

Work Session of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on February 21, 2023 at 6:00 PM, Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

I. Staff Discussion Items

Mayor Rusty Paul called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

A. 2023-049 2023-2027 CDBG Consolidated Plan Update

Michele McIntosh-Ross, Planning & Zoning Manager, presented the 2023-2027 Consolidated Plan Update.

The Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Plan is designed to help states and local jurisdictions assess their affordable housing and community development needs and market conditions, and to make data-driven, place-based investment decisions. The consolidated planning process serves as the framework for a community-wide dialogue to identify housing and community development priorities that align and focus funding from the Office of Community Planning and Development's (CPD) formula block grant program: Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). The Consolidated Plan is carried out through Annual Action Plans, which provide a concise summary of the actions, activities, and the specific federal and non-federal resources that will be used each year to address the priority needs and specific goals identified by the Consolidated Plan. Grantees report on accomplishments and progress toward Consolidated Plan goals in the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER).

The City of Sandy Springs was awarded \$550,054 in August of 2022. The city has been and will continue to utilize the CDBG grant to fund capital projects noted in our Consolidated Plans and Annual Action Plans.

Councilmember Melody Kelley asked what does the purple line and the orange line on the Hope Road Sidewalk Project design picture represent.

Planning & Zoning Manager McIntosh-Ross said blue lines are census tracts with census blocks. Staff will add labels to this.

Kristin Byars Smith, Assistant City Manager, replied the purple line is Roberts Drive. The City of Sandy Springs has a side project here. This shows how it will begin to connect into a larger network.

Councilmember Kelley asked will Staff partner with the Community Assistance Center for input over the 30 days?

Planning & Zoning Manager McIntosh-Ross replied they were present at the open house and provided input. We have had many discussions with them for other projects as well. The comments received are reflected there. They support our decisions, based upon the data, to continue with sidewalks.

B. 2023-050 Presentation of the Community Forest Master Plan

Catherine Mercier-Baggett, Sustainability Manager, presented the Community Forest Master Plan.

The intent of the Community Forest Master Plan (CFMP) is for the City of Sandy Springs to receive five

points for the Green Community Certification after its adoption. This is the combination of two existing documents: the Canopy Study presented almost a year ago by GIS Manager Bridget Lawler, and the Community Tree Measurement Plan prepared by a consultant and used internally to manage our public trees. The Canopy Study, based on 2019 data, was conducted in 2021 by the City's GIS team and concluded in 2022. The estimated canopy coverage was 58% with a new update coming soon and we will be able to conduct more in-depth analysis than the past. The other component of the Forest Master Plan is the Tree Management Plan prepared by a reputable consulting group. They surveyed most of the trees the City of Sandy Springs owns and maintains, and 11,400 trees are part of that assessment. The City's trees overall are doing well, 80% are in very good condition, 12% percent are in fair condition. There are 304 identified for removal with most due to dangerous situations. 84 % of the City's trees do not need any maintenance and we will have to conduct some additional inspections on 282 trees. This document is interesting, technical, and very in-depth, and anyone interested is encouraged to review. Overall, 117 different species have been inventoried as part of this management plan. The five most abundant species represent 60% of all the trees. This means we have a relatively low biodiversity in terms of tree canopy. Most of the young trees recently planted, are small growing species. The recommendations out of the plan is to increase the species diversity and to plant large growing species.

Councilmember John Paulson said the City has ranked trees by large, medium, and small specimens. The large trees are given points - some of those trees you get 80 points, other trees get only 30. Should we plant 80-point trees instead of the 30? Where is this going?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied the wildlife supported score is part of the text amendment. It is a different document. It is definitely something that should be considered when selecting the species that will be planted.

Councilmember Andrew Bauman asked if Council needs to approve the adoption of the plan. Is this tied to a certification application? If so, what is the deadline?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied yes, Council will be asked to adopt the plan at the next City Council meeting. This is also part of the City's application for the Green Communities Certification, whose deadline is March 30.

Councilmember Bauman said positive comments, many technical in nature, have been received. There should be an opportunity for public input before the next meeting.

Kristin Byars Smith, Assistant City Manager, replied this can be done. The Davey Resource Group's Tree Canopy Study Report (2021) is technical in nature. There are some discussions about how to dig into this more and start to look at things. The important piece is the City has a lot of GIS work to do this year and will dive in more on our tree canopy assessment.

Councilmember Bauman said that may be a discussion at some point. While the City has an estimated canopy coverage of 58%, Figure 3: Canopy Coverage Change from 2017 to 2019 illustrates that 80% of the land area in the City has a loss of canopy of anywhere from 5% to 20%, or in some cases 50% to 75% loss. This is something the City needs to dive into. This plan is not a community plan but the public property plan. The plan says in its conclusion, it wants to "incentivize private landowners to care for their trees and to plant new..." Is the report suggesting revisions to the tree canopy or to the tree ordinance? What are they suggesting? It would be helpful to hear some public comment before the City adopts the plan. Finally, there is a priority list that ordered the work that needed to be done (Section 3: Recommended Management of the Public Tree Resource). That included priority tree removals, stump removals and replacement of trees. Many would agree that one issue the city is dealing with is loss of

canopy. This document talks about budgeting and speaks to presumable use of tree fund. The City should raise the priority of large tree replacements and technically which ones they should be. The City can adopt it, there may be some things that would warrant revisions. This is the public property action plan when much of the loss of canopy is occurring on residential and commercial property.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied Staff intends to dig deeper into the canopy study. Part of a budget request will be support for an environmental stewardship strategy. This will cover what can we do to help the conservation of forest patches on private property. What you see today is the first iteration. We want to build on that now that we have an Urban Forest Coordinator who can dedicate a lot of time.

Councilmember Bauman stated Staff is encouraged to act quickly in a way that does not delay the schedule we need to adhere to. We can always revise it. There are citizens who are interested. I am interested in establishing some program or setting a meeting up here at City Hall where people can come in and submit some comments.

Councilmember Melissa Mular thanked Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett for the presentation. It is surprising how many cities are behind Sandy Springs.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied the City of Sandy Springs has a relatively heavy canopy compared to other cities. A lot depends on development patterns. The more urban, the less room there is for trees.

Councilmember Mular asked will this program support the identification of where invasive species are and then removing them?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett said it is very difficult to tell what is going on in the private forests. It has not been noted for the trees in the City of Sandy Springs. We need to get the community involved in reporting what they see. We are going to work on a strategy as to what to do if these bugs make their way to the City.

Councilmember Mular asked do we also look for trees that are those kinds of nuisances?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett said we do eradicate them in our parks. The Invasive Control Specialist goes out and removes mostly vines, privet, or the such.

Councilmember Mular said the yearly costs are surprising low. Sandy Springs has more than 20 acres. We spend a considerable amount of money, including fertilization and pest control. Is there a way to evaluate validate these numbers?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied Davey would need to confirm this information.

Councilmember Tibby DeJulio asked if the 11,400 trees surveyed are strictly on City property? We have not considered anything on private property?

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied yes that is correct.

Councilmember Melody Kelley asked if this includes right-of-way and conservation areas.

Sustainability Manager Mercier-Baggett replied yes. Includes rights-of-way and parks.

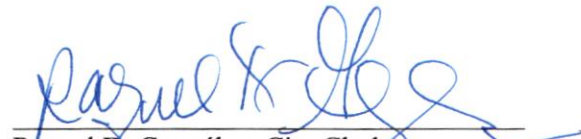
II. City Council Discussion Items

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

Approved: March 7, 2023



Russell K. Paul, Mayor



Raquel D. González, City Clerk