

Minutes

City of Bloomington Tree Commission

Wednesday July 15, 2020, 9:30-10:00am

Online via Zoom

- Present: Kerry Bridges, Tom Coleman, Laurel Cornell, David Dilcher, George Hegeman, David Parkhurst, Mia Williams, Erin Hatch
- Erin presented the Urban Forester's Report.
- Mia Williams reported that there are two excellent candidates for the Arborist position at IU, a favorable development. Storm damage from the storm last Saturday was minimal, in part due to a proactive pruning program that is being carried out by Bluestone Tree.
- David Parkhurst listed the committee reports that are made at the Environmental Commission meeting. It's a long list.
- George presented a motion, which was approved by acclamation, to send the proposed column about the Batchelor Forest to the Herald-Times with Tree Commission, not individual names, listed as the signatory. Erin reported that there is a new City policy that things like letters from Boards and Commissions to the Herald-Times include a disclaimer tagline. Erin, as is her responsibility as Urban Forester, will run the proposed column by Dave Williams and Paula McDevitt. The draft is attached.
- Responses to the letter about the Batchelor Forest that was printed in the Herald-Times have been received from two people. John Walsh, President of the Monroe County Public Library Board of Trustees, wrote that plans for the new library branch have not yet been formalized. Lauren Travis, Assistant Director of Sustainability for the City of Bloomington, expressed interest and sent David Parkhurst a link to the planning document for the new library branch in order to assess what stage the planning has reached. The url is:
https://issuu.com/mcplindiana/docs/final_branch_planning_report_01.30 Laurel suggested that David and Tom enlist Lauren as part of their subcommittee to forward the Batchelor Forest project.
- David Dilcher asked about the trees for the Switchyard Park that are heeled in at the plot on South Rogers Street. Erin replied that those trees are mostly rejects of various sorts: duplicate orders, trees in bad condition, and trees that will be returned.
- The Minutes for the June meeting were approved by acclamation. The next meeting is Wednesday August 19, 2020. The Commission discussed whether this should be an in-person or a Zoom meeting. Opinion was divided, so the next meeting will be a Zoom meeting.
- The meeting adjourned at 10am.

DRAFT

The City of Bloomington's Environmental Commission (EC) and Tree Commission (TC) have learned about a proposal from the Monroe County Public Library (MCPL) to construct a new branch of the county library. A new library on the south side of town is sorely needed, and both the TC and the EC strongly support one. However, we believe that the proposed location is the wrong site.

In 1999, MCCSC proposed an educational program for area students, and from that, the "Tree Fest" was born. Representatives from MCCSC, Monroe County Parks and Recreation, Bloomington Urban Forester, Monroe County Solid Waste Management District, Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District, Purdue Extension Service, and the State's District Forester formed a committee to make the Tree Fest come to life.

Batchelor Middle School seemed the perfect place to begin Tree Fest with its expansive land holdings; so, in 1999, the first trees were planted. Over the years, elementary students from MCCSC and Richland Bean Blossom planted 6 acres, at several different schools, with over 5,500 seedlings, using 33 native species.

Batchelor Middle School ended up with 4.5 acres planted over 11 years, to blossom into what is now known as "Batchelor Forest." This rich habitat now includes 8 to 12 inch red, white, and chinkapin oaks competing with tulip trees for the top layer of the canopy. Paw-paws in fruit with sassafras and dogwood are found the lower story. After 14 years of educational tree planting, Tree Fest came to an end.

The proposal in question requests that MCCSC subdivide and sell off a part of its property, including Batchelor Forest, to the MCPL for the new branch. Although a final plan has not yet been developed, given the scope of the project, almost all the woods will be destroyed according to the preliminary plans we have seen.

Today the forest is still relatively young, but the diversity of native species, the range of ages, and the combination of thick forest and open grassy space comprise a very healthy, thriving woods. The understory is native woodland plants, unfortunately interspersed with a few invasive species. The older sections of the woods are naturally culling out the trees that were planted too close together, and the wildlife is abundant and assorted.

Both the TC and the EC believe a different location could be found for the new library. The destruction of much of Batchelor Forest would obliterate a significant forest ecosystem and educational project, crush valuable memories, and run counter to the city and county priorities of increasing tree cover for the sake of carbon sequestration.

The Bloomington Environmental and Tree Commissions respectfully implore the Monroe County Library Board of Trustees not to destroy this memorable established forest, and ask them to find a different location for the much-needed library branch.

Sincerely,

City of Bloomington Environmental Commission and City of Bloomington Tree Commission

This statement reflects the opinion of these commissions only and does not necessarily represent the view of the City of Bloomington. The commissions are composed of residents who serve as volunteers to inform and advise their fellow residents, City staff, and elected officials.