



City of Rome Tree Board

Minutes

September 2025, 2:00 P.M.

Rome-Floyd ECO Center

Present: Hannah Bagley, KRFB Program Coordinator
Meredith Ulmer, Assistant City Manager
John Hendrickson, Tree Board Chairman
Chad Hampton, City of Rome Street Department Director
Ernest Watson, City of Rome Municipal Arborist
Seth Hawkins, Urban and Community Forest Program Coordinator
Keith Mickler, University of Georgia Extension Coordinator
Josh Athon, Georgia Power- Rome Distribution Arborist
Eddie Elsberry, Berry College
Pam Roberts, Tree Board Member
Georgia Burns, Tree Board Member

Guests: Julie Smith, Transportation and Trails Planner

Call to Order:

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

Reports

City of Rome

Mr. Hampton presented the City of Rome's 2025 Year-to-Date Summary. To date, 111 trees have been removed, requiring 413 labor hours. Additionally, 27 new trees have been installed, and tree maintenance has accounted for 3,110 labor hours, including pruning, watering, and other tree care activities.

Mr. Hampton also provided an update on a large tree removal on Highland Avenue. Unfortunately, a large limb from the tree fell and struck a car. After inspection by Mr. Hampton

and Mr. Watson, the tree was deemed dead and hazardous, warranting removal by a local contractor.

He further reported that, at the request of City Clerk Joe Smith, an inspection was conducted of trees on the Stone Bridge Golf Course property. Mr. Watson, Mr. Hampton, and Mr. Hawkins determined that roughly 75 pine trees were dead, with additional trees potentially affected by pine beetle infestation.

Georgia Power

Mr. Athon reported that Georgia Power is operating as normal, with no major projects at this time. Routine trimming is currently being conducted within both the City and County limits.

Berry College

Mr. Ellsberry reported that Berry College is currently focused on tree care, including limbing up trees, vertical mulching, and installing gator bags. They are preparing to partner with students, local companies, the Georgia DNR, and The Nature Conservancy to assist with prescribed burns. As this is the beginning of the season, training and education efforts are underway to ensure proper planting techniques. Much of the recent planting has been concentrated around the new science building, which is now complete.

Mr. Ellsberry also noted the discovery of additional Emerald Ash Borer infestations in multiple locations on campus. To efficiently identify affected trees, Berry is utilizing drones to assess tree canopies and pinpoint areas of concern, rather than surveying the property solely on foot.

Extension Office

Mr. Mickler reported the discovery of a new insect, the *jasmine leaf hopper*. While not currently affecting trees, it poses a significant threat to crops such as cotton, okra, and ornamental hibiscus. The insect is very small, and confirmed cases have already been identified in a local cotton field in Floyd County. Although it primarily feeds on cotton, Mr. Mickler expressed concern about what the insect will feed on once cotton is out of season, raising the question of whether trees may eventually be at risk. Homeowners who suspect the presence of this insect are asked to contact the Floyd County Extension Office at (706) 295-6210.

Mr. Mickler also announced that the annual Halloween Tree Walk will take place on October 31st in the ECO Greenway Arboretum. Additional details will be provided on the Extension Office's website: <https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices/floyd.html>.

Georgia Forestry Commission

Mr. Hawkins reported that the trees at Parks Hoke Park are looking healthy overall; however, two have died, a Redbud and a Sycamore. He is in discussions with Parks and Recreation to coordinate watering efforts and to organize a mulching day soon.

He also noted that the Tree City USA portal has opened. In past years, there have been delays with application reviews, but he plans to work closely with the Arbor Day Foundation this year to help avoid those issues.

Mr. Hawkins reminded members that the Georgia Tree Council Conference will be held November 5–6 in Macon, Georgia, at the former Macon shopping mall. The conference will feature excellent speakers, demonstrations, and educational sessions.

Mr. Hawkins thanked Mrs. Bagley for her efforts in applying for the ReLeaf Grant, which has been awarded to the City of Rome for \$15,000 to fund the Covington Park project. Mrs. Bagley added that this project will be fully contracted out, providing relief for the Urban Forestry crews. This grant requires no matching funds; the only staff responsibilities will be for Mr. Hampton and Mr. Watson to coordinate with contractors and oversee follow-up watering needs.

New Business

Mrs. Smith, Trails and Transportation Planner for the City of Rome, thanked the Tree Board and Mrs. Bagley for inviting her to share updates on the changes at the Mount Berry Trailhead. She informed the board about the new branding of Rome's trail system, now named the *AdventHealth Redmond ECO Greenway*. As part of AdventHealth Redmond's naming sponsorship agreement, both medical centers have committed to providing funding for five years and to construct a park at the Mount Berry Trailhead. Given the rising cost of playground equipment, this investment represents a significant win for both the City and County, which will not bear the expense.

This two-year project is now coming to life. Mrs. Smith shared a visual presentation of the conceptual plans, which include playground equipment, a rubberized porous ground surface, and a covered pavilion. As part of the redesign, the current trailhead sign, now located on the right-hand side, will be relocated to the left-hand side. Additionally, four arboretum trees will be transplanted to another location along the Mount Berry Trail, once they are dormant. While the space will function more as a "pocket park" than a traditional playground, it will officially be known as *Mount Berry Park*.

Mrs. Bagley added that this trail is consistently well-used by residents of all ages, regardless of weather, and expressed her belief that this addition will be a valuable and well-received enhancement to the community.

Mr. Hampton added that the affected Arboretum trees will be relocated to a new site along the trails. He assured the board that the trees would be moved during their dormant season to ensure the best chance of survival. Mrs. Bagley noted that letters have been sent to the families associated with the trees to inform them of the upcoming changes.

Mrs. Bagley shared that she has been working with a group of Berry College volunteers to address challenges with the original arboretum along the ECO Greenway behind the Emperors Stadium. When she assumed responsibility for the KRFB program, the inventory and care of existing plaques were not well documented. The goal of the volunteers is to identify each tree and pair it with its corresponding memorial plaque.

Some plaques have become overgrown or covered in dirt, and the students will clean and restore these plaques to their proper condition. Mrs. Bagley noted that some families choose to use the memorial plaque and tree as a tribute to their loved ones in place of a traditional headstone. The team is also exploring tree inventory software, potentially including a GIS component, to better track and manage all trees in the arboretum.

Mrs. Bagley noted that, although it is early to begin planning for Arbor Day 2026, the celebration is tentatively scheduled to take place in the new pocket park in North Rome. Tree species have been previously discussed, and once the project is completed, Mr. Hampton stated that another on-site meeting will be held to confirm that the selected species are appropriate for the space provided. Mrs. Bagley also encouraged the board to begin considering key community speakers who could be invited to take part in the Arbor Day ceremony.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Hannah Bagley

Hannah Bagley, Program Coordinator