

**TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND
TREE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
July 28, 2025**

A regular meeting of the Town of Sullivan's Island Tree Commission was held at 4:00 p.m. at Town Hall. All requirements of the Freedom of Information Act have been satisfied. Present were Commission members Mark Miller, Derek Wade, Madeleine McGee and Milton Langley.

Members of the public present: None.

Members of Council: No members of Council were present.

Staff members present: Rebecca Fanning, Director of Resilience & Natural Resource Management, Charles Drayton, Director of Planning and Zoning and Christina Oxford, Building Department and Planning Assistant.

CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Miller called the meeting to order and stated that the press and public were duly notified pursuant to State Law and a quorum of Commission Members was present. There were no known members of the media present.

- I. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM , June 23, 2025:** Ms. McGee made a motion to grant approval of the June 23, 2025, Tree Commission Meeting Minutes. Mr. Wade seconded this motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

II. TREE REMOVAL REQUESTS:

2314 MYRTLE AVENUE: Arnett Custom Homes on behalf of homeowners, Michael and Jessica Beckerman, requests the removal of one (2) Category I trees, a Pecan (18" DBH) and a live oak (16" DBH). The request is being made in response to a violation of Zoning Ordinance, Section 21-162 B (Application for tree relocation, or removal and replacement). (PIN# 529-06-00-066) (Supporting Documentation: 1)

Mr Drayton made an estimate of the trees' canopy and form since the trees had already been removed before the site photos were taken. Before development, there was over 75% canopy coverage on the lot. Now there is around 60% coverage. The two trees that were removed without permits represented around 8% of the canopy coverage.

Mr Drayton stated the trees were presumably healthy specimens; they were not called out specifically for any reason in the arborist's preservation plan. Even with the removals, the lot remains at 60% canopy cover; therefore, staff recommends the Commission consider the replacement value of the trees that were removed and assess an appropriate mitigation fee.

The Commission questioned how the trees were allowed to be removed without proper permitting and suggested building permits should be held until tree removal permits are issued to keep unpermitted tree removals from occurring.

No public comment was made.

Mr. Tom Oakley presented his application to the Commission.

Mr. Oakley stated that the tree removals were an oversight by the site superintendent. Mr. Drayton stated the staff has the obligation to set mitigation at \$230 per inch but the Commission has the latitude to choose the mitigation fee they find appropriate. The Commission members determined to double the mitigation fees for removing the trees without a permit.

Mr. Langley made a motion to double the tree mitigation fees for the removal of the pecan and oak trees. Mr. Wade seconded this motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

1743 ATLANTIC AVENUE: Charleston Tree Company, LLC on behalf of homeowner, S. I. Development LLC, requests the removal of a Category I, triple-leader (5", 10", 5") cedar tree (20" DBH). The request is being made in accordance with Zoning Ordinance, Section 21-162 B (Application for tree relocation, or removal and replacement). (PIN# 523-12-00-021)

Mr. Drayton stated this is a healthy, triple-leader 20" cedar tree whose only flaw is being in the way of development. The applicant has initiated mitigation efforts on the lot already having planted 47 ½ inches of new plant materials plus 3 new palmettos on the property, the new plants include cedars, palmettos, hollies and magnolias. On the lot before development, there was a canopy coverage of 50% reduced to 19% with the removal of the oak and will be reduced to 16.66% with the removal of the cedar. The subject tree is not located in the buildable area of the lot but given the narrow width of the lot and the goal of saving the limbs of the large oak tree located along the street frontage, there is little alternative for siting the driveway except for where the cedar tree is located. Mr. Drayton stated the staff recommends full mitigation for the 20" Red Cedar, with consideration made for the plantings that have already been added to the property.

No public comment was made.

Arborist Cater Helms of Charleston Tree Company and Sammy Rhodes of Rhodes Construction, presented the application to the Commission.

The Commission was concerned about the oak on the front of the lot as it relates to the position of the driveway and the utility line trimming. Mr. Rhodes stated they have looked at

trying to flip the house to move the driveway to the other side of the lot but this position best accommodates the oak tree.

Mr. Langley made a motion to accept the application as presented with the amendment that the applicant plant to bring the canopy coverage on the lot to 20%. Ms. McGee seconded the motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. TREE REPLACEMENT VS FEE IN LIEU:

Ms. Fanning stated that Mt Pleasant has adopted an ordinance that requires homeowners to plant at least one tree and not paying in lieu the full mitigation and that it was thought that a similar resolution might be worth considering on the Island. Ms. Fanning stated that on Sullivan's Island there has been a drop in the tree removal permits that have chosen to pay the entire tree mitigation fee rather than replanting at least a portion of the mitigation requirement which appears to correlate with the increase in tree mitigation fees adopted by the Tree Commission that went into effect in 2024. After the increase, only one tree permit chose to pay the mitigation fee in full rather than replanting. Ms. Fanning continued by saying the majority of people who paid the mitigation fees rather than replanting were already above the 32% threshold of canopy coverage.

Mr. Wade stated that it should be up to the homeowner to decide whether they want to plant a tree or pay the mitigation fee otherwise you could end up with trees planted too closely together. He thought there should be an opportunity for homeowners to thin out trees if they are planted too densely. Ms. McGee suggested that maybe the number of trees shouldn't be as important as the canopy coverage. She also noted the canopy coverage will be decreasing as the size of the homes grows and questioned whether 32% is the correct number for canopy coverage. Mr. Drayton stated requiring planting would not be appropriate across the board. Perhaps considering canopy coverage in relation to tree planting requirements would be an option.

The Commission questioned what they could do with the money in the Tree Fund. Mr. Drayton stated that there are lots owned by the Town that could possibly be planted if it were the Council's will.

VI. DISCUSSION OF NATIVE PLANT WEEK OCTOBER 2025

Native plant week is scheduled for the third week in October. Ms. Fanning presented the sponsorship levels for the event and recommended the Palmetto Partner level that would include 3 full symposium tickets.

Ms. McGee made a motion to propose to Town Council that they use Tree Funds to be a Palmetto Partner sponsor at the cost of \$1000. Mr. Miller seconded the motion. All were in favor. None opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. ADJOURN: Mr. Miller made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:01 p.m. Mr. Wade seconded this motion. All were in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.



Mark Miller, Chairman



Date