



**City of Springfield Urban Forestry Commission
Minutes
3:30 p.m. February 8, 2024
Room 203, Municipal Center West and via Zoom**

The meeting was called to Order at 3:30 p.m.

In attendance were Susan Allen, Randy Belville, Erskine Route, Amy McEuen, Jan Von Qualen, Brad Hamel, and Dan Brill. Ernestine Lawrence, Scott Marlowe, and Dave Fuchs were absent.

Attendees briefly introduced themselves to the new City Arborist, Brad Hamel. Guests included City employees: Amy Rasing, Grant Administrator, Greg Murdoch, Corporation Counsel, and near the end of the meeting, Nate Bottom, Chief Engineer. Guests from the public included: Rosa Harper-Davis of Faith Coalition for the Common Good (FCCG), Anne Logue, and Michael Clark, of Sustainable Springfield (SSI).

There was a moment of silence in remembrance of Jeff Reim. Jeff's memorial service will be 10:00 a.m. on February 13 at St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

Amy McEuen made a motion to approve the October 11, 2023, Minutes, as corrected. Erskine Route seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

It was confirmed that the \$24,750 Tree Grant is included in the FY25 Budget. Brad Hamel reported that the Request for Proposal will be re-posted soon. Brad is updating the list of vendors. He asked that if persons know of potential vendors, please send the names to him. He indicated that he had removed Hackberries from the tree list, leaving five shade and seven ornamental trees. Brad anticipates that the trees will be planted in April.

Greg Murdoch explained that the \$889,000 IRA Grant will be included in the FY25 Budget but is not listed with Grants because the City Council has not approved acceptance of it. Amy Rasing stated that no additional communications have been received from the Grant Administrator, American Forests, since it identified Lida Aljabar as the City's primary point of contact. Amy R. confirmed that the formal documents have not been signed, yet.

There was a discussion about the City's application for the \$3,000,000 tree inventory grant from the USDA Forest Service through Morton Arboretum. Brad announced that he had discussed the Grant Application with Nate Bottom. They suggest that the best use of the grant would be to (1) complete the City's tree inventory, and Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP), (2) hire a fourth crew to the City for pruning to establish a pruning cycle in the disadvantaged areas, and (3) to create a Master Forest Management Plan that would look out 20 years into the future.

Jan Von Qualen agreed with the proposal to hire an additional tree crew for the City. However, she stated, pruning the trees in the disadvantaged area would not fulfill the Grant requirements. The Grant does not require City matching funds because it is to be used to benefit the canopy and residents of the disadvantaged areas and that community outreach and engagement are required. To meet that requirement, the UFC proposes partnering with FCCG and SSI as Sub Awardees. Susan Allen explained that FCCG is a respected organization based in the disadvantaged area; knows the community and is known by the community. FCCG as a Sub Awardee will hire two individuals from the disadvantaged area to be trained and then do outreach education about trees, and tree care. Similarly, SSI, as a Sub Awardee, will create a Food Forest,

planting fruit and nut trees. The Tree Ambassadors and SSI will work together doing community outreach about tree care and nutrition.

Amy R. raised concerns about the 'process' of choosing the proposed partners. Susan Allen pointed out that FCCG is already a partner in the large IRA grant. The UFC and FCCG have been building relationships with the District 186 and Lincoln Land Community College in preparation for identifying the Student Arborist Interns under that grant. It was pointed out that the Food Forest would be a continuation of an ongoing project for Sustainable Springfield as it has been planting fruit trees in the area that is proposed for the Food Forest for several years. There was no suggestion that the proposed partners were not qualified, no other capable organizations were suggested, and no alternative process was proposed. Randy Belville left the meeting after voicing frustration about the 'process' concerns and doubts being raised about UFC's proposed partners, without any explanation or alternative plan of action.

Amy R. asked Corporation Counsel to explain the role of the UFC. Jan responded that the UFC is fully aware of its role: it has no budget and no authority; its role is simply to advise and consult on all things green on City property.

Amy R. raised concerns about timing. Jan noted that the City has been included/informed since the original meeting about the grant in 2023. (Meeting at Lincoln Library on November 15, 2023)

Amy R. raised concerns about the City's 'capacity'. It was noted that the Outreach Arborist would be the Grant Manager for the \$889,000 IRA Grant and that could be done in this grant. When asked if this was a matter of the City not wanting this particular Grant and why not, Amy R. responded emphatically that no, that is not the case.

Nate Bottom joined the meeting, explaining his proposal to add an additional crew and equipment for tree cutting. The Grant would not cover equipment over \$5,000. Nate explained the new crew allow the City to get on a tree pruning cycle. When the Grant's outreach requirement was raised, Nate voiced concerns about the City's 'capacity.' Jan repeated that this was the reason that UFC proposed using partners for outreach. Brad suggested that perhaps the Outreach Arborist could, and Dan Brill suggested the possibility of including a Grant Administrator to manage the grant.

Nate suggested that Amy R., Brad, and he should get back to the UFC after further discussing the City's needs on February 15 or 16. Amy McEuen noted the timing dilemma: Colette Copic who has offered to review and help with the Application wants to see it by the end of next week. Amy M. suggested that, given the timing, Susan and Jan, who were familiar with the Grant Application requirements, should join the meeting. It was agreed that Amy R., Brad, Nate, Susan, and Jan would meet on Thursday, February 15 to continue the discussion.

Brad said that Lou Bart, at the downtown YMCA, has identified a space for a small tree to be planted during the Arbor Day celebration. Jan asked Brad about the City ordering the bare root trees from Forest Keeling. Brad indicated he would work on that along with the ribbons and gift certificates for the celebration. Brad said Earth Day will be celebrated on April 20 at Springfield Union Station.

During public comments, Michael Clark stated that the City has historically failed to reach out to the disadvantaged areas of Springfield and the Grant under discussion is an opportunity to do that. Anne Logue emphasized Susan Allen has been successful in getting three grants for the City (\$20,000 inventory; \$24,750 tree; and \$889,000 IRA). Anne stated that Susan has demonstrated an understanding of the grant process and requirements, and that Susan's recommendations should be given great weight.

The next UFC meeting will be 3:30 p.m. on March 15.

The meeting was adjourned.