements for spacing of trees across the street frontage of the property, allowances for variations in the spacing, minimum soil volume and means of providing the soil volume while maintaining a minimum width of traversable sidewalk. It also included options for curb bump outs and for fee-in-lieu in areas with existing City streetscape plans. The requirements would apply on to new development and expansions of use. Ms. Link also presented explanatory graphics for suspended sidewalk technologies.

Judy Stalder noted that there will need to be some flexibility in location of trees, and asked whether the “expansion” clause would apply to expansions to the rear or increases in height. Ms. Link replied that it would not, that it would only apply to expansions along the street frontage. Ms. Stalder also noted the problem with sight triangles in downtown. Dabney Sanders asked if the intent of the expansion clause was to provide more opportunities to place trees downtown. Ms. Link agreed that it was. Ms. Sanders asked if the fee-in-lieu would be used only if the streetscape construction was not possible, or if it might be used as a way to get around having to do the construction. Ms. Link replied that fee-in-lieu would only be applicable in places where the City has an existing streetscape plan that has not yet been constructed, and the fee would go towards funding the streetscape installation.

Ms. Small suggested that the various options may lead to an uneven streetscape which would be undesirable. Ms. Conway added that she thought that the option of bump-outs should not be included. In further discussion, it was agreed that with the option only being available as a Type 2 modification, the option should be kept. After further discussion and explanation of Type 1 and Type 2 modifications, Ms. Sanders suggested that the ordinance have a purpose statement that would give goals and further direction to those deciding on modifications. Ms. Healy noted that the trees and bumpouts are an enhancement to the outdoor dining that has been added during the pandemic and which they hope to keep going forward.

Juhann Waller asked whether the ordinance addresses tree species diversity, and whether there might need to be a special subset of the Recommended Tree List for downtown trees. Noted City of Miami FLA had put a cap of 30% per species. Mr. Reaves noted that the Downtown Streetscape Manual has a list of recommended species. Ms. Sanders suggested that any list be required to be reviewed at certain intervals as new pests or diseases come along or species are found to be unsuitable. She also suggested that requirements for replacement be placed in the ordinance. Ms. Link noted that she would like to discuss the issue of maintenance and ownership after planting. The difficulties of educating owners about tree care were discussed and it was agreed that stipulating a one-year warranty from the owner would be more reasonable than a 2-year warranty.

Ms. Link then shared some details and wording that would need to be added into the Landscape Manual, including requirements for tree size, root barrier in tree pits, and banning electrical or other utility connections within tree wells. Mr. Reaves noted that underdrains within the tree wells might be difficult downtown and that there should be alternatives for not having to install it.

After further discussion it was agreed that Ms. Link would revise the ordinance wording based on discussion, and present it to the group for the next meeting. At that point the meeting was adjourned.