



City of Dallas

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION
Dallas City Hall – 1500 Marilla, L1FN Conference Room “C”
Regular Meeting
February 7, 2005
9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

MINUTES

Members Present

James Mitchell, Chair
Diane Benjamin
Carol Barnett Davis
Jon (Tad) Heimbürger
Keith Kwoh
Casie Pierce
Barbara Pittman
Christopher Schultz
Mary Warner

Members Absent

Thomas Hill
Tom Peck
Ronald Walenta

Public Present

None

Staff Present

Dave Howe, City Attorney's Office
James Mongaras, Assistant Director, Environmental & Health Services Department
Lilia V. Gonzalez, Coordinator, Environmental & Health Services Department

Minutes

Mr. Mitchell, Chair, called the regular meeting of the Environmental Health Commission to order at 9:00 a.m. The minutes from the December 6, 2004 meeting and the January 3, 2005 meeting were approved unanimously.

Impact of Trees on the Urban Environment

Phil Erwin, Arborist (Southwest Region), Office of Developmental Services

Mr. Erwin has worked with the City of Dallas for about six years primarily in the Oak Cliff and Mountain Creek areas. Mr. Erwin stated that trees provide benefits to the City of Dallas in various ways; primarily, energy savings, reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide, improving air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and aesthetic and other amenities.

Mr. Erwin stated that leaves absorb and/or deflect radiant energy from the sun during the summer months and allow filtered sunlight in the winter. He also stated that using heat energy from the air, water evaporates from leaf surfaces providing a cooling effect. Mr. Erwin also stated that trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30% and can save 20-50% in energy used for heating. Trees placed in proper locations such as the southern side of the property over windows the entire neighborhood can reduce air conditioning needs on homes as the energy

costs continue to increase. The current ordinance requires homebuilders to install trees on new lots. One study showed that shades from trees could save up to \$175 per year in air conditioning costs.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide while returning oxygen to the atmosphere. Mr. Erwin informed the commission that the City has an enormous forest near the Trinity River. He believes that forest should be increased and maintained. The current ordinance requires a certain amount of landscaping. New trees are being maintained and are planted at 2 – 3 inch caliber per tree and with time the trees would grow to be a substantial canopy.

Mr. Erwin stated that in addition to the removal of atmospheric carbon dioxide, tree leaves also absorb other pollutants such as ozone carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide. There is up to 60% reduction in street level particulates with trees. Trees pick up atmospheric particulates and dust in the air. Cities like Houston are gaining knowledge on that.

He stated that the planting of trees means improved water quality, resulting in less runoff and erosion. This allows more recharging of the groundwater supply. Wooded areas help prevent the transport of sediment and chemicals into streams. For every 5% of tree (canopy) cover added to a community, stormwater run off is reduced by approximately 2%. Tree roots also remove nutrients harmful to water ecology and quality.

Other benefits included are the increased property values even though some developers may argue that point. Even the forest or nursing tree is not on the property of a single homeowner having a tree within the vicinity can increase the value of the entire neighborhood. The current ordinance is on tree mitigation based on caliper or diameter of the tree. The proper way to determine the value of the tree within the city is to determine the tree canopy cover.

Mr. Mitchell asked Mr. Erwin how is the canopy of a tree determined. Mr. Erwin responded that the area projected to the ground of the tree canopy is how to determine the canopy of a tree. He also stated that to determine canopy of a tree over a large area computer software and aerial photos are used.

Houston had a significant study in the year 2000. Urban Ecosystem Analysis for the Houston Gulf Coast Region in conjunction with a large group of partners basically had an interest into helping devise a plan on where to plant trees, how many can be planted, where the existing canopy cover is and where is the canopy cover needed. The study is comprehensive and base information from different studies from State and Federal sources.

Ms. Pierce asked why the reforestation program is underutilized. Mr. Erwin responded that it might be a communication issue or maybe the neighborhood is not interested in approaching the program. Some neighborhoods come back to their department annually, Oak Cliff primarily.

Ms. Benjamin asked if there was an incentive program for homeowner associations to inform the community of this program. Mr. Erwin stated that currently there is not active approach to informing the residents. He stated that there are TIF program for commercial development areas.

Ms. Benjamin stated that in her neighborhood older homes are being removed and replaced with new construction. Many times magnificent old trees that would be in the middle of the living room in a newly constructed home. Therefore, developers tear those trees down. She had no knowledge of the ordinance on the tree removal. Builders are having the current owners to tear down the trees; therefore, bypassing the ordinance restrictions. Mr. Erwin stated that the provision in the ordinance states that if there is a current single family use on the lot and is less than 2 acres; the landowner has the right to do anything he wants to do with that tree. As long as there is a house on that lot the trees can be removed. Once the home has been demolished there is no longer a single-family use on the lot then the trees are protected.

Ms. Benjamin asked that once the house is raised and it is a lot and the builder removes a tree on his lot does he have to replace it with the same caliber. Mr. Erwin responded that the builder would have to replace it with the same number of inches or replace the value of the tree or donate to the parks department or plant another one within a mile.

Ms. Benjamin asked if his department would inspect the tree before a tree removal permit is issued. Mr. Erwin stated that they would have to inspect the tree that is to be removed before issuing a permit. If there is a building permit a tree removal permit is not needed because the tree removal permit is covered under the building permit.

Ms. Warner mentioned that cedar trees use a tremendous amount of water and do not make a very big canopy and will kill any kind of tree that is planted next to it. Mr. Erwin stated that cedar trees are a major competitor. Fortunately, the cedar trees in the area are not in areas that would be easily removed for development purposes. They grow in old farmlands that have not been in use for some time. Some places cedars would be beneficial like wildlife.

Mr. Mitchell asked for a follow up on the costs for Houston and Garland and an update on the discussion with Council of Governments in reference to the air shed management area. He also asked that David Miller, Manager of Air Pollution, speak to the commission on the contribution of trees on the air pollution side.

Mr. Benjamin asked Mr. Erwin how enforceable has the ordinance been for the City of Dallas. Mr. Erwin responded that for the most part they have been able to keep on top of all removals. He believes that a good job has been done in the past 10 years.

Mr. Schulz asked how much cross communication the City has with Dart and TexDot as far as new development is coming through. Mr. Erwin responded that very little communication has taken place with DART and the TexDot is not required to coordinate with the City. He said that they are cooperative on certain areas as needed.

Ms. Warner stated that at her neighborhood meeting they collected money to plant a number of Crape Myrtles of that about 6 ft. tall. She asked who would water the trees. She believes it is dangerous to take the garden hose across the 45-mile and hour median. Mr. Erwin stated that hopefully the Street Services Department had knowledge of it. If not, Mr. Erwin stated that he doesn't know what plan might have been set up. If the Street Services Department has a record it, a

Momentum Program would be set up. Otherwise, it is up to the neighborhood to figure out what to do. If the Street Services Department decides that it is a maintenance hazard, it will have them removed.

Ms. Benjamin asked what area of Dallas is most successful in tree conservation. Mr. Erwin stated it would be the Oak Cliff area. Some neighborhoods in the Oak Cliff area that are open to maintaining the trees that are important to their neighborhood.

Mr. Heimbürger mentioned to Ms. Benjamin that as a realtor she has a good chance to communicate to the neighborhood associations. He believes they are so many in Dallas but no official list. Therefore, neighborhood associations have to make contact with one another on their own. He stated that Ms. Benjamin being a realtor has the communicative ability to let neighborhood associations know. He is in a neighborhood association in Oak Cliff, which helped plant trees last year. He stated that the trees were free but getting them onto the ground took a lot of work and organization.

Mr. Heimbürger would like to see Dallas take a better approach. The way development is done in Dallas is by an engineering standpoint where trees are ignored to begin with. He believes that until there is a change in the way development is done in Dallas, developers will always look for the convenient out.

Ms. Benjamin stated that there is a conservation issue regarding a builder purchasing a property on Forest Lane, a four-acre parcel, that has been a habitat for animals, beautiful trees and a lake. The builder is attempting to change the zoning to allow twelve houses on a property that is meant for seven. It is a concern to neighbors that developers will be disrupting the habitat.

Ms. Benjamin asked if Mr. Erwin is involved in development and zoning commission when he is aware of changes in zoning. Mr. Erwin stated that Mike Sultan deals with the politics in the department. Mr. Erwin stated that he doesn't get as involved as he did when he was acting director. He was heavily involved providing information as needed.

Discussion of 2005 Priorities

James Mitchell, Chair, Environmental Health Commission

Mr. Mitchell began his discussion with what the City is doing within the boundaries of its organization, which he believes is in reasonable shape. He doesn't believe a lot of effort would be needed in terms of how the City runs itself environmentally. He suggests that the commission's focus should be on subjects that are more inclusive of the whole of the City of Dallas rather than the organization of the City of Dallas. He asked the commissioners for their opinions on what areas the commission should emphasize.

Mr. Heimbürger responded that one of the major topics of Dallas now is development. He believes that development is targeted toward the south because of the space. Development is a major part of the future economics for the City.

Mr. Mitchell posed the question to the commission whether Mr. Heimbürger's suggestion might take the form of the commission challenging the City of Dallas to take a holistic approach to the process of planning and implementing developments. Mr. Heimbürger agreed that would capture the essence of his comments.

Mr. Kwoh stated that he would like to commission to approach the traffic problems. This would include the speed limit, traffic lights and road conditions.

Mr. Schulz suggested that the commission approach the Trinity River Corridor Project. He stated that this project is a big topic in the media. Mr. Mitchell stated that it is a huge project. The commission has seen a briefing now and then but has not had an active participation in the project. He stated that that the commission only has limited resources in terms of its own time. He believes that the Trinity Project is an issue that the commission could be involved in but would probably take up too much time.

Ms. Pierce stated that it is important to make other groups aware of and understand how the built environment plays into health. For example, the absence of trees is equal to more carbon dioxide in the air. She believed that environmental issues should be approached by a health standpoint.

Ms. Pittman agrees with Ms. Pierce that they are an Environmental "Health" Commission. She would like the commission to focus more on the health issues. Mr. Mitchell suggested that a topic apropos to Ms. Pittman's suggestion would be long term strategy on West Nile Virus, Dallas has dealt with this new vector as an acute outbreak over the past three years, but it quickly becoming a chronic issue to the metroplex. He asked if the commissioners want to develop a strategy for dealing with the virus as a chronic problem. He suggested that the East Coast communities and public health institutions should be valuable resources.

In summing up the discussion, Mr. Mitchell suggested that the commission might adopt two topics for emphasis in the near future: (1) trees and their impact on the environment, and (2) a long-term strategy for the West Nile Virus. After some further discussion, the commission agreed to that suggestion. Ms. Pittman agreed to give leadership to the West Nile virus topic and Mr. Mitchell offered to assist. Mr. Mitchell said that he would retain leadership of the study on the impact of trees until it is a little better developed.

Commission Reports

None

Staff Reports

Before adjourning, Mr. Mitchell asked Mr. Mongaras about progress on the new food establishment inspection code. Mr. Mongaras responded that the legal department is still drafting the changes to the City Code. Mr. Mitchell asked if the commission would like him to write to the HEHS committee and Mayor requesting that this topic receive higher priority. The commission expressed encouragement.

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Public Comment
None

Adjournment
Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Signature: James E. Mitchell, Chair of the Environmental Health Commission