

STUDY SESSION
Urban Forestry Commission Report
CITY HALL, Fifth Floor
6801 Delmar Blvd., University City, Missouri 63130
Monday, June 9, 2025
5:30 p.m.

AGENDA

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

At the Study Session of the City Council of University City held on Monday, June 9, 2025, Mayor Terry Crow, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

In addition to the Mayor, the following members of Council were present:

Councilmember Stacy Clay; (*arrived at 5:35*)
Councilmember John Tieman
Councilmember Steven McMahon; (excused)
Councilmember Lisa Brenner
Councilmember Dennis Fuller
Councilmember Bwayne Smotherson

Also in attendance were City Manager, Gregory Rose; City Attorney, John F. Mulligan, Jr.; Director of Parks, Recreation & Public Area Maintenance, David Girdler; Forester/Staff Liaison, Jacob Kaiser; Commissioners Tim Schroeder; Dana Barhard; Kathryn Freese; Theodore Smith; Linda Fried, and Roger McFarland.

2. CHANGES TO REGULAR AGENDA

None

3. URBAN FORESTRY REPORT

Mr. Rose stated staff is asking that Council receive a presentation from the Urban Forestry Commission.

Mr. Girdler introduced the Chair of the Commission Tim Schroeder and Jacob Kaiser the City's Forester. Although the recent weather events have been devastating, the City's trees are an important asset that Mr. Kaiser, with the support of this Commission, has done an excellent job taking care of.

Commissioner Schroeder introduced members of the Commission; Dana Barhard, Kathryn Freese, Theodore Smith, Linda Fried, and Roger McFarland, and thanked Council for taking the time to listen to what they have been working on for the last year and a half. He stated that while two of their members are absent tonight, they are fortunate to now have a full Commission with seven members. Most of these members have only been active for a relatively short period of time, so their first task was to start at the beginning to gain a clear understanding of their purpose.

This report is a result of that work, which they hope will help Council and this administration make decisions regarding the trees in U City. Their next goal is to establish a yearly update that illustrates any problem areas and the progress being made.

History

University City has been designated as a Tree City by the Arbor Day Foundation since 1982. U City's approach to forest husbandry from 2010 through 2018 was primarily three-fold:

- Respond to resident complaints and concerns about City-managed street trees
- Care of trees in parks as issues arise
- Clean up from storm damage to City-managed trees

During this period the Forestry Department's role in its care for City-managed trees was reactionary.

Recent History

- In 2020 a tree inventory was commissioned to catalog all City-managed trees; including size, species, and geo-location. *(This did not include Ruth Park)*
- As a result of this study, an annual pruning program was initiated to cycle through the entire City every 5 years.
 - Important for the life of the tree
- The Forestry Commission has come under new leadership, brought in new members, and collected accurate data to maintain this vital infrastructure; Our Urban Forest.

2023-2024 Forestry Commission Report

In May of 2023, the Forestry Commission determined that it would be important to identify Key Performance Indicators to:

- Objectively measure the health of our City-managed trees and regularly report their status
- Compare U City's performance against established standards
- Identify needs for consideration in the Forestry Division Budget
- Encourage good tree husbandry of privately owned trees by residents
 - A lot of trees that contribute to the City's canopy are not managed by the City
- Create a Resident Communication Plan

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

1. Canopy Coverage
 - The I-Tree Canopy tool provides satellite imagery that helps you identify trees and determine how much coverage you have
 - Includes City-managed and privately owned trees
2. Numbers of trees
3. Number of trees pruned, planted, or removed each year
4. Tree species diversity
 - Important in identifying specific diseases
5. Tree size class distribution
 - Helps you identify if this is a healthy distribution
6. Percentage of contract versus in-house work
7. State/County tree management
8. New planting areas to be established
9. Resident communication

Canopy Coverage

The goal of tree coverage supported by the National Forestry Service is 40%.

The Forestry Commission used the "I-Tree Canopy" tool to estimate the actual Canopy Coverage of University City which is approximately 37%.

- What direction is this trending in
- The loss of trees due to storms or construction will have a direct impact

Number of Trees Maintained by Forestry Department:

- 7,721 Street Trees

- 2,978 Park Trees; (excludes Ruth Woods)

The current Forestry Department Staff oversees approximately 5000 trees per person.

Number of Trees Removed, Pruned & Planted

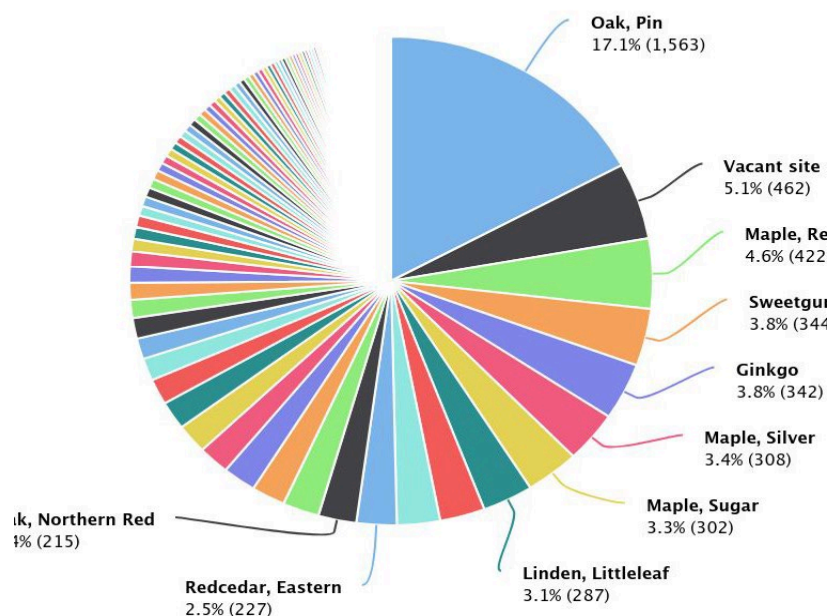
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Removed	263	178	223	265	248
Pruned	632	506	565	2011	1514
Planted	148	244	231	149	98

The number of trees pruned increased significantly in 2022 due to the addition of an annual pruning cycle.

- The pruning cycle is being done entirely by contractors
- Planting is being done by in-house staff and has gone down over the last four years due to being overwhelmed by storm cleanup and keeping up with removals
- Removals are staying consistent with the allocation of more money for contractors

Street Trees Species Diversity

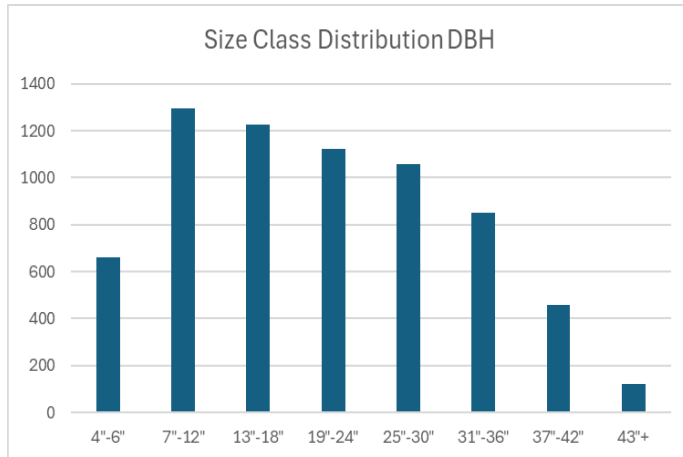
Count per (Common) Species



- 170 Different tree species managed by the City
- Pin Oak is the number one species by count with a 17% total
- Vacant sites are the next most prevalent and need to be replaced
- The industry standard is no more than 10% of any tree species

Tree planting must fill the vacant tree sites and targeted replacements must improve the diversity.

Tree Size Class Distribution



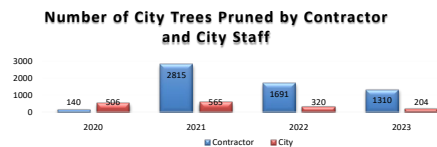
The size class distribution of a healthy urban forest should be a bell-shaped curve.

The Tree Size Class Distribution takes a generation to change and therefore must be monitored.

If the City can catch up on planting trees it will result in obtaining the desired curve.

Percentage of contract versus in-house work.

Pruning



- Pruning cycle started in 2021
- City staff decreased from 3 employees to 2 in 2020 and to 1 in 2024

Outsourcing was necessary to initiate the program but, in-house pruning results in better quality.

11

Outsourcing probably makes sense for a lot of the work that needs to be done.

Percentage of contract versus in-house work.

Planting



- Ash tree removal and new species replacement is by outside contractors. This program expires in approximately 7 to 10 years.
- Staffing restrictions and storm cleanup limited planting time in 2022 and 2023.

Planting can be done by either contract or in-house employees but, in-house is preferred for quality

12

The Commission would like to see more trees planted and yearly goals being established to determine if the City is moving in the right direction.

State/County Tree Management

Some of the most high-profile tree-lined streets in University City are not maintained by our Forestry Division because they are the responsibility of the County. These 519 trees equate to 7.6% of the street trees in U City.

The County prunes only on request, and removes trees when needed, but does not replace trees.

- The understanding is that the County does not want to take responsibility for maintaining more trees
- These 519 trees are at risk
- Absorbing these trees would not be a problem for U City

Trees are distributed as follows:

- Delmar – 230
- Hanley – 64
- Midland – 158
- North and South, McKnight, Pennsylvania and Vernon – 67

University City needs to take responsibility for managing these trees in order to ensure good husbandry of this significant asset.

Currently, No Planting Areas Have Been Established

“Heat islands” form when pockets of hot air reflected from hard surfaces such as buildings and streets create an unusual body of heat. Additional tree canopy can mitigate heat islands.

- St. Louis City has designated funds to identify heat islands and address them by establishing new planting areas
- University City also has areas that could be considered heat islands. Currently, there has been no analysis of heat islands in our community

The Commission recommends the identification of funding sources to undertake a heat island study.

Resident Communication

Canopy coverage is a collaborative effort between the City and the residents. The Commission has formed a sub-committee which has completed significant work on goals.

- 15 educational topics have been identified
- Communication methods such as print media, social media, and community communications have been identified
- Currently, one topic is being discussed in the City's quarterly newsletter
- Collaboration has begun between the Forestry, Parks, and Green Practices Commissions

Importance of Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Our summary evaluation is that insufficient resources have been allocated to grow our Forestry Division staff and equip staff to meet the goals defined by the Commission's KPIs.

Trees are a major value asset for University City and we have been taking them for granted. Planting and pruning are the best ways to maintain this valuable asset. Trees take a long time to grow but can be lost more quickly if proper husbandry is not a habit.

- Forestry and trees can be included in every project that is undertaken

- The Forestry Department is an excellent resource for new projects

The KPIs are designed to provide year-to-year consistent reporting to measure the health of our tree ecosystem. As the concerns grow about climate change more investment in the Urban Forest is required.

Major Issues Identified

- A. Forestry staff consists of 2 persons; often this is not sufficient to support needed maintenance, let alone improvement of our KPIs
- B. Forestry equipment is old and needs updating
- C. There are 462 planting sites where trees have been removed and have not been replaced
- D. 519 State/County Street trees within U City are not managed except for removal and storm damage clean-up
- E. There is limited outreach to the community regarding the Forestry Division
- F. The current Storm Cleanup Policy for a major storm detracts from Forestry's daily mission

Commissioner Schroeder stated the Report also contains an Appendix with definitions and a printout from the I-Tree Canopy tool. So, if Council needs additional information they will be happy to supply it.

Mayor Crow stated that he has been sitting on this dais for a long time, and rarely has he seen a report of this caliber from the Urban Forestry Commission. It has given him a lot to think about moving forward. So, on behalf of himself and his colleagues, he would like to thank the Commission for this well-organized presentation.

Commissioner Schroeder stated while reviewing some of the previous documents they came across a Forestry Management Plan that appears to have never gone through the formal approval process. The Commission's desire is to solidly pull together all of the City's official documents.

Councilmember Clay echoed the comments of Mayor Crow regarding the Commission's Report and acknowledged the significant work performed in good and bad weather, by Mr. Kaiser and his staff.

The City's trees are certainly an asset, and he would agree that without proper maintenance they can become a liability. It's rare for anyone to purchase a house in U City and not inherit at least one large tree, and tree maintenance is incredibly expensive; especially for the folks he represents in the 3rd Ward. Many of their complaints are about trees that they perceive need to be removed, either because the tree itself is in jeopardy or it is putting them in physical jeopardy. There is no easy answer, so he would stress the Commission's point about the need to get information out to the community about maintaining privately owned trees and how pruning can help remediate some of their problems.

With respect to the proposition of the City taking over State and county-owned trees, Councilmember Clay stated he hopes that the request would include providing corresponding resources to assist the City with managing those 519 trees.

Commissioner Schroeder stated this is something the Commission believed was above their pay grade. Clayton is also a Tree City and if you are designated as a Tree City you must have a Forestry Commission. So, if the City wants to address this issue one of his thoughts was to establish a Task Force that could talk to other Commissions to see if they might have a similar problem and perhaps work through this together.

Councilmember Fuller stated that a lot of this information was new to him, so he would like to associate himself with the compliments given on this presentation; it was really great. He then posed the following questions to Commissioner Schroeder:

Q. Did you say that the only thing the State and County will do for these 519 trees is prune or remove them?

A. *I'm not sure they even prune them.*

Q. Who replaces these trees if they are removed?

A. *They are not being replaced. Our understanding is that they will move a tree onto a resident's property if they want it to remain, but they will not replace it.*

Q. That's why you would like U City to start replacing those trees removed by the County/State?

A. Yes.

Q. Who would then be responsible for that tree?

A. *That's a good question.*

Q. Who would be legally responsible if that tree caused damage to someone's property?

A. *I'm sure they would not mind giving the City these trees, but I think responsibility and liability will be some of those thorny issues that will require legal guidance.*

Q. If the City were to plant a tree on their land wouldn't it remain under their jurisdiction?

Mayor Crow stated he believes these are questions for another day. However, he does not think that it would hurt to make outreach in order to get a little more clarification.

Councilmember Brenner stated she loves to have a lot of data when making decisions, so she appreciates this data that can be followed throughout the years. The City's canopy of trees is one of its assets, so there is a need to be aware of how we can all work together to keep them healthy. She stated one thought that might help bolster forestry's capabilities is for Mr. Rose to consider the need to update or replace old equipment in his discussions with other cities about the sharing of resources.

Commissioner Schroeder stated what he would like to make clear to everyone, is that while the Commission plans to keep reporting on the numbers and making suggestions, they understand that how these issues are addressed or any actions that are taken as a result of their reports will be totally up to the City's discretion.

Councilmember Smotherson thanked the Commission for its presentation and stated that he would like to discuss several issues occurring in the 3rd Ward.

Trees were removed and never replaced from four homes in the 1200 block of Purdue. When he asked if they would like to see a new tree planted, they all responded yes, but they would like the option of selecting the type of tree being planted. One tree they have shown particular interest in is the Crimson Century Maple. So, it would be great if the Commission could provide a list of the species available for replacing a tree that has been removed.

There are huge Elm Trees along Etzel that have been there for years. The problem is that these residents do not have driveways, and their only options are to park in the back alley; which is not safe, or on Etzel underneath these trees that are constantly destroying their cars and their lawns. Many have stated that reporting these issues to their insurance companies has been problematic.

The last complaint is from residents who have experienced their tree's roots growing into the sewer system. So, he would like to see some consideration given to these residents when they make requests to have these trees removed. Councilmember Smotherson stated he would also appreciate information explaining the importance of the City's trees and the steps that can be taken for maintaining or requesting that a tree be removed or replaced, provided to his 3rd Ward residents.

Commissioner Schroeder stated the Commission entertains providing residents with the opportunity to come to their meetings and discuss any problems they are having with a tree.

Councilmember Smotherson stated his understanding is that many have tried that avenue only to be told that their tree is healthy and cannot be removed.

Commissioner Schroeder stated he is only aware of two residents appearing in the last year and a half, so perhaps that's something that could be added to their communication topics.

Mayor Crow posed the following questions to Commissioner Schroeder:

Q. As Councilmember Brenner mentioned, the opportunity to utilize the resources and expertise of other communities would be interesting. Do you know if any of the other neighboring communities have forestry programs that are as active as Clayton and U City?

A. *Not at this time, but it's something I will look into.*

Q. Would it be of any benefit to have community organizations or schools help us plant trees or does it make more sense to have the professionals do it?

A. Something else the Commission has done is to self-educate itself on how trees should be planted, and there are some very technical things to know about planting a tree that even I did not realize. So perhaps, they could assist in planting small trees called "Whips," but not any of the bigger trees.

Q. Why was planting Pin Oaks so popular in U City?

A. Mr. Kaiser: *(Inaudible response)*

Mayor Crow stated unfortunately, the speaker was not at the microphone. But his answer was that Pin Oaks were so popular years ago because they were less expensive and there was little to no forethought given to diversifying the types of trees being planted.

Councilmember Clay posed the following questions to Commissioner Schroeder:

Q. Our existing trees are gigantic and just seem inappropriate for the City's tree lawns. So do you know what the average height of the new trees being planted will be?

A. *An interesting thing we learned about how to mitigate a tree's damage to sidewalks is that Cornell University has developed a compound that can be saturated into the ground and the tree's roots will follow that compound in any direction you desire. Sometimes you can even do this with existing trees. So, to avoid some of the situations we have now, this might be something to keep in mind as you're planting new trees.*

Q. Is it fair to say that the new trees we are planting will be smaller and more compact than our existing trees?

A. *(Mr. Kaiser): Our biggest problem with urban forestry is a monoculture where you have the same species of trees. As you saw on the inventory, 17% of the City's trees are mature Pin Oaks that we are starting to lose at a rapid rate. When choosing what tree to plant I have to think of things like power lines and the width of the tree lawn. That means that I am not going to plant the same tree on the 7000 block of Kingsbury as I am on the 6800 block of Corbett. So no, we will not be planting smaller trees everywhere. We love those big, beautiful trees that create so much shade that helps residents cool their homes, and improves the City's infrastructure when it is properly maintained. It's when you don't maintain them that they become a nuisance. Different trees fit in different places, but we're not going to see these results in our lifetime. It's for the next generation.*

4. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Crow thanked the Commission for providing an excellent report and adjourned the Study Session at 6:23 p.m.

LaRette Reese
City Clerk, MRCC