



Minutes

Wilmington Tree Commission Regular Meeting

9:30 – 11:00 AM, August 20, 2025

Attendance

Bridget Callahan, Vice Chair – *in-person*
Catherine (Cate) Cardamone – *in-person*
Cathey Luna – *virtual*
Terri Parham – *in-person*
Rhonda Waterhouse – *in-person*
Jeanne Fisher – *in-person*

Ex-Officio:

Sally Thigpen – Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation
Haley Hopkins – Secretary, Staff Liaison, Long Range Planner, Planning and Development

1. Call to order at 9:34 A.M. Note presence of quorum, 6/9.
2. Review and approve minutes from June 18, 2025.
Motion to approve minutes by Jeanne Fisher, Second by Cate Cardamone. No discussion. All in favor, 6/9.
3. Annual Report – See Attached.
Motion to approve the Annual Report by Terri Parham, Second by Jeanne Fisher. No discussion. All in favor, 6/9.
4. **Heritage Tree Awards** – Update
 - a. One application to be reviewed, 1214 S. 4th St.
Motion to approve the Magnolia Tree at 1214 S. 4th Street as a Heritage Tree by Rhonda Waterhouse, Second by Terri Parham. No discussion. All in favor, 6/9.
5. Strategic Plan Updates
 - a. **Community Education to the Public**
Goal: Give presentations to three professional organizations that influence new community members on the value of trees and maintaining the tree canopy in Wilmington within 1-2 years.
Discussion: Working to identify organizations and partners and create resources to bring to the table. Local nurseries may be a vital partner in selling the vision of the importance of trees to new residents.
Follow-up items: Investigate local nurseries to be included in the pursuit of this goal (Bridget) and create a guide to the economic benefits of planting trees (Cate).

Tree Ordinance and Enforcement

Goal: Analyze current tree ordinance and recommend an amendment to the Land Development Code to increase tree retention in all new development within 2 years.
Discussion: Potential to reach out to admirable cities on their tree ordinances, but need to understand the current local regulations first. Alliance for Cape Fear Trees (Isabelle Shepherd) has created a visionary document of broad recommendations for improving the local tree ordinance, but it is not specific to the City of Wilmington. Isabelle offered to share a presentation on the document and vision at a future meeting. Requesting a presentation from the City of Wilmington Planning and Development department that details the current tree ordinance.

Follow-up items: Receiving presentation regarding the current tree ordinance followed by a presentation from the Alliance for Cape Fear Trees in October to discuss their policy recommendations.

b. Partnerships and Collaboration

Goal: Create a spreadsheet and score card with statistics regarding number of volunteers, volunteer hours, trees distributed and use to provide updates to the public, determine the impact of work completed, and evaluate current practices within 2 years.
Discussion: Created a working group to collect information for score card starting with volunteer hours, events, and actions in the previous fiscal year.

Follow-up items: Identify volunteer hours and events attended in the previous fiscal year (Rhonda and Jeanne).

6. Isabelle Shepherd - Update on activities of the Alliance for Cape Fear Trees

- a. Code and Canopy – ACFT has completed a draft of ‘Code and Canopy,’ a visionary document of policy statements and recommendations for preserving and planting trees in new development*
- b. Grants – ACFT received \$25,000 from Duke Energy to distribute 900 trees in Downtown and is working with the city on locations. They also received \$4,000 from Residents of Old Wilmington (ROW) for a planting in the Northside. They have received \$5,000 from the NC Urban Forestry Council for street trees in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Audi Cape Fear is interested in sponsoring another planting.*
- c. Tree Stewards – The next Tree Stewards class is this October, meeting each Saturday. Thirty-one stewards are registered. This class will include DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) training.*
- d. Other Projects – ACFT is interested in working with WAVE Transit to revitalize bus stops with trees to provide shade and cooling.*

7. New Business

- Native Plant Festival – September 17-20, 2025
Cate/Bridget to reach out to organizer to confirm format and potential for participation.
- Fire in the Pines – October 4, 2025, 10:00 AM -3:00 PM at Halyburton Park
Sign up to be completed before the next meeting.
- Top 10 Native Plant Lists – Interest in creating a presentation version of the lists to have on hand for presentation requests.

Next Meeting is September 17, 2025, at 9:30 A.M., 929 N. Front St, 2nd Floor, Room 269.

- a) Adjourn – 10:42 A.M.



Wilmington Tree Commission

Annual Report

FY2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30 2025)

-
- 1. Overview**
 - 2. Initiatives and Workplan**
 - 3. Programs**
 - 4. Advocacy**
 - 5. Events, Education, and Outreach**

1. Overview

Membership*

Commissioner	Email	Term Expiration
Thomas Boland, Chair	tom.boland78@gmail.com	6-18-2026
Bridget Callahan, Vice Chair	sharpshinyclaws@gmail.com	6-18-2027
Catherine Cardamone	catherinecardamone@gmail.com	6-18-2026
Jeanne Fisher	jleef54@gmail.com	6-18-2028
Cathey Luna	cathey@lunaad.com	6-18-2028
Matthew Moore	matthewmoore1776@gmail.com	6-18-2026
Terri Parham	terri.r.parham@gmail.com	6-18-2027
Alana Seaman	seamana@uncw.edu	6-18-2026
Rhonda Waterhouse	rlw118@gmail.com	6-18-2028

Ex Officio

Aaron Reese – Forestry Management Supervisor, Parks and Recreation

Sally Thigpen – Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation

Haley Hopkins – Planner I, Planning and Development (Staff Liaison)

**As of 7/15/2025*

Mission Statement

"To promote, protect and enhance our urban forest"

Monthly Meetings

Regular Meetings scheduled for the 3rd Wednesday of each month, 9:30 am at 929 N. Front Street on the 2nd Floor.

Purpose of the Commission

"The Commissions mission is to promote and endorse programs and policies to support, maintain, and grow our urban forest, increase public education, and establish award and recognition programs as incentives to encourage a healthy, safe, and attractive natural environment for the City of Wilmington."

City Awards

In 2024, the City of Wilmington was named a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation for the 23rd consecutive year and received a Tree City Growth Award for

the 21st consecutive year. Wilmington is one of only five communities in North Carolina to receive the Tree City Growth. This award recognizes environmental improvement and encourages a higher level of tree care throughout America.

2. Initiatives and Workplan

The Wilmington Tree Commission conducts strategic planning every few years to develop actionable goals to uphold the purpose and mission of the Commission. Strategic planning workshops for 2025-27 were held on February 19, March 19, April 16, and June 18, 2025. The goals included in the 2023-2025 workplan and recently adopted goals for 2025-2027 workplan are detailed below.

FY24-25

- **Tree Ordinance and Enforcement**

Goal: Educate all groups on how the city tree ordinance works.

Accomplishments

- Commissioners worked to create basic handouts to explain the tree ordinance in laymen's terms.
- The Community Meeting to Save Cape Fear Trees and Presentation to Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UNCW events were focused on tree ordinance education (see *Events, Education, and Outreach*).

- **Resource Commitment**

Goal: Provide support to City and other organizations in the implementation of the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

The Wilmington Tree Commission was a major partner and advocate in the development of the Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) and its adoption in 2022.

Accomplishments

- Since its adoption, each regular meeting includes an update on the progress of recommendations in the UFMP from City Staff. Commissioners consistently offer their support for furthering the efforts of the plan.
- In an effort to support the work of the Community Services department in carrying out the UFMP, the Tree Commission is investigating grant opportunities to complete the plan's action items.

- **Community Education**

Goal: Develop an ad hoc committee to identify 3-5 actions/activities and incorporate into the Commission Workplan. Actions are focused on the development of native tree planting resources.

The Wilmington Tree Commission is invested in encouraging the selection of native plants and trees. Native plants are more sustainable for an ecosystem as they co-evolve usually in a symbiotic relationship with other organisms and other trees.

Accomplishments

- The Commission created an in-depth manual for native trees for the Wilmington region as a resource and guide to planting native.
- To increase accessibility and encourage native plantings, the Commission developed '10 Best' native tree graphic lists. Currently the Commission has published the 10 Best Flowering Trees, Trees for Birds, Trees for Butterflies, Salt Tolerant Trees, Large Canopy Trees, and Keystone Trees.
These lists include the expected height, crown spread, soil conditions, flower and fruit details, and images of the tree and its leaf. They can be found on the Tree Commission page on the city website. They have been handed out at several events and are well liked by the community.
- Additionally, to further community education on our urban tree canopy the Tree Commission has participated in 7 community events. Each event has offered a platform for sharing environmental resources.

FY26-27 (Adopted June 2025)

○ **Community Education to the Public**

Goal: Give presentations to three professional organizations that influence new community members on the value of trees and maintaining the tree canopy in Wilmington within 1-2 years.

Presentations have proven to be a valuable tool for connecting with and educating community members. The Wilmington Tree Commission would like to expand the reach of presentations to professional organizations working with new community members outside of the environmental sphere to reach new audiences. The Commission identified potential collaborators at the June 18, 2025, regular meeting including Cape Fear Realtors, Cape Fear Hospitality, and the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce.

○ **Tree Ordinance and Enforcement**

Goal: Analyze current tree ordinance and recommend an amendment to the Land Development Code to increase tree retention in all new development within 2 years.

Potential first steps towards achieving this goal were discussed at the regular meeting on June 18, 2025. Action steps may include analyzing the current tree ordinance, benchmarking admirable tree ordinances in other cities, and investigating the variance process and its use for tree removal.

○ **Partnerships and Collaboration**

Goal: Create a spreadsheet and score card with statistics regarding number of volunteers, volunteer hours, trees distributed and use to provide updates to the

public, determine the impact of work completed, and evaluate current practices within 2 years.

The Wilmington Tree Commission plans to develop a Tree Canopy Score Card that tracks changes in canopy and tree related practices. Efforts towards completing this goal will be conducted in collaboration with City Planning and Parks and Recreation staff and local tree-related organizations such as the Alliance for Cape Fear Trees. Potential first steps include identifying existing tree-related metrics tracked by the Parks and Recreation Department and defining additional measurements to be included.

3. Programs

Heritage Tree Program

The Heritage Trees Program recognizes trees throughout the City that are important to Wilmington's heritage.

A presentation of 2020-2024 Heritage Trees was made at the May 7, 2024 City Council Meeting and 2025 Heritage Tree Awards were presented at the June 17, 2025 City Council Meeting. Trees are chosen on the basis of their size, rarity or desirability of the species; historical significance (landmarks); or notable groves or plantings. The program was initiated in 2007. The list of Heritage Trees now includes 76 trees.

The Heritage Tree program was dormant, but continued accepting applications, from 2020-2023. In October of 2023, the Wilmington Tree Commission began actively reviewing applications and conducting onsite measurements. In May of 2024, 13 trees were awarded as Heritage Trees. After awarding Heritage Trees in May of 2024, the Commission received several new applications for awarding. The re-investment in this award program began a community conversation and sparked resident interest in nominating important trees in the Wilmington Community.

In June of 2025, 4 trees were awarded as Heritage Trees:

1. 4213 Princess Place Drive, Wilmington NC

Live Oak tree, *Quercus Virginiana* located at the side of the property, significant in size.

2. 912 Page Avenue, Wilmington NC

Live Oak tree, *Quercus Virginiana* located at the front of the property in the right of way, significant in size.

3. 6329 Head Road, Wilmington NC

Live Oak tree, *Quercus Virginiana* located along Head Road near front of property, significant in size.

4. 2422 Monroe Street, Wilmington NC

Live Oak tree, *Quercus Virginiana* located at the front of the property, significant in size.

Wilmington Tree Commission

Heritage Trees 2007-2025



4. Advocacy

Advocacy is a major tool in promoting, protecting, and enhancing our urban forest. The Wilmington Tree Commission advocates for a stronger understanding of Wilmington's natural environment, tree preservation, and appropriate tree maintenance practices by supporting grant applications and aiding in City media campaigning regarding specific tree maintenance projects. The following highlight advocacy tasks completed in FY 2025.

- **Market Street Tree Removal, August 2024**

In August of 2024, the City of Wilmington prepared to remove # Laurel Oak and Live Oak trees along Market Street. This project warranted upset from the public and misinformation on the number of trees to be removed, the reason for removing, and the plan for replanting spread. The Wilmington Tree Commission members seek to be a reliable resource to the community when participating in conversations regarding the City's tree canopy. To this end, the Commission received a presentation from Sally Thigpen, Assistant Director of Community Services, with the correct information regarding the project. Additionally, the Chair, Thomas Boland, participated in a local news update regarding the project.

- **Long Leaf Pine Restoration at Halyburton Park, September 2024**

In September of 2024, Community Services began dispersing information on a long leaf pine restoration project at Halyburton Park. Staff received many questions and concerns about the project. As stated, the Tree Commission members seek to be informed advocates. The Commission requested a presentation from the project manager, Andy Fairbanks. The presentation included the purpose of the project, project details, and reiterated the uniqueness of the long leaf pine ecosystem in Wilmington.

- **Cape Fear Bald Cypress Health UNCW Research Grant Support, January 2025**

The Wilmington Tree Commission provided a Letter of Support for University of North Carolina, Wilmington (UNCW) professor Dr. Andrea Hawkes's application for research funding from the Water Resources and Research Institute (WRRI) and US. Geological Survey (USGS). The research group is examining the ghost forest problem on the Cape Fear River and its tributaries. Over time the freshwater forested marshlands, which are dominated by Bald Cypress trees, are becoming marshes as trees die. By investigating tree rings, microfossils in sediment, and water level and salinity, they seek a better understanding of ghost forest formation. This research will inform future decision-making regarding dredging and development along the Cape Fear River.

5. Events, Education and Outreach

- **The Great NC Tree Conference, September 26-27, 2024**

The Chair of the Wilmington Tree Commission, Thomas Boland, attended the North Carolina Urban Forest Council's Annual Great NC Tree Conference in September of 2024. This conference is focused on education and collaboration. Attendees dug into tree ordinance implementation, tree health indicators, and the ecosystem role and needs of urban trees.

- **Fire in the Pines, October 5, 2024**

The Wilmington Tree Commission attended the Fire in the Pines Festival at Halyburton Park. This event is held by the Nature Conservancy and is focused on environmental education, especially on the unique ecosystems in Wilmington, NC that support Flytraps and Long Leaf Pines. It is a family-oriented event with booths from a variety of local and regional organizations offering activities and educational materials. The Wilmington Tree Commission booth offered information on the role of the Tree Commission and current programs and a leaf printing activity for kids

- **Branching Out: A Community Meeting to Save Cape Fear Trees, January 15, 2025**

A community focused on tree ordinance education was held in January by the Alliance for Cape Fear Trees, City of Wilmington Planning and Development, New Hanover County Planning and Land, and the Wilmington Tree Commission. At a table during the event, the Wilmington Tree Commission offered information on current programs, suggested native trees, and the role of the Commission. The event was well attended by the community and fed an ongoing community conversation on tree canopy and development.

- **Tree Fest, January 18-19, 2025**

Tree Fest is an annual event running for 27 years held by the NC Cooperative Extension and New Hanover County Arboretum. The event takes place at Independence Mall and includes giving away free trees and grasses. Several members of the Tree Commission volunteered at this event where they offered expert guidance on tree selection and care, and shared information on suggested native trees and Commission programs.

- **Wilmington 101 Environmental Panel, February 27, 2025**

The Vice Chair, Bridget Callahan, of the Wilmington Tree Commission participated in the environmental panel for the inaugural class of Wilmington 101. This panel included bringing together a diverse group of experts dedicated to preserving and enhancing the city's natural resources. The Tree Commission discussed current programs and resources developed that contribute to resident education and enhance the city's natural ecosystems.

- **UNCW OLLI Presentation, February 27, 2025**

The Wilmington Tree Commission was asked to give a presentation to students of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington (UNCW). The Chair, Thomas Boland, gave a presentation outlining the history of the Tree Commission, programs, and the tree ordinance.

- **NC Arbor Day Celebratory Planting at Hoggard High School, March 21, 2025**

The Wilmington Tree Commission recognized North Carolina Arbor Day with a ceremonial planting at Hoggard High School. Students participating in the athletics program attended the planting and remarks by Mayor Bill Saffo, and Vice Chair of the Wilmington Tree Commission, Bridget Callahan. The Parks and Recreation department supported the planting by providing a tree, relocated from another site, and staff to conduct the planting.

- **National Arbor Day Celebration with the MLK Community Center Afterschool Program, April 25, 2025**

The Wilmington Tree Commission celebrated National Arbor Day with a tree education program for the MLK Community Center's Afterschool program for K-5 students. Students kicked off the afternoon with learning about the role of trees in the community and wrapped up with a nature walk.

- **Wilmington Earth Day Festival, April 26, 2025**

The Wilmington Tree Commission participated in the annual Earth Day Festival at Long Leaf Park. They shared information regarding the commission, the importance of native plantings and potential species, and hosted a children's activity.