

Historic District Commission

October 24, 2019

Minutes

Chairman William Blackwelder called the meeting of the Historic District Commission to order at 6:03 p.m. on Thursday, October 24, 2019 at City Hall in the Council Chamber.

Present: Commissioners Jerry Tucker, Andi Eddlemon, Dick Ruhlman, William Blackwelder (Chair), Ed Starr, Carol Hauer and Clark Simon

Absent: None

Staff present: Kim Wallis, Planner; Chrystal Howard, Secretary; and Robert Stroud, City Arborist

ITEM 1a. Roll Call / Sound Check

Chairman Blackwelder opened the meeting and declared a quorum.

ITEM 1b. Adoption of the Agenda

Commissioner Simon made the motion to adopt the October 24, 2019 Agenda. Commissioner Tucker seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (6-0).

ITEM 1c. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Starr made the motion to approve the August 22, 2019 minutes. Chairman Blackwelder seconded the motion and the motion unanimously passed (6-0).

ITEM 2. Other Business

Discussion with Duke Representative on Transmission ROW Maintenance:

Chairman Blackwelder introduced Mr. Christopher Marbut and Mr. Stephen Lord with Duke Energy. Mr. Marbut distributed the Duke Energy Electric Transmission Right-of-Way (ROW) Guidelines/Restrictions valid for North Carolina and South Carolina. Mr. Marbut explained the difference between transmission and distribution lines. He shared that his responsibility is vegetation that may impact the transmission grid and substations.

Commissioner Eddlemon arrived.

Commissioner Simon referred to the guideline/restrictions 8.c. *For compliant mature height species, refer to plans.ces.ncsu.edu for reference.* He recommended the person evaluating and marking trees leave a single page document directing owners of proper plantings that may not be problematic. He commented that this may ease concerns about plundering the trees. Mr. Marbut stated Duke Energy contracts their tree work and then explained the notification process. The contractor is expected to leave a customer notification letter, business card, and Duke Energy door hangers. A minimum of 3 days is given before beginning any tree work with the exception of special circumstances. Mr. Marbut explained that the excessive amount of varieties and hybrids create a problem with using an approved species list. He explained trees that are approved are not to exceed, at maturity, 15 feet. Mr. Marbut encouraged the commissioners to contact him with questions concerning their own property. Commissioner Simon shared his concern of a conflict of interest between Duke Energy and the Forester. Mr. Marbut encouraged Commissioner Simon to elevate this concern until it reaches him.

Commissioner Starr shared an experience he had in Haywood County and then asked what the policy was on removal of a tree taken down. Mr. Marbut replied that wood was not hauled for transmission, and he briefly explained their tree cutting practices in natural and maintained areas.

Chairman Blackwelder asked why Duke Energy does not trim trees that they ask homeowners to do. Mr. Marbut commented that the tree should be removed and Duke will remove the tree if the homeowner does not want to trim the tree. Crape Myrtle was used as an example. Chairman Blackwelder inquired about Duke Energy working with the homeowner to trim the trees versus cutting it down. Mr. Marbut explained the options of the homeowner. Mr. Lord shared that he is responsible for matters on removal of encroachments and plan review. He commented that if a homeowner wanted to plant a replacement tree, they can work with the vegetation group. From a developer standpoint, plans would go through his office for review and compliance with guidelines and restrictions. Chairman Blackwelder mentioned there was an image issue and asked the company not to butcher any trees. Commissioner Simon stated a leaflet left behind with acceptable plantings would go well to build support. Mr. Marbut tried explaining the difficulties and issues of approved plantings due to various species and hybrids, as well as, this being a reason for problems being dealt with now. Chairman Blackwelder reiterated the image of the company.

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Commissioner Hauer commented that the tree canopies, trees, and the neighborhood add to the character of historic districts. She continued that the loss of a tree makes a big difference and the neighborhood may be sensitive to the work being done. Mr. Marbut offered renting a large passenger van for a group to go and view the neighborhood together. Several Commissioners were in favor of the request.

Commissioner Ruhlman asked if Duke Energy has the responsibility of the York-Chester Historic District. Mr. Marbut and Mr. Lord stated they were unsure and would need to look at their territory map.

Commissioner Tucker asked if there was a map available on the website of the lines in the Historic District and Mr. Marbut replied that there was not a map available. Commissioner Tucker also asked if the options for homeowners are to have Duke Energy cut the tree down, or have the homeowner keep the tree and be responsible for the trimming and maintenance at their own expense. Mr. Marbut agreed and included that the homeowner will maintain the tree below 15 feet at all times.

Commissioner Simon briefly explained the Historic District Commission tree removal request process. He asked if Duke complies with regulations of different historic districts or neighborhood associations, or anything with vested interest to maintain lots. Mr. Marbut replied that they would always revert to their easement rights. Brief discussion ensued on communication of city trees for inventory purposes. Mr. Robert Stroud, Municipal Arborist for the City of Gastonia, explained that the inventory is a City asset. As a result, Mr. Marbut and Mr. Stroud exchanged contact information to exchange an inventory list. Brief discussion ensued on the City inventory.

Chairman Blackwelder inquired about referring others to a website for approved plantings. Mr. Marbut reiterated that an approved species list has been removed. Mr. Lord explained to use the website provided on the letter as an educational reference for general information and also encouraged contacting their city arborist. Mr. Marbut informed the commission to have homeowners contact him with concerns of tree replacement for long term plans.

Chairman Blackwelder stated he will contact Mr. Marbut to schedule their tour. He shared positive feedback regarding having someone to talk to regarding this matter. Mr. Marbut thanked the Commissioners for inviting him. The commissioners thanked Mr. Marbut and Mr. Lord for their time.

Subcommittee Meeting Tonight, if Needed:

No subcommittee meeting needed.

Ms. Wallis stated there will be a Historic District Commission meeting on December 12th.

A group photo of the commission will take place at the December 12th meeting.

ITEM 4. Adjournment

There being no other business, Chairman Blackwelder adjourned the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Chrystal Howard, Secretary

William Blackwelder, Chairman