



Staff Analysis

Gainesville's Urban Forest Ecological Assessment and Next Steps Presentation and Discussion

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CITY OF GAINESVILLE STAFF ANALYSIS

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Title: Gainesville's Urban Forest Ecological Assessment and Next Steps Presentation and Discussion (B)

Sponsor: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

City Staff Contact: Steve Phillips, Director

Summary of Issue

The University of Florida/IFAS completed an Urban Forest Ecological Assessment for the City of Gainesville in March 2017. This ecological assessment provides a detailed look into some of the economic and ecological values of the City of Gainesville's urban forest. The outcomes from the study can serve as the basis for enhancing the understanding of the urban forest's values, improving urban forest policies, urban forest planning and management, and providing empirical data for the inclusion of trees within environmental regulations. University researchers will present the data to City Commissioners and describe next steps, the City of Gainesville's Urban Forest Management Plan.

History/Background Information

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Department wishes to create an Urban Forest Management Plan based on the newly completed ecological assessment and years of pre-existing research and data undertaken by the University of Florida. The Urban Forest Management Plan will be developed with a 20-year planning horizon to meet the challenge of programmatic continuity by planning on a long time framework. It will also provide guidance for intermediate 5-year city-wide work planning. In turn, it will offer direct input into short-term annual departmental operational plans and decision-making. The key objectives and performance indicators will be tied to a 5-year cycle of Urban Forest Ecological Assessment.

On February 18, 2016, the City Commission approved a list of projects that would be funded if the half cent sales tax passed in November. The City of Gainesville's Urban Forest Management Plan is on the list of approved projects. The Wild Spaces Public Places Voter Referendum passed on November 8, 2016 and the collection of the ½ cent sales tax began on January 1, 2017. The City started receiving revenues in late March, approximately \$484,000 per month or \$5,808,000 per year.

At the December 8, 2016 General Policy Committee meeting, the committee voted to fund the Urban Forest Management Plan utilizing Wild Spaces Public Places funding. City staff is seeking General Policy Committee approval for staff to work on contracting for the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Options

A. Hear the presentation regarding the Urban Forest Ecological Analysis and direct staff to work on contracting for the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Pros The General Policy Committee will gain an understanding of the benefits of Gainesville's Urban Forest and steps can be taken to begin the Urban Forest Management Plan process.

Cons There are no discernable cons.

B. Hear the presentation regarding the Urban Forest Ecological Analysis and provide other directions regarding on whether to contract for the Urban Forest Management Plan at this time.

Pros The General Policy Committee may want to consider holding off on pursuing the Urban Forest Management plan as it relates to the other unfunded WSPP projects that are not currently being pursued. This would allow the assigned WSPP staff to consider this as part of the larger picture.

Cons An urban forest management plan, based on the recent urban forest ecological analysis, is an essential tool for protecting this valuable resource. An urban forest management plan is an action plan; it will give the City detailed information, recommendations, and resources needed to effectively and proactively manage Gainesville's urban forest. Without this plan we have no goals and objectives and no information on whether we are meeting any goals or objectives related to the management of the urban forest.

Staff Recommended Option

Staff recommends Option A. Hear the presentation regarding the Urban Forest Ecological Analysis and direct staff to work on contracting for the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Attachments/References

1. Full Gainesville's Urban Forest Ecological Analysis Report 2016
2. Gainesville's Urban Forest Ecological Analysis 2016 PowerPoint (condensed)
3. General Policy Committee minutes from December 8, 2016