

City of Urbana, Illinois

Minutes of the Urbana Tree Commission Meeting
Public Works Engineering Conference Room
706 S. Glover Ave.
Urbana, IL 61802

Wednesday, December 4, 2013
2:00 P.M.

Members Present: Carol Augspurger, Stewart Berlocher, Jeff Dawson, Darin Eastburn, Michael Stevenson

Members Absent: Barbara Anderson, Thom Fehrmann, Derek Liebert

Staff Present: Michael Brunk, City of Urbana Arborist

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:09 p.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes from September 4, 2013 were presented for approval. Dawson moved to approve the minutes, Augspurger seconded, and the minutes were approved.

Public Input

There was no public input.

2013 Fall Tree Planting

Brunk distributed the spring and fall planting lists. Brunk explained that 129 trees had been planted, and that, with the new plantings, no one species accounted for more than six percent of the City's tree population. He suggested readjusting the City's diversity goal to five percent. The Commission discussed the variety of tree species; Dawson suggested reinforcing the declining Sugar Maple population. The Commission also discussed the negative impact that salting (for ice-abatement purposes) has on the tree population. Dawson suggested composing a statement in favor of City staff using urea instead of salt on City sidewalks.

The Commission also discussed the slow decline of the tree population; Brunk explained that this is due to several factors, including urban expansion. He said that, in order to combat this trend, several goals have been identified. These include the replacement all removals when sufficient room exists, shorter pruning cycles, and an effort to focus more on preventive pruning in

addition to focusing on hazard abatement. The Commission discussed ways to increase public support for tree planting, including the possibility of establishing a group of volunteers to help plant and maintain trees. Brunk suggested further discussion on these topics in future meetings.

The Commission also discussed a lack of native trees on the planting list. There was general agreement that the City should plant more urban adaptable native trees. Dawson suggested a list of such trees be compiled to compare against future planting lists.

2013/2014 Winter Removals

Brunk distributed the tree removal list, and explained that many of the 262 removals were discovered during the tree inventory process. The Commission discussed the rate of removal and the species of trees on the list.

Tree Trail Mapping Progress

Brunk reported that he was working on a list of trees to include on a “Best of Species” trail. He also distributed a list of trees which may warrant inclusion on a “Big Grove” trail. He invited Commission members to recommend trees to include on tree trails. Brunk also reported that he had been given access to a mobile app that could pull up information from the recent tree inventory. He said he would send more information regarding the app to Commission members.

2014 Meeting Dates and Times

The Commission agreed to meet on the first Wednesdays of March, September, and December at 1:30 p.m.

Former Business

Berlocher distributed information regarding potential Big Grove trees (attached). He also discussed the implementation of a walking trail incorporating these trees.

New Business

There was no new business to discuss.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:47 p.m.

A Possible Big Grove Trail for the Crystal Lake Area

1. Largest remnant of Big Grove forest - Busey Woods.

Park at the lot for the Anita Purves Nature Center. Start the trail at the Nature Center and cross the bridge into Busey Woods. Follow trail through north part of the part (need to get more directions, link to Busey Woods trail map). Return to the bridge but don't cross.

2. Scattered surviving Big Grove trees in County Fairgrounds.

From west side of bridge in Busey Woods head south on the trail that runs on the top of the ridge along the west side of the Saline Ditch. At the end of the trail cross into the Fairgrounds and proceed along the east side of the track. At the south end of the ??? hall there is a large bur oak at the edge of the parking lot. Based on other trees in the area that have been dated, this tree and nearby oaks germinated in the 1830s. Note that this tree has a fairly tall trunk before it branches, indicating that it grew in a forest at one time.

3. Group of surviving trees.

Walk south into the grove of trees on the boundary between Crystal Lake Park and the Fairgrounds. This small group of trees is shown as a wooded area on the 1905 US Geological Survey maps, and also hosts a population of trout lilies, characteristic spring plants of eastern woodlands.

4. Large White Oak that may be the oldest tree in Crystal Lake Park.

Walk west from stop 3. to N. Orchard St. (to go around the fence between Crystal Lake Park and the Fairgrounds), and then turn back east into the park. On the west side of the park road across from the playground there is a very large (54 inch diameter) white oak. This is in fact the largest diameter tree in the park. Note the very wide spread of the branches, which indicates that the tree has grown in the open for a very long time.

5. Grove of white oaks.

Walk just east from the large white oak to the park road, and follow along the side of the road in a southeastern direction. You will enter a grove consisting almost entirely of white oaks. These are not very large, but because they are quite crowded, and because of constant foot traffic that has compressed the soil, they probably are of roughly the same age (from the 1830s) as the larger bur oaks in the Fairgrounds.

6. Bicentennial Tree and grove in Leal Park.

Leave Crystal Lake Park where the park road exits onto Park St., go west to McCullough, turn left (south), and cross University at the traffic light. Once across, turn left (east) and walk on sidewalk until Leal Park appears on the right. Leal Park is an overlooked park of great interest. First, it contains a number of very large bur oaks, the largest of which was recognized in 1976 as a Bicentennial Tree, a tree that at the time was at least as old as the Declaration of Independence. Notice that there are large, old bur oaks in the yards of private residences to the east of the Park, one of which is as large as the Bicentennial Oak. There is also a very large Catalpa. Although none of these trees has been dated by

counting growth rings, they are almost certainly all Big Grove survivors. Note from the map that these trees are within a hundred feet of the edge of the Big Grove; Native Americans would have seen prairie looking southwest from here. In addition to the trees, Leal Park is also Urbana's first cemetery, with an unknown number of early settlers buried here.

7. Kerr homestead, Abraham Lincoln, and a dinner of greens.

Leave the park and walk east on the sidewalk to Race St. Cross with the light, and turn right (east) to Market St. The little "hill" you go down is actually the edge of the Saline Branch floodplain. Turn left (north) on Broadway. In a block you will cross Park St., and then the dam for Crystal Lake on the Saline Branch of the Middlefork River. Why is there no water passing under the street? Further north you will cross the Saline Ditch, which is the result of a flood control project in 1907 (check date); the original waterway was relocated here. Continuing north on Broadway until you cross Franklin St. Look east from here (or cross Broadway and look closer if you want), you will see a large bur oak in front of a house (but do not trespass!). This Big Grove survivor tree is roughly in the middle of a tract of land belonging to early settler Archibald Kerr and family. Walking further north on Broadway you will see another survivor (bur?) oak on the east side of the street, next to the sidewalk, that has had many branches removed on one side because of close power lines. Moving further north to the southeast corner of Kerr Ave. and Broadway, you will see a large lot with a brick Victorian house (need to get info) and a number of large trees. Along with a large bur oak there are two hickories, relatively rare trees characteristic of the original grove, but not often planted in cities. This site is important because, somewhere on the original tract, a one-story cabin was located in which Abraham Lincoln ate dinner (lunch) at least once with the Kerr family - as Mrs. Kerr related it, Lincoln invited himself to lunch after seeing "Mrs. K" picking greens in her garden.

8. Nice grove of old white and bur oaks near Oakland St.

Return to the west side of Broadway if you have crossed over to look at the Kerr trees. Resume walking north on Broadway. As you pass Kerr, Chapin, and Oakland streets on the left, you will see a grouping of very nice, and probably old, white and bur oaks along the right (west) side of Broadway. The largest of these are almost certainly Big Grove survivors. Finally, you will notice that the trees recede from Broadway, and you can follow the treeline back in the direction of the new swimming pool, and make our way back to the parking lot at Purves Center. As you leave, think about the original thousands of acres of big trees in the Big Grove, and the tiny number of survivors that we are fortunate to still have with us.

