

# Urban Forestry Committee Minutes

June 11, 2026 – 4:00 p.m.

City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids Public Service Center – 1500 Scribner Ave NW

Room 2106

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## Committee Members Present:

Tommy Allen, Dan Chase, Max Gibbs, Cindy Irving, Geoff Kempter, Becky Pobst, Joe Sulak

Others present: Christy Brunsell, Nick Hitchcock, Michelle Slykhouse (City staff)

## Mission:

*To provide guidance to the City Commission and City staff to promote and maintain a vibrant and healthy urban treescape and canopy for citizens of Grand Rapids.*

## Agenda:

1. Call to Order: 4:08pm
2. Determination of Quorum
3. Approval of Agenda  
Motion made by Cindy Irving, supported by Geoff Kempter, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.
4. Approval of Minutes from the May 14 meeting  
Cindy provided corrections to the minutes about sustainable task force and other City updates. Becky provided correction regarding the tree planting item in the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks partner report section. Motion made by Dan Chase, supported by Becky Pobst, to approve the minutes as amended. Motion carried.
5. Public Comments – none
6. Old Business
  - Tree awareness items and communication  
Christy stated the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) encourages communities to register for an annual parks for pollinators BioBlitz in September. The BioBlitz is hosted on iNaturalist app with the intent to bring awareness to the community about pollinators. The Parks and Recreation Department registered to host a virtual BioBlitz event using iNaturalist and will also hold a small in person event on September 9. Christy stated having someone speak about the importance of pollinators would be good. Tommy stated the date is on the Mayor's calendar

Tommy asked that each UFC member and the City Forester choose their favorite tree species: Joe – Redbud, Cindy – Tamarack, Becky – Black

Gum, Nick – Chinkapin Oak, Max – Birch, Dan – London Plane, Geoff – Northern Red Oak.

- Mayors' Monarch Pledge

An event is expected to be held on September 9, discussed time is from 6:30-8:00 p.m. The BioBlitz will be introduced at this same event. Location still to be determined. Ken-O-Sha Park was discussed.

- Approved species list

Nick provided information on some tree species that would be good to add to the approved planting list. Nick also provided the site and size requirements that are published in the tree manual and standards of practice.

Species to add:

1. Bigleaf Linden – Nick stated the little leaf Linden is a good street tree and the larger species would be good to add for planting at other locations in the City.
2. Katsuratree has good color.
3. Bigleaf Dogwood is a flowering tree, which Nick gets requests for. The tree is not native but does well in Michigan and shows no sign of becoming an established invasive.
4. Walter Dogwood is like the Bigleaf Dogwood with smaller leaves.
5. Sourwood is a popular, slow growing tree that makes great honey and is good for pollinators.
6. Hot wings Maple is native to the United States and provides color throughout the seasons (green leaves turn yellow to red in the fall). This tree was found in Colorado.
7. Eastern Redbud has good leaf color and stays under 15 feet high.
8. Eastern Redbud floating clouds is like other redbuds only with dark green variegated leaves.

Dan asked about Black Cherry trees. Nick stated birds carrying and dropping seeds from these trees cause an issue. In addition, the tree sheds small limbs which is also an issue, especially when planted as a street tree.

Cindy asked that an update be made to the site and size requirements. Cindy stated that where there are large utilities underground there needs to be a small species planted. Nick stated the site and size requirements would need to be updated in the Tree Manual and that will be reviewed by the UFC this Fall.

Motion made by Max Gibbs, supported by Dan Chase, to approve the recommended tree species list with additions provided by Nick. Motion carried.

7. New Business

- None

8. Partner Reports

- City of Grand Rapids

Joe stated the priority pruning project is complete and work is ongoing for stump removal. Storm work has been taking a lot of time.

Nick stated one of the Tree Trimmer Aide's recently promoted to a Tree Trimmer I. An additional Tree Trimmer I is being hired. Forestry will then be fully staffed.

Nick stated that pesticide treatment has been delayed due to storm work.

- Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP)

Becky stated planting season is done and watering is happening now. Melanie continues work with the conservation program at Ken-O-Sha, Ball Perkins, and Huff Parks. A new trail coordinator staff member started at FGRP.

FGRP is going to try a couple public events this year (tree pruning night and tree watering night). These types of events were held and successful in the past.

- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

The community room at Martin Luther King Park Community Center will be named after Don Williams.

There are 15 amenities at Sullivan Field that will be named after significant donors.

- Committee Member(s)

Tommy met with the Mayor and the following are priorities:

- Public safety infrastructure (more tree canopy on streets for traffic calming)
- Native planting policies
- Stewardship – adopt a tree program
- Climate adaptation

9. Agenda Items for future meeting

- Zoning change and effect on canopy
- Tree inventory components and timeline
- Tree manual & standards of practice

10. Adjournment – 5:01 pm

**Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, September 10, 2026 – 3:00 p.m.  
at Grand Rapids Public Service Center, 1500 Scribner Ave NW**