

City of El Paso, Illinois

Beautification Committee meeting minutes for July 9, 2018

The City of El Paso Beautification Committee met Monday, July 9, at 6 p.m. at City Hall. Present were Jennie Kearney, chair, and committee member Ellen Rigsby. Also present were City Council members Alex Brucker and Sarah Steffen, Public Works director Casey Jones, Parks and Recreation Director Derek Stoller, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Colton Scott, City Clerk Dave Fever, and local resident Darrin Schertz. Committee member Chuck Burton was absent.

Jennie called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Discussion of tree planting: The group discussed the pros and cons of planting trees in the city rights-of-way, also known as parkways. Examples were provided of various communities' policies, permit applications, and lists of approved small, medium and large trees, as well as prohibited trees.

The concerns about trees in the parkways included the cost of tree removal for the city, tree roots damaging sewer and storm sewer pipes, roots damaging water lines, tree limbs obscuring signage, trees damaging sidewalks or hanging so low over sidewalks that they are an obstacle, and the way the power company deals with potentially problematic trees by hacking off limbs – often to the point that residents can see a 90-degree angle of cleared limbs on a tree.

Casey felt that there are better places to plant a tree than in the parkway, where it increases the workload to city employees and often causes problems with the infrastructure.

Darrin noted that trees have an aesthetic appeal that makes the city more attractive and that a simple, straightforward policy could give residents the opportunity to plant appropriate trees, while limiting future damage to city infrastructure.

After much discussion, the group agreed they'd like to create a list of acceptable small, medium and large trees, discuss the pros and cons with an arborist, and develop a permit application form. Casey would then review any applications that come in, as the group affirmed that he would best be able to visit the site and determine whether the location is appropriate for a tree or whether the location will cause problems for the city in the future.

Sarah also suggested that when a resident calls for JULIE locates that the city supply the resident with the list of suggested trees and the permit application form if they are hoping to plant a tree in the parkway.

Dave had a draft of a permit application. The committee will continue to discuss the topic at the next meeting.

Discussion of sign on I-39 north of El Paso:

The committee reviewed the proposed "Welcome to El Paso" sign for I-39 north of El Paso. Questions included why the sign references parks, as people do not typically detour to visit a park, why Fulton Sheen was listed, why the colors were purple, black and white, and how well purple and black would wear. To the first question, parks were listed as a highlight of El Paso during a city swap more than a decade ago, and Sheen was famous for a top rated television show and is still well known.

The group would like to see alternative options for a sign, and suggested that Farnsworth Group would likely have someone in marketing/graphic design who could suggest options. They also agreed they need to look at the sign location to see if visibility will be a concern.

Other beautification issues:

The group briefly discussed the adopt-a-flowerbed program. Topics included consistency of look, and there was a suggestion that the city purchase pallets of specific flowers and deliver them to the people/groups that adopt a flowerbed, to ensure a more consistent look. Groups that would prefer different flowers can submit a drawing showing their plan. Derek noted that sometimes groups will adopt an odd number of flowerbeds.

A question of what to do with flowerbeds that are not adopted arose, with indicating that the council had previously decided that grass – either normal grass or ornamental grasses – be planted in those flowerbeds. Derek said planting regular grass would also require them to remove the brick border, as the Parks and Recreation Department had bordered each flowerbed when the program was created. The committee will continue to discuss the topic at the next meeting.

Ellen suggested that the council members be sure to ask that their constituents let them know if they see a property deteriorating, believe a property has been abandoned, or notice a concern that should be addressed, as the council can then take appropriate action, whether that be to request a wellness check, contact the landlord, or some other action.

Next meeting: The Beautification Committee will hold another meeting at 6 p.m. July 16, prior to the regular City Council meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jennie Kearney, chair of the Beautification Committee.