

City of Greensburg
PLANNING COMMISSION Meeting

Monday, February 25, 2019 7:00 PM

- I. **Call to Order by Dave Kahley**
- II. **Roll Call---taken by Miranda Waugaman,
Administrative Assistant**

PRESENT:

DAVE KAHLEY, CHAIRMAN
BRIAN LAWRENCE, VICE CHAIRMAN
KAREN HUTCHINSON, SECRETARY
LISA METROSKY – Arrived at 7:01pm
ANITA SIMPSON
JOHN MUNSCH
RICK CUTIA

ABSENT:

RYAN VESELY
ROBERT RECKLEIN

ALSO PRESENT: LOU DEROSE, SOLICITOR
DONNIE ZAPPONE JR, COUNCILMAN
RANDAL FINFROCK, COUNCILMAN

**III. Approval of November 26, 2018 meeting
minutes**

Secretary Karen Hutchinson made a **motion to approve** the November 26, 2018 meeting minutes. Vice-chairman Brian Lawrence **seconded the motion**. No discussion. **Unanimously all voted in favor.**

IV. Old Business

There was no old business to address.

V. New Business

A. Replacement of sidewalks and removal of trees along Walnut Avenue from Beacon Street to Park Street, and North Maple Avenue from Park Street to Kenneth Street using CDBG funds.

Chairman Dave Kahley opened the public meeting by stating that the purpose of the gathering was to solicit comments, opinions and suggestions from property owners within our Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program project areas about the City's plan to replace broken curbs and sidewalk. Mr. Kahley mentioned that street trees and money are factors in the decisions as well. Dave communicated with *Gibson-Thomas Engineering* and *Urban Design Ventures* regarding the use of CDBG funds and the project and learned that CDBG funds can be used to remove "architectural barriers" in the public right-of-way to improve pedestrian access. "Architectural barriers" include anything that would create tripping hazards, wheelchair access, etc. Broken and irregular sidewalk are a hazard and restrict access, so removal and replacement of the sidewalk can be paid by CDBG funding. Trees are sometimes the cause of the sidewalk problems. Removal of the trees can be paid for through CDBG funding, but replacement trees don't improve pedestrian access so the CDBG funds will not buy new trees. General questions the board and the public may have at this point include, do we keep the trees, remove the trees or replace the trees? Reasons to keep the trees include for shade, visual appeal, street calming, and increase of property values. Reasons to remove the trees include some trees are growing into the overhead wires, some varieties are prone to squeeze roots into sewer pipes, some have roots that go lateral and break sidewalks, and others are past maturity and are dying right in front of us. Reasons to replace the trees include adding to the visual aspects and health of our City and neighborhoods and to replace the trees for the next generation of homeowners. Tree cutouts are allowed with CDBG funds but will not be paid by these funds. The sidewalk must be a minimum of three (3) feet wide. Mr. Kahley asked the engineer if there had been any decisions made, to which he was told that we are still very early in the process and no decision has been made. Property owners can have curb and sidewalk without the grass green strip, but there would need to be two pours of concrete with expansion joint in between.

Councilman Donnie Zappone commented that pictures for each property located within the areas in question would be displayed on the screens and public comment from the property owners and/or neighbors would be heard. Mr. Zappone mentioned that the property owners should state if they are for keeping the trees, removing and/or replacing the trees, keeping the grass strip, or removing everything and having a monolithic pour for the sidewalk and curbing. There are 23 total trees along the Walnut Avenue section of sidewalk, and 11 trees on North Maple Avenue.

Christina St. Onge, owner of 429 North Maple Avenue, asked if property owners would be able to keep the grass green strip. Ms. St. Onge mentioned that she looked at Wayne Avenue sidewalks, a previous CDBG funds project, and saw that those property owners no longer have the green strip and was wondering if the streets now in question would be allowed to keep that

area. Dave Kahley said that he doesn't believe this has been decided yet, but it could be considered.

Dee Cook, owner of 223 Walnut Avenue, asked if on the green strips that are present now, property owners would be allowed to replace those trees. Donnie Zappone told her this would be acceptable, but we reinforced that the property owners would be responsible for the cost of the replacement. Ms. Cook agreed and was satisfied with the answer.

Board member Rick Cutia mentioned that the project becomes a constructability issue to leave the green space. The City of Greensburg ordinance states that a sidewalk and curb are allowed to be placed monolithically as long as it's reinforced. When placing curb then green space then sidewalk, there would be two (2) additional form placements needed.

Sam Laciak, owner of 203 Walnut Ave, commented that there is a large Maple tree along the front of the house within the green strip, and the second tree that was shown to be on his property is actually on the property line of his and his neighbor's house. Mr. Laciak stated that he's not really crazy about the green space since it's hard to grow grass, but he does like the fact that the trees keep the houses cooler in the summer and would prefer to leave the Maple tree alone if possible. Mr. Zappone mentioned that a survey would be needed to determine whose property the second tree is on.

Dee Cook commented that years ago, Heather Lund was involved with the planting of the Crabapple trees along Walnut Avenue. Ms. Cook said that originally the trees were pretty in the spring, but it appears they are past their prime. The trees were also not supposed to produce fruit, but they do, and there are birds that feast on the rotten fruit causing more problems. Dee wanted to make it known that she feels as though property owners should not be able to plant the same kind of tree in the neighborhood and instead a mix should be used. The City of Detroit and Southwest Greensburg were referenced with how each planted the same type of trees and then they all died off at the same time. Ms. Cook and her husband have discussed amongst themselves that the two (2) trees in the front of their property within the grass strip are diseased and would need to be removed. Dee mentioned that she and her husband would like to replace the trees and that their preference would be Linden trees, because they are highly recommended as street trees since they grow very tall and quickly in a triangular shape.

Councilman Randy Finrock stated that his fear is that some property owners may want the green space and some will not, therefore, leaving the Planning Commission to make the decision. Mr. Finrock feels that there should be consistency across the board with either a green space or none.

Dee Cook is concerned about the green space, because at one point in time Ms. Cook was having trouble getting the grass to grow and has spent a considerable amount of money to put block in that area. Also, in 2002 Dee was issued a Violation Notice from the City of Greensburg to replace her entire sidewalk and curb area. Ms. Cook was wondering if her sidewalks would be replaced again with the CDBG monies. Councilman Finrock commented that under the grant there is an option for the sidewalk to be replaced with a new sidewalk and that in previous years of the program sidewalks that have recently been replaced would be evaluated and left

alone and/or replaced depending on the evaluation. Ms. Cook also asked if the green space were to be removed what would replace that area. The sidewalk would most likely extend directly to the curb allowing for a large concrete area in these cases, but Mr. Finfrock is intrigued with the use of pavers or block to break up the concrete area and wouldn't object to the use of another material if that became an option. Dee commented that the stamped concrete look of sidewalks that occurs in the Downtown area of the City is attractive.

Dave Kahley brought up the issue of how much impervious surface is in the City. The increase in concrete surface would impact the sewer systems and cause more flooding downstream. Mr. Kahley mentioned how the green space areas are compacted from foot traffic and have many tree roots so these areas may not take a lot of water, but the question is how much would they take away from water ending up going up into our sewer systems, water systems and streams. This issue should be taken into consideration as the plans become more permanent with this project.

Dee Cook mentioned that the more the tree roots are touched with the project and the trees that the property owners wish to save the more damage will be done to the trees. Ms. Cook has seen this happen when the gas company had to do work along the street and three (3) neighboring trees were damaged and had to be removed.

Rick Cutia asked if anyone on the board was aware of how much the CDBG funds allow for replacement, i.e. replacement of in kind or replacement with a minimum of three (3) feet and a maximum of 20 feet. Dave Kahley said when he asked both the engineers and the CDBG consultants, both parties mentioned that the project is still in very early stages of discussion so he doesn't believe that question could be answered at this time. Councilman Finfrock stated that the way the CDBG law reads is that if the streets are to be replaced then the sidewalks and curbs must be replaced as well, but he wasn't sure how much the cap is on the amount that has to be replaced. There must be some sort of improvement to the curb and the sidewalks where necessary for the use of the funds.

Steven Dimiceli, owner of 207 Walnut Avenue, commented that a huge part of why he and his wife decided to buy a house on this section of street is due largely in fact to the large Sycamore trees in front of their house. Mr. Dimiceli loves the look of the trees and in the summer the shade of trees cools the house down roughly five (5) to six (6) degrees during the day since he doesn't have central air conditioning. He understands that the roots are disrupting the sidewalk, but doesn't want to see them go. Councilman Zappone reminded Mr. Dimiceli that a cutout could be down around the tree as long as there is a minimum of three (3) feet of concrete for the sidewalk.

Gary Furlong, owner of 219 Walnut Avenue, stated that one (1) tree in the green space in front of his property is dead and can be removed, and the other two (2) Linden trees on the property aren't wanted due to the amount of sap and wasps. Mr. Furlong would like cut outs to be put in for different trees and isn't sure what kind of trees he would like to put in, but is for replacing the trees.

Dee Cook mentioned that quite a number of years ago a disease called oak wilt went through the area and killed the Rhododendrons and will eventually kill the Oak trees. Currently, algae is growing on the trees, branches are falling off and overall the Oak trees are not healthy. Ms. Cook said she's okay with the Oak trees being removed and will replant.

In discussions regarding the North Maple Avenue properties, Councilman Zappone commented that he spoke with the property owner of 404 North Maple Avenue, Hugh Burkett, earlier in the day and Mr. Burkett didn't specify if he was for or against the green strip, removing the trees or replacing the trees, but instead was more concerned about who would be paying for the tree removal and/or replacement.

Christina and Donald St. Onge, owners of 429 North Maple Avenue, originally had three (3) Maple trees in the front of their property along the green strip that were replaced with other trees more recently. The current trees produce fruit and make a mess. One of the trees recently died and has been partially cut down. A small section of sidewalk in front of the property was also replaced due to the lifting caused by tree roots. Mr. and Mrs. St. Onge would like to keep the green space on their property, but would like the trees removed and not replaced.

Daniel and Carol Thomas, owner of 403 North Maple Avenue, asked about their property since their house wasn't shown in the presentation. Currently, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas do not have trees in the green space along the North Maple Avenue side of their property, but they do have a couple trees located on the Grant Street side. CDBG funds will not be covering Grant Street at this time, however, Daniel and Carol would like a cut out for one tree placed on the North Maple Avenue side. Their sidewalk is in good shape, which means it would be evaluated at the time of the project to ensure consistency and continuity.

Sam Laciak mentioned that the green spaces along Walnut Avenue are different sizes on each side of the street. Mr. Laciak was wondering if the sizes had to be the same for the CDBG funding. Councilman Zappone stated that he wasn't sure of the answer. Sam asked when the project would be started, and Councilmen Zappone and Finfrock said possibly late-summer or fall 2019.

Dee Cook asked if the streets were going to be repaved as well. To answer Ms. Cook's question, Councilman Finfrock said that the sidewalks and curbs will be completed first and then the streets will be completed.

Chairman Dave Kahley summarized the comments from the property owners by saying that the general consensus was that the trees are liked, but not certain kinds because they're dirty, dead or dying. The green strip is liked, but there are maintenance issues. Some property owners spent hundreds to thousands of dollars putting in new sidewalks years ago, so the question becomes what is the useful life of the existing sidewalk. The sidewalks may all have to be redone to maintain age and uniformity of the concrete.

Board member Anita Simpson asked if possible *Penn State* could come in and give an evaluation on what type of grass could be used to ensure that the grass could be fostered and

kept alive in this particular environment. If everyone uses the same type of grass, the area might be more aesthetically pleasing.

Secretary Karen Hutchinson mentioned that there are particular types of grass that doesn't need to be cut and only grows to a particular height. Ms. Hutchinson said that maybe it could be a possibility to have some type of grass planted that wouldn't need to be mowed and would still absorb the water.

Board member Lisa Metrosky mentioned about limiting the size of the tree so you don't have the tree roots lifting up the sidewalks again in 10 years.

Chairman Dave Kahley brought up about the street tree issue being what trees have the roots go down & doesn't go into the sewer lines. He mentions about finding optional trees that could be used unlike the oak trees that spread out.

Secretary Karen Hutchinson mentions about the trees not being planted right and about being knowledgeable about how to plant them. She says the top root that comes out of the bottom of the tree has to be ground level and you cannot use mulch volcanoes because it kills the trees. The first root should be out of the ground and everything else is fine otherwise they choke themselves and to use the dirt already there. She says about using a personal contact to purchase bundling of trees at a discount.

Chairman Dave Kahley brought up about the grade of the ground between the curb and the sidewalk has changed over time which would leave the water running over the green space. He mentions about doing some contouring when they put the new curb and sidewalk in.

Board Member Rick Cutia talks about whether we have to replace the sidewalk to what is existing then Laciak's property trees would have to go. He says you can't replace that sidewalk in the location the trees are at because the freestanding curb is 18" deep and has to be formed. The excavation along there is going to affect the roots of those trees & kill it which would mean the entire street tree is going to get affected by new construction.

Secretary Karen Hutchinson mentions that she would hate to lose 100 year old Sycamore trees, which Councilman Finfrock agreed.

Board Member Rick Cutia states that there is no way to easily construct sidewalks and curbs with the existing roots of the trees. With a possibility of up to 12" of excavation to take the sidewalk out tree roots will be affected.

Vice-chairman Brian Lawrence brings up the program *TreeVitalize* by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy which they will train neighborhood individuals to become "Tree Tenders" so they are able to fully take care and maintain the specific trees. The neighborhood would get new trees covered under the grant from *TreeVitalize*. He mentions this could be something to look into since most of the neighborhood would be okay with removing and replacing the trees.

Chairman Dave Kahley mentions about two to four trees that the neighborhood would want to keep and wanted to see if they could talk to engineers to see if they could try and save the trees.

Board Member Rick Cutia mentions about there being a standard size for a curb being 18" deep and how a contractor isn't going to come in and excavate the 18" by 8" wide.

Chairman Dave Kahley mentions that if you pay the contractor enough they will do just about anything.

Board Member Rick Cutia says you think?

Board Member Lisa Metrosky asks if it's possible to be transplanted.

Councilman Randy Finrock said not for trees that big.

Secretary Karen Hutchinson said the trees are too huge.

Chairman Dave Kahley mentions we have an engineering dilemma in question which is difficult but not impossible.

Councilman Donnie Zappone says he can talk to Gibson Thomas to see if they have any thoughts or ideas as well.

Chairman Dave Kahley mentions there are only a handful of the great Sycamores.

Councilman Randy Finrock says he is with Chairman Dave Kahley about saving the Sycamores if they could.

Chairman Dave Kahley asks Board Member John Munsch if he has any thoughts.

Board Member John Munsch says he likes the idea of keeping the big Sycamores however he doesn't think the new trees should be planted as Sycamores. As an example he mentions the St. Onge's house and how the trees are growing into the communication and electrical wires. He also mentions about talking to West Penn Power or a Forester to see what kind of trees to put in.

Secretary Karen Hutchinson mentions you have to be careful as to what kind of trees to plant because of the diseases and bugs that could cause the trees to die.

Chairman Dave Kahley asks the Commission if there are any further questions or comments and to discuss this at the next meeting to come up with a recommendation. He mentions that Council should be able to get answers to the questions and get other recommendations from grass to trees. He asks to table the discussion for now.

No further questions or discussion from members of the board or audience. Board member Anita Simpson **moved** to table the discussion until more recommendations and information is obtained

regarding trees, grass and the overall CDBG project. Vice Chairman Brian Lawrence **seconded** the motion. **All voted unanimously to table the motion.**

VI. Adjournment

Vice-chairman Brian Lawrence **moved** to adjourn the meeting.

Meeting adjourned 8:03 pm.