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Press Release

Beautification and Tree Advisory Board talks downtown trees

Citizen members also discuss Nelson Award, Lions Club memorial bench

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (July 30, 2015) — The City Beautification and Tree Advisory Board had its third monthly meeting with its new members on Thursday.

Board members picked the Nelson Sensation Award and Yard of the Season award winners for the month of August. The recipients will be announced each week on Facebook and in the Traveler.

Citizens may nominate a yard for the board's consideration for either award by emailing the address — and, if they like, a photo — of the yard to Watts at twatts@arkansascityks.gov.

Prior to five new citizens' being appointed to the board by the City Commission in May, the Beautification and Tree Advisory Board had just one member and had become largely inactive.

Board members present Thursday were Michelle Dykes, Bob Foster, Candace Stephens, Steven Walker and Jill Wineinger. The board's sixth member, Kammy Downs, was absent.

The board meets at noon on the last Thursday of each month, except November, which has no meeting, and December, when it meets in the middle of the month because of the holidays.

Its next meeting will be at noon Aug. 27 in the city manager's office at City Hall.

Lions Club memorial bench

Kenneth Gilmore and Charles Kennedy, with the Arkansas City Lions Club, presented to the board a preliminary design for a granite memorial bench they would like to install at Ben Givens Center City Park.

The intent of the bench is to memorialize the late Irvin Kramer, who was active on many City boards.

For immediate release

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“And above all, he made about 10,000 funnel cakes right there on that corner,” joked Gilmore, referring to the Lions Club’s annual Arkalalah Festival food stand on Central Avenue.

The Lions Club would pay for the cost of the memorial, which will be made by Dawson Monument.

City crews would maintain it as part of the park after it is installed. It was not yet certain who would be responsible for replacing the memorial if it were to be defaced, however.

After obtaining a preliminary blessing from the board, Gilmore said he would work to nail down the final design and bring it back for board approval. The City Commission also would have to approve it.

The board also reviewed its duties and responsibilities regarding the approval of permanent memorials and other fixtures, as laid out in Municipal Code.

Downtown tree replacement

City Manager Nick Hernandez showed board members some pictures of damage that had been done by trees that were planted as part of the downtown “streetscape” project.

Particularly troubling were instances where tree roots have interacted with or disrupted water pipes and utility lines. In some cases, electric lines appear to have been laid through existing tree root systems.

Additionally, as the trees grow, they can disrupt the sidewalk above the roots, cracking it in places.

“You can’t have a root system that goes too deep; you can’t have a root system that goes too shallow,” Hernandez said. “You can’t have a tree that gets too big or too tall, because then it pushes up the concrete. You can’t have a tree that flowers, necessarily. You can’t have one that drops berries. You can’t have one that has small leaves; you can’t have one that has big leaves. So what does an individual plant downtown that is going to give you the least amount of grief, but also look nice?”

Hernandez said that in some places, dead or dying trees have had to be removed. For the time being, those spaces are being filled with holly bushes because they are fairly cheap. But they are not a long-term solution, he added, asking for the board’s input on which species of tree the City should plant.

“I would like for the community come up with an alternative that isn’t going to impede on the electric lines and plumbing as best we can, one that’s not going to heave up the concrete, one that still looks nice, but is not overpowering,” Hernandez said. “So it’s either going to be a tree or a bush.”

After discussing several varieties that wouldn’t work — either because they grow to the wrong size or do not thrive in this climate — the board settled on two recommendations for the City to look into.

They are crape myrtles — “They don’t get very large if you trim them,” Walker said — and Okame cherry blossoms. “That’s not a bad tree, just from reading about it,” Hernandez said of the latter option.

Crape myrtles have purple blossoms and Okame cherry blossoms are bronze orange to orange-red, lending some local school spirit to whichever tree is selected.