

The Delaware Gazette

City discusses tree preservation

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A group of Delaware residents is calling on the city to take increased preventive measures to slow down what they feel is a rapid decline of the city's tree canopy. During Monday's meeting of City Council, a petition to improve tree preservation practices was read for consideration by council before being tabled as the city prepares its next steps in addressing the matter.

The petition was originally presented to the city's Shade Tree Commission on Oct. 26 before being submitted to council on Nov. 22.

In the petition, residents highlighted four specific ways in which the city can better preserve the existing tree canopy of Delaware, beginning with the support of an ordinance or resolution by council "to require adherence to the Codified Ordinances of Delaware, Ohio Chapter 1168 in all development, including planned mixed-use overlays."

The petition noted that Chapter 1168 was written and adopted to establish the inclusion of tree preservation in all zoning texts. However, the petition stated the residents' belief that planned mixed-use overlay districts have been exempt from following the ordinance.

"Such exemption should end immediately, and all development that has not completed its final approvals from the date of this petition henceforth shall once again be held to the standards found in Chapter 1168 of the Codified Ordinances of Delaware, Ohio," the petition stated.

Additional requests stated in the petition included the requirement of an iTree study to be conducted for all future developments, with the Shade Tree Commission reviewing the study before making further suggestions, as well as changing the city's requirements for tree replacement as found in Chapter 1168.

The petition asked that the city "create new requirements that would acknowledge the value of slow-growing trees and typical layers of tree growth in forests that also contribute to our tree canopy."

Finally, the petition requested that the city give immediate attention to the Delaware Together Comprehensive Plan's goals relating to the preservation of natural resources. Specifically, the petition asked that goal E3.5 of the plan, which covers the considerations of natural resources zoning overlay districts, be made a "high priority item."

"Our continued growth as a city cannot be at the expense of all of our natural resources. We need swift action to preserve our tree canopy," the petition stated in closing.

Following the reading of the petition, City Manager Tom Homan discussed a "working group" of community stakeholders that is being established to help the city to decide how to move forward with changes to its tree preservation policies.

“We are in the process of putting together the working group that will assist staff and, ultimately, City Council on making changes to Chapter 1168, which is the tree preservation chapter of the Code of Ordinances ... We are not at the point where we can sufficiently address all of the requests that are made in this petition,” Homan told council.

Homan recommended that council table the petition until “the end of the third quarter,” which he acknowledged seemed like a long time. However, he said tabling the petition until then would allow the working group to complete their work and come back to council with recommendations on how to move forward.

Addressing concerns about a member of the Building Industry Association (BIA) being included in the working group, Homan said it is important to get the feedback of all stakeholders in the community. Romanelli and Hughes Building Company’s Jim Ohlin, who also served on the city’s comprehensive plan steering committee, is expected to serve as the BIA representative in the group.

Councilman Stephen Tackett noted that the BIA representative will ultimately be just one voice in a group representing the entire community.

Homan added that given recent court rulings regarding the use of trees as an exaction, the city has to make sure its code is “defensible and legal” when dealing with the developers who are writing the checks for those trees, further necessitating the input of a developer’s perspective.

Source: <https://www.delgazette.com/news/95691/city-discusses-tree-preservation>