

# Tree Advisory Board

## Meeting Minutes

January 7, 2026

(DRAFT)

1/7/2026 - Minutes

### 1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

**Members Present:** David Price, Preston Troutman, Robert Connors

**Staff Present:** Kevin Polk, Horticulturist; Stephanie Lutton, Parks and Recreation Director; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk; Deena Drumgo, Assistant City Manager

Chair David Price called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

### 2. Minutes

#### 2.1. Minutes - February 26, 2024

The minutes of February 26, 2024 were reviewed. Robert Connors made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

### 3. Communications And Petitions

### 4. City Staff Updates

#### 1. Planting and Maintenance Statistics

Kevin Polk, City Horticulturist, provided a status report on city-wide arboriculture activities over the past two years:

- Tree Planting: Since February 2024, over 200 trees have been planted.
- Maintenance & Pruning: Continuous contracts with Aspen Tree Service and Crossing & Paint have resulted in the trimming of over 250 trees and palms.
- Removals: Over 150 dead or invasive trees have been removed from city rights-of-way.

#### 2. Equipment and Irrigation Challenges

The primary focus of the discussion was the critical delay in obtaining a city water truck:

- Water Truck Status: A new water truck was ordered in April 2023. Due to supply chain issues, delivery is now expected in February 2025.
- Current Vulnerability: Newly planted trees, specifically bottle brush and certain oaks, are failing due to a lack of consistent irrigation. Flowering trees were noted as being particularly delicate and at high risk.
- Interim Solutions: Board members and volunteers are currently hand-watering trees using 5-gallon buckets or borrowing water from sympathetic residents via garden hoses.

### 3. Proposed Strategy: GIS Mapping & Establishment Periods

The Board discussed the urgent need for a more scientific approach to tree maintenance:

- GIS Database: There was discussion that the city should implement a GIS (Geographic Information System) map to track every newly planted tree. Chanda Bennett (County Planner/LW Heritage Board Member) is currently working on a partial list.
- Establishment Tracking: The Board proposed that the GIS system should include: Date of planting, A defined "establishment period" (18–24 months), A scheduled watering frequency.
- Accountability: By tracking these metrics, the city can systematically "retire" trees from the active watering list once they are fully established, ensuring resources are directed to the most vulnerable new growth.

### 4. Future Projects and Coordination

- Trailhead Development: Discussion occurred regarding the Scenic and Seminole area and the Ridge Scenic Highway Trail. Landscaping plans are currently on hold pending a design meeting at the Women's Club to finalize the reorientation of the parking lot and trail path.
- Library Planting: A successful example was noted involving a large (20-ft tall) tree donated from Lake Placid and planted near the library; it is thriving due to successful integration with the existing library irrigation system.

### 5. Action Items / Conclusions

- Continue coordination between city staff and volunteers to sustain new plantings until the water truck arrives.
- Prioritize the development of the GIS tracking map to prevent "losing" trees in the system.
- Maintain communication with the city regarding the schematic designs for the new trailhead to ensure landscaping is integrated early.

### 5. Board Member Comments

#### Tree Replacement Fund Inquiry

A significant portion of the discussion centered on the "Tree Planting Fund" (or Tree Replacement Fund) established to collect fees/fines from developers who remove trees.

- Fund Status: It was noted that the fund balance was approximately \$293,795 as of September 30, 2023.
- Assessment Rate: The current fine is \$91.74 per caliper inch.
- Concerns: Board members questioned whether these fines are being consistently assessed and collected, specifically citing developments on South 11th Street and near McKinley Drive where large oaks and pines were removed.
- Request for Data: The Board requested a detailed list of all parcels cleared since 2023, including the initial tree count/assessment and the total fines collected for each.

#### Enforcement and Canopy Preservation

Members expressed frustration over the perceived loss of the city's signature tree canopy due to development:

- Live Oak Removal: Preston Troutman reported the removal of a 36-inch diameter live oak on a residential lot, emphasizing that the Board exists to ensure such losses are mitigated through

replanting.

- City Identity: Robert Connors noted that the tree canopy is a primary reason residents and businesses (e.g., the Manwell family of Crazy Fish) choose Lake Wales; losing the canopy threatens the city's appeal.
- Small Lot Sizes: Concern was raised that current development approvals for small lot sizes leave no room for canopy trees, leading to the use of "substandard" street trees like crepe myrtles which do not provide adequate shade.

#### Proposed Use of Funds: Professional Inventory & GIS

The Board proposed utilizing the Tree Replacement Fund to modernize the city's tracking capabilities:

- Professional Inventory: A proposal was made to use fund reserves to hire a contractor or intern to complete a comprehensive tree inventory.
- System Integration: Members suggested moving beyond "cheap" or basic systems to a robust, GPS-based automation system (e.g., ArcGIS/Survey 123) that can grow with the city.
- Operational Benefits: Such a system would allow staff to:
  - Track tree health and maintenance work orders.
  - Ensure developers replant trees that die after the initial phase.
  - Link to other city assets like benches and signs.

#### Commercial Landscaping Maintenance

The Board highlighted a lack of code enforcement regarding landscaping at existing commercial sites:

- Case Study: The shopping center containing Aldi and Rural King was cited as "very ugly," with most original landscaping and trees now dead or missing.
- Accountability: Members argued that if a landscape plan was a condition of original approval, property owners must be held accountable for maintaining it.

#### Action Items

- Staff Request: Provide the Board with an itemized list of cleared parcels and associated fines collected since 2023.
- Strategy: Explore the feasibility of using the \$293k+ reserve fund to hire a specialized contractor for tree inventory and GIS implementation.

The Board engaged in a strategic discussion on how to resolve the current lack of oversight regarding tree ordinances.

The "Vicious Cycle": It was noted that a lack of staff prevents the collection of tree fines, which in turn prevents the budget from having enough funds to hire more staff.

Recommendation: The Board suggests that the current \$293k reserve is sufficient to "initiate the process." By hiring a dedicated staff member or contractor to audit developments and collect outstanding fines, the position would effectively become self-funding.

Audit Methodology: Members suggested using aerial imagery from 2022 to present to estimate tree loss on recently cleared parcels. This would allow the city to assess fines retroactively if they were missed during the initial development phase.

#### Druid Circle / Olmsted Park Project

The Board discussed the future of the city-owned property on Druid Circle (Olmsted Park). The property is

currently overgrown with invasive species and "weed trees."

Strategy: A recommendation was made to begin "dead-wooding" and pruning existing desirable trees (such as Turkey Oaks) to improve the site's aesthetics immediately, even before a full development plan is executed.

Planting: Emphasis was placed on getting new trees in the ground sooner rather than later to establish growth.

#### Standards for Street Trees

A specific critique was offered regarding the types of trees developers are currently choosing for streetscapes. Robert Connors noted that developers often choose small ornamentals (like Crepe Myrtles) because they are less expensive and easier to maintain near underground utilities.

Policy Recommendation: The Board wants to refine the ordinance to strictly define "Street Trees" as canopy/shade trees rather than ornamentals. The goal is to ensure trees eventually provide a physical canopy over the roadway.

Consultation Loop: The Board questioned why the City Horticulturist is not consistently included in the Development Services review process for new landscape plans.

#### Code Enforcement & Park Protection

Vehicle Damage: Members expressed frustration with people driving onto park grass and damaging trees. Recommendations included the use of bollards and/or landscape features to prevent vehicle access without the need for unsightly fencing.

Home-Based Businesses: A concern was raised regarding commercial parking at residential homes, which should be a Code Enforcement matter.

Board member terms and future meetings were discussed. Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk, urged caution regarding "Sunshine Law" violations, noting that board members should not be emailing one another or discussing board business outside of public meetings.

#### Action Items for Next Meeting

Chair's Request: Kevin (Staff) is requested to facilitate a joint discussion with Development Services regarding fine collection and ordinance enforcement.

Inventory Proposal: Formalize the recommendation to use the Tree Fund for a professional inventory contractor.

#### 6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned.

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Chair

ATTEST:

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Staff