



City of Rome Tree Board

Minutes

March 18, 2025, 2:00 P.M.

Rome-Floyd ECO Center

Present: Hannah Bagley, KRFB Program Coordinator
John Hendrickson, Tree Board Chairman
Chad Hampton, City of Rome Street Department Director
Ernest Watson, City of Rome Municipal Arborist
Michael Skeen, Floyd County Public Works Director
Brian Roberts, Environmental Compliance Manager
Josh Athon, Georgia Power
Georgia Burns, Tree Board Member

Call to Order:

Chairman John Hendrickson called this meeting to order. The minutes from the January 21st meeting were approved by common consent.

Reports

City of Rome

Mr. Hampton presented the 2025 Year-to-Date Summary of Tree Installations, expressing his appreciation to Mrs. Bagley for preparing a visual presentation to supplement the report, rather than relying solely on a verbal update.

He reported that the "rock ring" beside City Hall was cleared of overgrown arborvitae, which were replaced with a Japanese Maple as the new focal point. This ongoing project plans to add additional shrubs and flowering plants over time.

Along East 4th Avenue, in front of the Floyd County Administration Building, a Zelkova tree was removed due to root overgrowth, which was compromising the surrounding pavement and

creating tripping hazards for the public. Given the extent of root growth beneath the brick and concrete, the tree could not be saved and was replaced with another Zelkova. To prevent similar issues in the future, Mr. Watson installed a root barrier in the tree pit. This barrier redirects roots downward rather than outward into the concrete. He noted the ease of installation and expressed plans to implement this method in additional tree pits.

A new Eastern Redbud tree has been planted at Mitchell Plaza's corner of 3rd Avenue and Broad Street. According to Hampton, the original tree was a dwarf Redbud, the only option available at the time. It was replaced by a larger Redbud, however, at the request of David Mitchell.

During the past year, the Between the Rivers neighborhood has played a significant role in tree planting, funding all the trees installed. Recently, a Kwanzan Cherry tree was replaced after it was unintentionally killed by excessive herbicide application by a lawn maintenance worker. In addition to their aesthetic value, trees also contribute to the infrastructure of the neighborhood, as Mr. Hampton expressed his appreciation.

At the Labyrinth of Rome, managed by Lisa Smith, landscape improvements are underway. Ms. Smith acquired Tea Olive trees that were originally in the city of Cave Spring but were damaged in an accident. Rather than being discarded, she purchased and repurposed them with the guidance of Mr. Watson. This marks the first phase of landscaping enhancements, with additional flowers and shrubs already added to the area.

Covington Park was selected as the Arbor Day planting site. Mr. Hampton praised Mr. Watson, his crew, and Mrs. Bagley for their efforts in organizing and executing the event, which resulted in the planting of eight large-growth trees—two Black Gums and six Oaks. He also announced that the 2026 Arbor Day event will take place in North Rome at the Pocket Park adjacent to the well-known restaurant, Stanley's.

At Stonebridge Golf Course, landscaping improvements were made along Snead Avenue, where an old, dilapidated split-rail fence once stood. After meeting with golf course staff and City Clerk Joe Smith, it was decided to plant trees suited for full sun and manageable growth at maturity. Ten trees were installed, including two Purple Leaf Plums, four Pink Crabapples, and four Snow Crabapples. The new plantings have been well received and have enhanced the overall aesthetics of the area.

Finally, Mr. Hampton provided the Tree City Report, stating that year to date, 16 trees have been removed, with 118 hours dedicated to tree removals. Additionally, 20 trees have been installed, and 650 hours have been spent on tree maintenance. He concluded by thanking and

commending the Urban Forestry team, led by Mr. Watson, for their ongoing efforts to care for and maintain the City of Rome's trees throughout all seasons.

Mrs. Bagley introduced a new technology for tracking tree installations—Google Earth, an easily accessible tool available to everyone. She has begun mapping and monitoring all tree installations by Urban Forestry within the City of Rome. She believes this will provide the Board and citizens with a clearer understanding of the city's annual tree-planting efforts. Additionally, this system will allow Mr. Hampton and Mr. Watson to reference detailed information about each tree at the time of installation, including the date, time, and species.

Other Board members expressed support for this approach, noting that it offers an effective tracking solution without unnecessary complexity, particularly for monitoring tree installations funded by grants. Mrs. Bagley emphasized that this method leverages existing technology already in use, eliminating the need to purchase new software or reinvent the wheel.

Floyd County

Mr. Skeen reported that the County has not installed any trees at this time. However, tree removals were conducted in January and February, with 23 trees removed in January and 27 in February. These removals were necessary due to construction, dead or hazardous conditions. He noted that the county was fortunate to have sustained minimal damage from last week's storms, losing only 12 trees along the storm's path.

Mr. Roberts provided an update on multiple developments currently under construction or preparing to break ground. He expressed optimism about the ambitious efforts of developers working on a 122-home project off the Armuchee Connector. Despite not being required to replace trees due to the type of development, they have committed to planting one tree for each home, demonstrating a strong willingness to enhance the landscape.

Similarly, the Chulio Road development has plans to incorporate significant green spaces, with tree installations either already underway or scheduled for the near future. Mr. Roberts emphasized that it is encouraging to see developers proactively integrating trees and green spaces into their projects.

At Unity Point, he is currently working with the company on riverbank restoration and revitalization efforts as part of the ongoing development process.

Georgia Forestry Commission

Mr. Hawkins reported that the City of Rome is expected to receive approval for Tree City USA status soon. Currently, it is one of 40 cities still awaiting final approval. He has been in contact with Tara from the Arbor Day Foundation, who oversees the approval process.

Regarding the ReLeaf Grant, Mr. Hawkins noted that the grant cycle is expected to return this summer. However, due to government funding cuts, the program will have lower funding caps, making it more competitive for cities applying, as fewer funds will be available compared to previous years.

He also shared that the new Georgia Tree Council (GTC) Executive Director, Mel Sparrow, will soon be on maternity leave. During her absence, Mr. Hawkins will assist in filling her role.

Additionally, he mentioned upcoming changes to the third-quarter program, which will be held virtually instead of in person as a cost-saving measure. Unfortunately, the organization has had to lay off several employees.

Finally, Mr. Hawkins announced that the Annual Conference will be held at GTC headquarters in Macon, GA. The conference will continue to offer a variety of courses, and attendees will have the flexibility to either stay nearby or commute daily.

Old Business

Mr. Watson provided an update on tree maintenance at the Clock Tower, reporting that approximately 15% of the canopy on several trees had been pruned, along with the removal of some large limbs. He noted that, at this time of year, trees of that size should not be pruned beyond 20–25% of their coverage. The 15% reduction allows for healthier growth by reducing congestion and preventing branches from growing into one another. Additionally, some of the overgrown trees were obstructing the lights at the Clock Tower, and the pruning has helped restore visibility.

New Business

Mrs. Bagley recapped Arbor Day 2025 at Covington Park, highlighting its success with 65 citizens participating to support the community and tree canopy efforts.

She also informed the Board that she is seeking recommendations for rubber mulch at the newly renovated Rome-Floyd ECO Center. Given the area's heavy foot traffic and proximity to a frequently flooded zone, she believes rubber mulch would be an ideal solution. This material has already been tested, approved, and successfully implemented in downtown Rome's tree pits and multiple public parks. She has reached out to community partners and local businesses

for potential funding or support and is also considering including this as a capital project for the 2026 fiscal year.

Mr. Hampton acknowledged that while rubber mulch is a significant investment, it is a permanent solution that reduces maintenance labor. He emphasized that this would be a great application, similar to successful installations at the Town Green and Downtown Rome.

Upcoming Events

During the meeting, Mrs. Bagley informed the Board that they will be hosting their annual "Garden Party" on Friday, April 25th, at 5:00 PM in partnership with the Northwest Georgia Housing Authority. Through this event, residents are provided with fresh food from the community garden, and nutritional gaps are filled, thereby supporting underserved individuals. To make the garden a hands-on learning experience, families actively participate in its installation and maintenance. She emphasized that this initiative not only promotes sustainability but also teaches valuable lifelong skills. With many Board members being Master Gardeners, their expertise would be invaluable in educating and assisting families.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hannah Bagley

Hannah Bagley, Program Coordinator