

**COMMUNITY HEALTH AND EQUITY
COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 25, 2021 2:00PM
VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Members Present:	Councilmember Ana Sandoval, Chair, <i>District 7</i> Councilmember Robert Treviño, <i>District 1</i> Councilmember Jada Andrews-Sullivan, <i>District 2</i> Councilmember Rebecca Viagran, <i>District 3</i> Councilmember Shirley Gonzales, <i>District 5</i>
Staff Present:	David McCary, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Roderick Sanchez, <i>Assistant City Manager</i> ; Monica Hernandez, <i>Assistant City Attorney</i> ; David Newman, <i>Director, Solid Waste Management Department</i> ; Michael Shannon, <i>Director, Development Services Department</i> ; Homer Garcia, <i>Director, Parks & Recreation Department</i> ; Douglas Melnick, <i>Director, Office of Sustainability</i> ; Josephine Valencia, <i>Assistant Director, Solid Waste Management Department</i> ; Melissa Ramirez, <i>Assistant Director of Land Development, Development Services Department</i> ; Stephen Stokinger, <i>Development Services Engineer, Development Services Department</i> ; Mark Bird, <i>City Arborist, Development Services Department</i> ; Ximena Copa-Wiggins, <i>Public Relations Manager, Office of Historic Preservation</i> ; Michael Baldwin, <i>Manager, Parks & Recreation Department</i> ; Ross Hosea, <i>Special Projects Manager, Parks & Recreation Department</i> ; Nancy Cano, <i>Office of the City Clerk</i>
Others Present:	Gretchen Riley, <i>Forestry Coordinator, Texas A&M Forest Service</i> ; Rebekah Zehnder, <i>Geospatial Analyst, Texas A&M Forest Service</i> ; Deborah Reid, <i>Technical Director, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance</i>

Call to order

Chairwoman Sandoval called the meeting to order.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

1. **A briefing on the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a recycling processing contract.** [David W. McCary, CPM, Assistant City Manager; David Newman, Director, Solid Waste Management Department]

David Newman reported that the City's current recycling rate was 36% and the 60% recycling goal for 2025 was difficult to achieve due to a shift in demand in recyclable materials from newspapers to plastic materials. He explained that a recyclable market downturn occurred due to China as the largest global buyer of recyclables and its adoption of a national cleanliness standard in 2017 which caused a drop in revenue from \$100 per ton to \$60-\$65. He noted that the market downturn impacted municipal revenue contracts in a shift from revenue contracts to expenditure contracts.

Mr. Newman reported that the City's current contract with ReCommunity (RC) began on August 1, 2014 and would expire on July 31, 2024. He noted that in 2017, RC was sold to Republic Services which owned a landfill on the east side of the City and had a separate contract with the City for that entity. He emphasized that Republic Services was not associated with the City's current recycling processing contract in any way. He indicated that RC expressed interest in a contract extension at an increased payment and with a change in the revenue split with the City which staff did not recommend. He presented two other processing options:

Staff Recommended Recycling Processing Options		
Contractor Owned/ Contractor Operated	Command and known framework	Limited flexibility
City Owned/ Contractor Operated	Asset; potential lower long-term expense; educational opportunities; increase response opportunities	Initial capital expense; asset maintenance

Mr. Newman observed that a contractor owned/contractor operator contract was the common option and was the current arrangement the City had with RC. He added that the City had utilized this method for over a decade and staff recommended exercising this option in conjunction with a City owned/contractor operated arrangement which would entail a contractor building and operating a recycling facility on land provided by the City, with the facility becoming an asset of the City at the end of the contract term. He explained that this hybrid option allowed the City to further decide to continue operations on a contractual basis or continue the work in-house.

Mr. Newman reported that the Solid Waste Management Department (SWMD) worked with a consultant on the evaluation of its options and issued a Request for Information (RFI) which garnered four responses with large companies that were interested in both options. He added that the City's current recycling expense rate of \$13/ton would increase to \$25/ton by FY 2025. He presented a rendering of the proposed City owned/contractor operated proposed site to be located at 6802 Culebra Road which was formerly the Northwest Service Center and was conveniently situated next door to the Public Works Department, SAPD West Patrol Substation, and the City's household hazardous waste and drop-off facility. He stated that the recommendation was to proceed with a Request for Proposal (RFP) process for a contract with two submittal options outlined above. He noted that the RFP process would provide the best opportunity to compare costs and evaluate benefits on a high-profile contract that would be presented to City Council B Session on March 31, 2021.

Chairwoman Sandoval referenced the October 22, 2020 meeting discussion surrounding the issue of plastic film bags that commonly got caught up in recyclable machinery and caused daily breakdowns for recyclable contractors that were soon likely to start rejecting them. She asked if the acceptance and processing of plastic film bags could be included in the RFP and in the potential City owned/Contractor operated contract(s). She requested salary and benefit information for employees under the current contractor. Mr. Newman replied that staff would structure the solicitation so that there were mandatory items to be collected, processed, and sold by the potential contractor and more points would be added to the evaluation criteria for processing of plastic film bags. He noted that RC indicated that they would opt out of plastic film bag processing if granted a contract extension, which was fairly common with

processors, and a reason that discussions regarding the potential need of State level advocacy were held at the October 22, 2020 meeting.

Councilmember Treviño asked if the option to use the Northwest Service Center provided an opportunity for smaller companies to apply and requested that staff review similar considerations made for a recent mulch contract for consistency. He requested that staff explore all options and requested more information about City employee job opportunities at the facility. Mr. Newman noted that the prime contractor would be a large company, as it was very specialized work. Josephine Valencia stated that the capital required to build the facility would be expensive and added that there would be increased opportunities for subcontractors.

Councilmember Viagran asked of current operations at the Northwest Service Center and its size. She asked of the proximal environmental impact on the area. Mr. Newman state that the he was unsure of the exact size but that the facility was currently used to house the City's cart operations. He added that the facility was adjacent to City property on both sides, the Northside Independent School District Bus Depot was across the street, and the Southwest Research Institute and retailer Caliente Harley Davidson were located behind the facility.

Chairwoman Sandoval requested that information on the in-house recycling option and policy recommendations on plastic film bags be included in the staff presentation to the City Council B Session on March 31, 2021.

2. A briefing on the Urban Forest Inventory and Analysis for San Antonio [David W. McCary, CPM, Assistant City Manager; Homer Garcia III, Director, Parks and Recreation]

Gretchen Riley reported that in 2011, the State experienced an exceptional drought that resulted in many dead trees in both urban and rural area landscapes. She explained that for decades, the U.S. Forest Service Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program collected data for trees in rural landscapes, but not for urban area trees. She stated that in 2017, the City Council authorized an interlocal agreement (ILA) between the City and the Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) in the amount of \$150,000.00 to initiate an Urban Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) study. She noted that previous analyses of San Antonio's tree canopy conducted in 2002, 2003 and 2008 utilized technology that only provided aerial imagery of the City's tree canopy, and the Urban FIA method was a much more comprehensive and accurate analysis of a municipality's forest inventory forward, with 10% of plots resampled each year for a continuous on-going inventory that would be updated annually. Ms. Riley added that funding to cover the costs associated with the Urban FIA was provided by the 2017 Tree Canopy Preservation and Mitigation Fund Adopted Budget, which was managed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

Ms. Riley presented maps from the My City's Trees Application that depicted cycles of data collected from many cities enrolled in the Urban FIA. She reported that 267 plots throughout the City and its extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) were collected over a two-year period and the initial baseline data was now completed.

Rebekah Zehnder presented an overview of the My City's Tree Application which was how the public would access information about San Antonio's urban forest inventory. She noted that the data could be filtered by six different spatial themes: City growth, land cover, watershed, heat island, social

vulnerability, and equity. She navigated through several key features to provide sample displays. She reported that through the Urban FIA program, San Antonio was found to have 46 million trees within the City limits, and another 92 million trees in the ETJ for a grant total of 138 million trees, of which 26% were publicly owned. She indicated that the trees provided 3.5 million tons of carbon stored in the City and the ETJ combined that removed over 6,500 tons of air pollution annually. She highlighted several key benefits of San Antonio's urban forest: \$63 million in health costs savings was attributed to air pollution removal; \$17 million in energy costs savings was gained by residents; and stormwater runoff was reduced by 380 million cubic feet.

Ms. Riley added that the Urban FIA program informed priority areas for tree planting, identified ecosystem services that needed to be enhanced, and the ideal species of tree to be planted to fill ecosystem needs. She noted that with climate issues and an increased global society, more invasive insects and diseases were embedded in the local ecosystem and Urban FIA data would help assess potential impacts and drive decision making for such issues.

3. A briefing on the City's Tree Ordinance and processes related to Tree Variances and reporting. [Roderick Sanchez, Assistant City Manager; Michael Shannon, Director, Development Services Department]

Michael Shannon reported that the City's Tree Code intended to balance the protection of existing trees, promote planting of new trees, and allow for development to occur. He stated that the current Tree Code had been in place since 1997 and balance was critical as development continued to provide needed housing and jobs. He added that several iterations of the Code included tree surveys and tree protection. He stated that variances were incorporated in 2009 for Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and floodplains through the Planning Commission process to ensure that trees were not planted in such areas. He noted that in 2010, the City added Tree Canopy Rules for newly developed areas to assess when canopy needed to be planted or retained to meet certain.

Mr. Shannon reviewed the Tree Code Compliance process and presented a listing of minimum preservation requirements for new residential and new commercial property development plans. He explained that the mitigation ratio represented the number of trees a property owner was required to replant if more trees were removed than the certain numbers established for that development. He added that the Tree Fund was a mitigation option wherein developers could pay into the Fund to satisfy Tree Code Compliance measures. He noted that since 2010, over \$19 million was paid into the Tree Fund which was managed by the Parks & Recreation Department, which in turn paid for over 105,000 trees planted throughout the City.

Mr. Shannon explained that variances in the City's Tree Code were not exceptions, nor waivers, but provided an alternate way for residents to meet the Code if they were experiencing a hardship or had an exceptional condition where the Code could not be met to exact specifications. He stated that residents could propose alternate ways to meet the Code by submitting a Variance Request, and City staff were available to consult with at Step Zero of the process where preliminary discussions took place to provide assessments and recommendations; thereafter, residents proceeded to Step One and submitted a written Variance Request to the City Arborist, paid a \$350 fee, and attended a final determination hearing before the Planning Commission. He presented an itemized detail of the Planning Commission's role as the

final approval body for variance requests, and as the recommending body and appellate body for a host of other matters.

Mr. Shannon stated that a new level of reporting was added to improve transparency and documentation of variance requests received and monthly reports disclosed total building permits issued and total variances received, reviewed, and processed by the Development Services Department (DSD) and the Planning Commission. He noted that some vested rights were protected by State laws and challenged the City's Tree Code, and many local projects had grandfathered rights for decades-old projects for which the City's Tree Ordinance could not be applied. He presented a short history of recent Bills that sought to weaken or eliminate the City's Tree Ordinances.

4. A briefing on the San Antonio Soil Carbon project, a joint effort between the City of San Antonio through the Parks and Recreation Department and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. [Debbie Reid, Technical Director, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance]

Deborah Reid reported that the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) approached the Parks and Recreation Department regarding a partnership to sample and analyze soils within City parks for carbon levels. Ms. Reid explained that the project led to the implementation of a mitigation strategy from the Climate and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) with a focus on the use of public green spaces to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it within their soils. She stated that the San Antonio Soil Carbon Project was a joint effort between the City through the Parks and Recreation Department and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

Ms. Reid stated that the Project would provide the City with baseline data to determine current soil carbon levels, update soil survey maps, and take soil samples. She explained that trees and plants removed carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and stored it as carbon, thus improving air quality. She stated that in 2009, the City's baseline for 113,011 acres of tree canopy (38%) was 38,000 tons of CO₂ removed and stored annually, and noted that current carbon offsets credited values at \$20/ton calculated that level of CO₂ removal as an annual service valued at \$760,000.

Ms. Reid reported that a map would be designed for random and defective site selection for sampling sites in every Council District and soil samples would be initiated in the summer. She explained that soils could sequester up to three times more CO₂ from the atmosphere than above-ground vegetation and the Project findings would provide soil improvement recommendations from the NRCS. She requested Councilmember assistance to provide public education to their constituents on how effective changing some vegetation management practices were. She stated that moving some park areas from golf courses and other locations that did not provide soil benefits was an effective change for best vegetation management practice.

Ms. Reid highlighted that the City had 16,517 acres of City parks and golf courses. She explained that using park soils to mitigate CO₂ and stormwater runoff levels would create a 1% increase in soil organic matter (SOM) which would lead to 16,517 tons of CO₂ removed annually and the removal of 330-340 million gallons of stormwater per rain event from the City's drainage infrastructure. She highlighted that the 330-340 million gallons of stormwater per rain event would recharge the Edwards Underwater Aquifer, which was a tremendous benefit for the City's ecosystem, and a great improvement in overall community resilience and quality-of-life for all residents in San Antonio.

Councilmember Andrews-Sullivan asked if data was tracked for the number of viable or dead trees removed per the City's Tree Code or for variance requests during residential or commercial development. Mr. Shannon stated that a total inventory of trees removed was not tracked; but trees to be removed were identified by developers in the planning phase and City staff confirmed and approved the removal of dead, decaying, or hazardous trees to avoid potential hazards, with no penalty or credit issued to the property owner.

Councilmember Viagran asked for a definition of environmentally sensitive areas, and if it included the Edwards Aquifer Protection Zone. She noted the importance of soil composition identification and analyses for the planning of infrastructure projects and bond programs in the future. She asked if soil management planning could be incorporated into the Unified Development Code (UDC) for future EOS areas under review for zoning changes. Mr. Shannon explained that FEMA floodplain maps geographically identified topographical areas of steep slopes or buffers that were generally located 30-60 feet adjacent to floodplains which had a higher environmental impact and more protection was placed on those areas. Mark Bird reported that there were specific 60-foot buffers in riparian areas where recharging contributing zones were located, and 30-foot buffers surrounded non-recharge, non-contributing zones. Mr. Shannon stated that the UDC process was on hold due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and noted the opportunity for a UDC code change in the future.

Councilmember Gonzales asked of a plan for tree planting along the Westside Creekway. Homer Garcia stated that a tree planting strategy was actively being implemented for trails under construction in the Westside Trail Creekway Project - Phase 1. He added that a tree canopy retrofitting was done to correct initial oversights for initially-segmented areas of Martinez Creek. Ross Hosea reported that two of the three projects were completed with over 340 trees of various sizes added to the Martinez Creek, 350 trees added to Apache Creek, and 175 trees would be planted in the lower Apache Creek area by the end of Spring 2021 during the last phase of the project. Mr. Garcia confirmed that a total of nearly 700 new tree plantings were added as part of the project and he would follow up with a final tree count for the Alazan and Zarzamora Creek segments.

Councilmember Treviño asked how the NRCS data could inform tree canopy implementation strategies for vulnerable communities, especially during the summer months. He requested that Spanish translation be included for future community engagement on tree planting strategies. Mr. Garcia reported that the Urban FIA study was a robust tool that would continue to connect residents to the City's community tree planting strategies. He referenced a very targeted and successful recovery effort made to restore trees in neighborhoods affected by a tornado several years ago where door hangers were provided to residents that opted for replacement trees, and City staff installed the requested trees as part of its service delivery model. He added that this year was the first year that the program was expanded City-wide using the Equity Atlas and combined census-tracking scores to canvass specific areas within each Council District with the highest needs for tree planting.

Councilmember Treviño requested further information on tree variance locations and any related demolitions. He requested that City staff explore ways to address and implement 'road diet' designs with tree planting strategies, where roads that were excessively wide could be reconfigured to add sidewalks lined with tree plantings. He noted the opportunity to include road diets and tree plantings along with safety and pedestrian mobility within the 2022 City Bond Project for infrastructure planning. He asked

how good soil management could be dovetailed into future infrastructure planning. Councilmember Treviño noted that pre-cast sidewalks made of different sidewalk materials to address different soil conditions would work well for future sidewalk plans. Assistant City Manager Rod Sanchez stated that he and Mr. Shannon were available for an offline meeting to discuss available data on tree variances and related demolitions, if any.

Chairwoman Sandoval voiced her support for complementing the 2022 Bond Project with some tree mitigation funding. She asked how trees species and sizes were determined for planting in different parks and areas. Mr. Garcia reported that the Parks and Recreation Department worked closely to extend City bond projects through the tree mitigation fund for road projects, park projects, or stormwater projects. He noted that project spaces determined the types of trees planted, among other specific considerations.

Chairwoman Sandoval highlighted a demonstration of the My City Tree Application which showed that 5% of the tree canopy covered 40% of the population within the highest equity zip codes, which were zip codes of the most vulnerable populations, including persons of color and lower incomes. She stated that residents in high equity zip codes had some of the worst health outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic as a result of pre-existing health conditions. She added that when the data was sorted by lowest equity scores, it reflected the presence of many trees on public lands, such as public parks and public facilities, in low equity zip codes. She noted that the Urban FIA tool brought to light the truth of what was needed to be done.

Chairwoman Sandoval asked when monthly reports of all variances received, reviewed, and processed would be regularly available online for public viewing. Mr. Shannon reported that the information would be included as part of the enhanced open data system in process and would be regularly available for viewing in approximately one month.

Chairwoman Sandoval asked of the decision-making process that determined if a variance was needed or if redesign was needed. Mr. Shannon explained that initial conversations with developers in the planning process included discussions on alternative ways to work around variances and achieve balance while following the City's Tree Ordinance. He noted that only 2%-3% of permits issued required variances and City staff was dedicated to saving every tree in the most balanced way possible.

Adjourn

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:01 pm.

Ana Sandoval, Chair

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy Cano, Office of the City Clerk