

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on Tuesday, February 15, 2022 at 6:08 p.m., immediately following the Special Called Public Facilities Meeting, Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. Staff Discussion Items

A. 2022-34 Tree Canopy Update

Bridget Lawlor, GIS Manager, presented the Tree Canopy Update. Every two to three years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture acquires four-band digital imagery during the growing season in the United States through the National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP). The four-band imagery illustrates vegetation in natural color and near infrared. The City runs GIS classification processes on the four-band imagery to create a tree canopy layer. These GIS processes are called Iso Cluster Unsupervised Classification, which separates the imagery pixels into groups based on their spectral characteristics. Using the NAIP imagery, as well as aerial imagery provided by Fulton County and Google street view, GIS then assigns each group a classification: Canopy, Non-Canopy, Unknown/Mixed. GIS next repeats Classification again with just the Unknown/Mixed pixels and assigns these new groups a classification until all the pixels had a classification of either Canopy or Non-Canopy.

This year, there was significant cloud coverage over the Rivershore Estates, Mountaire and Amberidge neighborhoods, so GIS used the 2017 classifications in these areas covered by the clouds. There is denser Canopy in the older neighborhoods and Chattahoochee National Recreation Areas. Non-canopy is along transportation corridors and commercial areas and power lines. GIS Staff estimates the City's tree canopy in 2019 to be 56.5% to 59.7% and between 57.7% to 62.9% in 2017. The City continues to hover around 58%, but the margin of error has improved.

Comparing other cities in the metro area, other Sandy Springs tree canopy is in a similar range to Alpharetta, Brookhaven, Decatur and Johns Creek.

The North End canopy is increasing due to new plantings maturing. Areas with development changes have seen canopy decreases. Overall canopy estimates year-to-year are within the margin of error., hovering around 58%. The 2021 NAIP Imagery will be available in summer of 2022. The City will complete a classification and updated canopy analysis in the fall of 2022.

Councilmember John Paulson asked can GIS study how much canopy has been lost because of highway projects.

GIS Manager Lawlor advised yes, that can be done, and can be reported in the next update.

Councilmember Andy Bauman asked can information be quantified by zoning district, so the City can review the impact of development.

GIS Manager Lawlor replied yes, in theory. Because it is automated process, smaller areas, such as by parcel, can be difficult with current resources and may not be as accurate.

B. 2022-35 Discussion of Potential New Uses for the Tree Fund

Catherine Mercier-Baggett, Sustainability Manager, presented potential new uses for the City's Tree Fund, first reviewing the benefits of trees. Currently, Development Code, Sec. 9.3.8.C., Establishment of Tree Bank, 3., provides that funds maintained in the Sandy Springs Tree Bank are administered by the Director pursuant to the rules and regulations regarding the funds as established by the Sandy Springs City Council for the purposes of replacing tree canopy or canopy preservation. Current City initiatives using Tree Bank resources include tree planting, survey of all public trees, maintenance plans, tree maintenance of public trees, and invasive species control in public parks.

Tree Fund Balance	
Current balance, approx.	\$920,000
Est. revenue, FY2022	\$300,000
Annual expenditures, avg.	\$150,000

In an effort to maintain the existing canopy, work with the community and employ a preference for species that provide multiple benefits, Staff recommends several pilot programs to more efficiently use Tree Bank Uses:

Property Acquisition. Acquire properties, or portions of, with canopy coverage greater than 75%, include overgrowth, and are sensitive habitat areas (wetlands, steep slopes, endangered species, etc.). These properties are for conservation, and should not be developed as active parks.

Landmark Tree Maintenance. Based on a treatment plan of pruning, fertilizer, etc. approved by a certified arborist, assist private property owners with the maintenance of their 27" DBH (hardwoods) or 30" DBH (pines) landmark tree (as defined by City code). The City could provide a cost-share of 25% City and 75% property owner, with a maximum of a \$1,000 City match per property every four years.

Planting on Private Property. The City could implement a resource-sharing program with property owners, where the City provides trees, soil and plantings, and the property owner is responsible for site preparation. Two initiatives that could fall under this program include:

1. equity plantings would include multi-units with rates for less than 80% of AMI households and single units with income less than 80% of AMI households; and
2. for nonresidential properties, where the properties should be legal, nonconforming parking lots.

Educational Activities. Create a dedicated education program to host activities such as seminars on tree selection and care; pruning classes, invasive removal workshops and volunteer events; activities with children; and Arbor Day celebrations.

Additionally, the Council may consider creating an Urban Forestry Coordinator position, which could be funded through the Tree Bank. The Urban Forestry Coordinator would be tasked with the oversight and management of all Tree Bank programs and providing arborist support and expertise on City projects.

Alternate options include payment for ecosystem services or stream buffer restoration.

Mayor Rusty Paul noted invasives, particularly the English Ivy, are detrimental on to the trees. The Education Program is crucial.

Councilmember Melody Kelley asked what percentage of the City's canopy is owned by the City. Will planning include a target number?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied that could be possible, but it is difficult to identify a meaningful number.

Councilmember Melissa Mular asked what type of guardrails could be put in place to ensure owners would not remove what the City has put in place.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied there could be a contract with the property owner, where if resources are damaged or removed, the property owner would repay the City for the loss.

Councilmember Andy Bauman asked should the City drill down further to identify reforested area needs.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied yes, by going into the field to identify areas ready to accommodate trees. A big issue in the area are all of the utilities, such as when wanting to plant in the right-of-way.

Councilmember Bauman asked how many arborists does the City currently employ.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied that Community Development has an arborist, along with an arborist in Recreation and Parks who's primary responsibility is a landscape management.

Councilmember Bauman stated the Urban Forestry Coordinator position is favorable, but maybe funded outside of the Tree Bank, as it is a universal need in terms of sustainability. Tree Bank should be put towards plantings, resources and incentives. Are the current City fines still valid? Most concerning is the cutting gets done for expedience, when best-practice may suggest other options.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied it would be most helpful if developers could meet with the City's arborist prior to creating their plan.

Councilmember Jody Reichel agreed hiring another arborist would be helpful to make the City's arborist resources more accessible to people. Property acquisition is interesting, but more information is needed about the private property recommendations.

Councilmember John Paulson suggested the Urban Forestry Coordinator position could be part-time, where the work can be split to support other arborist needs. Education is key. There are a lot of parking lots in the city that could benefit from planting and vegetation.

Mayor Paul noted the city needs trees that bloom in July, August, September and October such as a basswood trees. The city needs early blooming trees as well. There should also be an education program about the importance of the streambanks and how to restore streambanks that have lost their buffer. Lastly,

the Georgia Department of Forestry gives away seedlings, including certain species that grow very quickly and are easy to plant.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio stated clear-cutting is significantly impacting District 5. It is partially education and enforcement. Perhaps there needs to be better review of permits and enforcement. Perhaps the City should require people to have some sort of education about the value of trees when applying for permits.

II. Public Works

C. 2022-36 Abernathy Road at GA 400 Reconstruction

William H. Martin, Jr., AIA, Director of Public Works, stated City Staff have met with the Georgia Department of Transportation to address concerns about the presented alternative, which is to shut down Abernathy Road on I-285/400 for nine consecutive days, beginning February 25, 2022. This would negatively impact day-time traffic and there are public safety concerns.

Nick Buggenhout, Project Manager, north perimeter contractors, LLC ("NPC"), presented the Abernathy Road at GA 400 Construction update. Starting February 25th, 2022, it is proposed as an alternative that Abernathy Road will be closed under SR 400 through March 6th, 2022. Construction crews will work through the day and night. The closure will detour motorists along Mount Vernon Highway in both eastbound and westbound directions. The exit ramps from SR 400 northbound and southbound will remain open for motorists to exit and turn right onto Abernathy Road. Access for emergency services could be provided under SR 400.

Mount Vernon Highway Detour

The bridge will be open along Mount Vernon Highway with four lanes to help experience an influx of traffic to help alleviate any delays on local roadways. Message boards will be installed to help direct traffic through the detour routes.

Abernathy Road Detour

Motorists traveling on Abernathy Road westbound should turn left onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should continue on Mount Vernon Highway and turn right onto Barfield Road (road changes to Mercedes-Benz Drive). Motorists should continue traveling on Mercedes-Benz Drive to access Abernathy Road.

Motorists traveling on Abernathy Road eastbound should turn right onto Mercedes-Benz Drive (road changes to Barfield Road). Motorists should continue traveling on Barfield Road and turn left onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should continue on Mount Vernon Highway to access Abernathy Road.

Motorists traveling on SR 400 northbound to Abernathy Road westbound should exit onto Abernathy Road. Motorists should turn right onto Abernathy Road. Motorists should continue on Abernathy Road and should turn right onto Peachtree Dunwoody Road. Motorists should turn right onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should turn right onto Barfield Road (road changes to Mercedes-Benz Drive). Motorists should turn left onto Abernathy Road.

Motorists traveling on SR 400 southbound to Abernathy Road eastbound should exit onto Abernathy Road. Motorists should turn right onto Abernathy Road. Motorists should continue on Abernathy Road

and should turn left onto Mercedes-Benz Drive (road changes to Barfield Road). Motorists should continue on Barfield Road and should turn left onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should continue on Mount Vernon Highway and turn left onto Peachtree Dunwoody Road. Motorists should continue on Peachtree Dunwoody Road to access Abernathy Road.

Motorists traveling on Abernathy Road eastbound to SR 400 northbound should turn right onto Mercedes-Benz Drive (road changes to Barfield Road). Motorists should continue on Barfield Road and turn left onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should continue on Mount Vernon Highway and turn left onto Peachtree Dunwoody Road. Motorists should turn left onto Abernathy Road to access SR 400 northbound.

Motorists traveling on Abernathy Road westbound to SR 400 southbound should turn left onto Mount Vernon Highway. Motorists should continue on Mount Vernon Highway and turn right onto Barfield Road (road changes to Mercedes-Benz Drive). Motorists should continue on Mercedes-Benz Drive and turn right onto Abernathy Road to access SR 400 southbound.

By implementing this nine-day closure, construction crews will be able to work on several issues and concerns that the traveling motorists and walking pedestrians have brought to the contractor's attention, including: easier access to on-ramps and exiting onto Abernathy Road, along with helping pedestrians navigate along Abernathy Road. This closure will help expedite the process of being able to implement the proposed diverging diamond interchange (DDI) sooner than anticipated, not necessarily after the nine-day closure, but in the coming weeks to follow. With the opening of the bridge along Mount Vernon Highway we will be able to help alleviate the influx of traffic that will happen due to the Abernathy Road closure and it will be prepared for future motorists once Abernathy Road closure is complete. Finally, completing Mount Vernon Highway will allow the City of Sandy Springs to commence with future improvements in the area.

After the demolition and removal of the existing bridge, construction will begin on double right and left lanes allowing motorists to enter SR 400 northbound and southbound or continue along Abernathy Road through a DDI movement, scheduled to open in May, 2022.

The public can access additional information, such as traffic impact reports, project maps, and an image gallery, by contacting the Transform 285/400 Project Team at email transform285400@dot.ga.gov, phone (404) 609-4609, or online at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/BuildSmart/Projects/Pages/I285SR400.aspx>.

Mayor Rusty Paul stated Abernathy is the main corridor connecting to the Perimeter market. Is there enough time to educate travelers? GDOT has been a good partner, and this is probably going to be the most disruptive projects. GDOT have been a great partner on this difficult project.

Marlo Clowers, Georgia Department of Transportation, stated if the City wants to move forward with the proposal, there would need to be an extreme push to get the word out.

Councilmember Jody Reichel advised the following week is when many private schools have spring break, and there may be less traffic.

Councilmember John Paulson stated an additional week may provide more time to ensure ancillary roadways are open as planned and signage is available to support the nine-day closure, which is favorable to the 40 nights of work.

Project Manager Buggenhout explained the alternate closure would not be done if Mount Vernon was not fully open with the two eastbound lanes and two westbound lanes.

Councilmember Melissa Mular asked what does the Department gain by moving up the timeframe to a shorter. This will significantly impact those living along Barfield and Mt Vernon, and is not favorable.

Project Manager Buggenhout replied there are cost savings by eliminating night work and the project is built quicker.

Mayor Paul asked what the plan is to safely reroute people who do not exit and try to cross through Abernathy.

Project Manager Buggenhout stated the Department will use message boards, and more people are currently using Hammond because of the current traffic disruptions on Abernathy.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio emphasized the need to coordinate during school breaks.

Public Works Director Martin advised prior to making a final decision, the contractor should provide more detailed traffic analysis to understand the significance of the nine-day disruption.

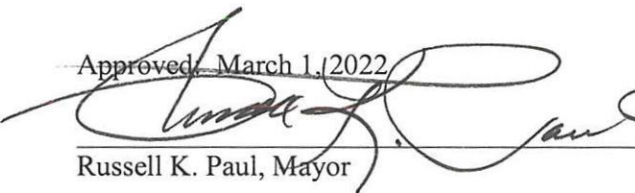
Mayor Paul instructed the City Staff to coordinate with GDOT to identify the best solution.

III. City Council Discussion Items

There were no City Council Discussion items.

The meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Approved: March 1, 2022


Russell K. Paul, Mayor


Raquel D. González, City Clerk