



Mayor & Board of Aldermen WORK SESSION

Thursday, November 20, 2025 @ 5:30 PM

Location: City Hall Boardroom - 1018 Porter Avenue - Ocean Springs, MS 39564

This is a Work Session Only - No Official Action will be Taken.

1. Tree Canopy Committee Formation Workshop

Tree Canopy Committee Formation Workshop Agenda

Thursday – 5:30–7:00 p.m.

City Hall – Board Room

1. Call to Order & Roll Call (5:30–5:35)

- **Welcome and purpose of workshop**
- **No action taken; discussion only**

2. Workshop Purpose & Background (5:35–5:45)

- **Overview of canopy issues and public feedback**
- **Intent of establishing resident-led Tree Canopy Committee**

3. Legal Framework & Authority (5:45–5:55)

- **Mississippi Code references for advisory committees**
- **History of prior Tree Committee and ordinance gap**

4. Committee Purpose & Scope (5:55–6:05)

- **Trees as infrastructure; preservation and storm resilience**
- **Host department and staff liaison role**

5. Committee Composition, Membership & Terms (6:05–6:20)

- **7 members: ward and at-large appointments**
- **Term lengths, eligibility, attendance, conduct expectations**

. Responsibilities & Work Program (6:20–6:35)

- **Heritage Tree Registry**
- **Review of major tree removal applications**
- **UDC recommendations**
- **Public outreach initiatives**

7. Construction Impact Protections & Enforcement (6:35–6:45)

- **Tree Impact Assessments and Protection Plans**
- **Proposed fine ranges and enforcement tools**

8. Tree Mitigation Fund & Replacement Tools (6:45–6:55)

- **Overview of mitigation fund**
- **Replacement ratios and priority planting areas**

9. Implementation Timeline & Next Steps (6:55–7:00)

- **Direction on edits and revisions**
- **Drafting formal resolution**
- **Application process and appointment schedule**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bobby Cox and Members of the Board of Aldermen

FROM: Alderman Shannon Pfeiffer, Ward 4

DATE: October 7, 2025

RE: DRAFT Guidelines – Tree Canopy Committee

The attached draft document outlines proposed guidelines for re-establishing a citizen-led Tree Canopy Committee for the City of Ocean Springs. The purpose of this committee is to support the City's commitment to responsible tree management, preservation of historic trees, and canopy restoration initiatives.

As noted in recent public discussions and community feedback surrounding the Lovelace Oak, it has become clear that Ocean Springs would benefit from a standing advisory body focused on canopy health, arborist coordination, and construction impact oversight. These guidelines aim to restore the framework that once existed under the former Tree Protection Committee, while updating its structure to reflect current planning and environmental needs.

The proposed composition includes seven citizen members—one appointed by each Alderman and one at-large—supported by a City liaison from the Planning Department. The Committee would provide annual reporting, policy recommendations, and technical input on matters involving protected trees, urban forestry programs, and UDC amendments related to tree protection and setbacks.

New sections in this draft include 'Construction Impact Protections' and 'Enforcement: Fines & Tree Replacement Plan,' which establish clearer standards for construction near protected trees and accountability measures for violations.

I respectfully submit this draft for the Board's review and discussion at tonight's meeting. If the Board concurs, I recommend considering holding a public meeting workshop and then drafting a resolution to formally adopt the committee framework and initiate a public call for applicants.

Attachment: Tree Canopy Committee – Draft Guidelines

Memorandum

To: Mayor Bobby Cox and Members of the Board of Aldermen

From: Alderman At-Large Matthew Hinton

Date: September 23, 2025

Re: Tree Canopy Committee Formation and Draft Guidelines/Bylaws

Purpose

This memorandum proposes the formation of a **Tree Canopy Committee** under the authority granted by **Mississippi Code Title 17, Chapter 1**, and the **Ocean Springs Unified Development Code**.

The purpose of this resident-led advisory committee is to assist with the mitigation and management of protected trees in Ocean Springs. The committee will consist of seven (7) appointed members — one from each Ward (1–6) and one At-Large appointee. The committee will be hosted through the **Planning Department** and overseen by the **Building Department official**.

Draft Guidelines and Bylaws

Composition

- Composed of seven (7) voting members, each appointed by the Alderman representing Wards 1–6.
- The seventh voting member shall be appointed by the Alderman At-Large.
- Members will serve **three-year terms**.

Membership Requirements

Section 1: Membership Qualification

Members must be residents of the City of Ocean Springs and should, where practicable, represent diverse interests and backgrounds.

Section 2: Appointment

Seven (7) resident members will be appointed by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen (BOA). Each member shall serve a term of three (3) years, staggered to ensure continuity. Members will be selected to ensure representation from each ward plus one (1) at-large member.

If the Board does not have an applicant to fill a specific ward opening, the Alderman At-Large and the Alderman from that ward may jointly select a candidate residing in another ward.

Section 3: Attendance

A member who is absent from three (3) consecutive meetings, or a total of five (5) meetings within a twelve-month period, without a reason deemed satisfactory to the committee, shall be reported to the Mayor and BOA. Attendance and terms shall be tracked by the Building Department official and the committee secretary.

Section 4: Vacancy

The Mayor and BOA shall appoint a new member to fill any vacancy for the unexpired portion of that term. Member terms shall be tracked by the Building Department official.

Section 5: Conflict of Interest

If a member identifies a conflict of interest in a particular case before the committee, they shall so state for the record and vacate their chair. A member who vacates their chair shall not vote, participate in discussion, or hear that case. If the recusal results in a lack of quorum, the case shall be continued to the next regular meeting.

Section 6: Training and Conduct

Members shall complete a minimum of three (3) continuing education units (CEUs) annually in areas such as trees, environmental issues, landscaping, ethics, or board responsibilities.

The Building Department staff shall provide course offerings and monitor members' CEUs annually.

Certificates of completion shall be maintained by both the member and the Building Department for three (3) years beyond the completion of the member's term.

Members shall uphold principles of fairness, impartiality, and transparency in all proceedings and shall not engage in ex parte communication regarding pending cases.

Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the Tree Canopy Committee may include, but are not limited to:

- Establishing a **Heritage Tree Registry** to recognize and protect historically or environmentally significant trees.
- Supporting tree canopy expansion through replanting programs.
 - Tree replacement guidelines will be established to govern mitigation funds and replanting.
- Reviewing and advising on applications for major tree removal submitted through the Building and Planning Departments.
- Coordinating with Public Works and approved arborists regarding scheduled and routine maintenance of public trees—especially those along major corridors, public parks, and downtown areas.
- Advising the Board on updates to the **Unified Development Code (UDC)** to include protections for protected trees in relation to developments and setbacks.
- Coordinating with the Building Official to ensure developers or property owners follow permit conditions, replanting, preservation, and maintenance requirements.
- Requiring **Tree Protection Zones (TPZs)** during site work or development, including fencing, signage, and penalties for violations.
 - Ocean Springs already includes TPZ language in its tree permit documents; however, enforcement authority may be strengthened through the Tree Canopy Committee, with oversight by the Building Official.
- Recommending a maximum fine of up to **\$5,000 per incident**, to be enforced by the Building Official.

Officers

Section 1: Officers

The officers of the committee shall include a **Chair**, **Vice-Chair**, and **Secretary**.

Section 2: Duties

- **Chair:** Calls each meeting to order, presides over roll call, pledge of allegiance, approval of agenda and minutes, discussion of business items, and adjournment.
- **Vice-Chair:** Assumes the duties of the Chair in their absence.
- **Secretary:** Serves in the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair; reviews and verifies the accuracy of draft minutes prior to board approval; assists the Building Department official in tracking appointments, vacancies, absences, and annual CEU requirements.

Section 3: Election of Officers

Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the full committee at the first meeting following annual appointments. In the event of a vacancy, a successor shall be elected at the next regular meeting to serve the remainder of the term.

Meetings

Section 1: Regular Meetings

The Committee shall generally meet monthly on the second Wednesday at 5:00 PM at City Hall, or as otherwise publicly scheduled.

Section 2: Special Meetings

The Committee may meet at the call of the Chair, three (3) members, or the Building Department upon written request, with at least five (5) days' notice, in compliance with the **Open Meetings Act (Mississippi Code of 1972, Chapter 41)**.

Section 3: Quorum

A quorum shall consist of four (4) members. If a quorum is not present, the meeting shall be adjourned and business postponed to the next scheduled meeting, with appropriate public notice.

Section 4: Procedures

All meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of **Robert's Rules of Order** and the **Open Meetings Act**. The Building Department shall prepare and distribute the agenda to the Committee no later than 5:00 PM on the Thursday preceding the meeting.

Typical Agenda:

- A. Call to Order and Roll Call
- B. Pledge of Allegiance
- C. Approval of Agenda

- D. Approval of Minutes (with corrections as needed; approved minutes become part of the official record)
- E. Old Business (tabled applications or pending decisions)
- F. New Business (new applications, appeals, or variance requests; includes staff presentation, applicant remarks, public comments, and Committee discussion)
- G. Audience Requests (public comment on non-agenda items; comments limited to five minutes unless extended by the Chair)
- H. Adjournment (upon motion and majority approval)

Section 5: Decisions and Voting

All decisions must be supported by findings of fact based on evidence presented and included in the motion. A majority vote is required for action. The Building Department staff shall publish the Committee's recommendations within five (5) days and forward them to the Board of Aldermen for final approval.

Amendments

Section 1:

The Committee's bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of its members. Proposed amendments shall be distributed to members at least thirty (30) days prior to the vote. Any member may submit a proposed amendment in writing to the Chair for consideration.

Tree Canopy Committee – Draft Guidelines

Purpose and Intent

The City of Ocean Springs recognizes the value of its tree canopy in protecting environmental quality, enhancing storm resilience, and preserving community character. This committee will support thoughtful growth and stewardship of public and private trees through citizen-led guidance and interdepartmental coordination.

As the city forms its new Tree Committee, it would be wise to view these trees as part of our essential infrastructure—deserving of proper care, regular inspections, and maintenance by a highly qualified, licensed arborist on a consistent schedule.

Committee Formation

Name: Tree Canopy Committee

Composition:

- 6 voting members, each appointed by one of the six Ward Aldermen
- 1 voting at-large member, appointed by the Alderman at-large

Total: 7 voting members

Terms: Two-year terms, staggered for continuity; renewable

Eligibility: Ocean Springs residents or stakeholders with relevant backgrounds in arboriculture, urban forestry, environmental planning, landscaping, engineering, construction, or neighborhood advocacy

Oversight and Reporting

Host Department: Proposed Planning Department (to be confirmed)

City Liaison: A designated staff member will assist with meeting logistics, agenda setting, and coordination with public departments.

Annual Reporting:

The Committee shall submit an annual report to the Board of Aldermen that includes:

- Canopy loss and gain assessments
- Tree removal recommendations or reviews (if empowered to perform them)
- Program milestones such as Arbor Day events, native planting campaigns, outreach programs, and budget requests
- Inventory updates of city-maintained and historic trees

Core Responsibilities

The Committee may be tasked with:

- Advising the Board on revisions to the Unified Development Code (UDC), specifically chapters related to tree protection, setbacks, and development.
- Supporting Canopy Expansion through programs like:
 - Native tree giveaways or subsidized planting efforts
 - Annual Arbor Day and Earth Day events
 - Neighborhood-based planting campaigns (e.g., 200 Live Oaks Project)

- Reviewing Applications for tree removal, especially in cases involving protected or historic trees, if delegated that authority by ordinance.
- Outreach and Education:
 - Develop materials and host workshops on tree care, native species, and planting best practices
 - Partner with schools, civic groups, and environmental nonprofits
- Inventory and Infrastructure Coordination:
 - Help maintain a database of public trees, particularly along major corridors, in parks, and downtown
 - Work with arborists and public works to advise on maintenance, trimming, and hazard removal
- Historic Tree Files:
 - Create and maintain a file for each designated historic tree, which includes:
 - Species and approximate age
 - Exact location and GPS tagging
 - Photos (initial and updated)
 - Noted health or structural issues
 - Scheduled or completed maintenance
 - Notes from licensed arborists or public works staff

Policy Justification

Previous iterations of city policy included:

- Ordinance 2019-12: Established a Tree Protection Committee
- Ordinance 2020-10: Repealed and reassigned duties to the Building Department
- Ordinance 2020-16: Reduced the list of protected tree species

Since then, there has been no formal body tasked with consistent canopy advocacy or oversight. This committee restores a transparent mechanism for long-range policy and community input.

Implementation Timeline

Task	Lead Party	Target Date
Confirm Planning Dept. as host	Board	Oct 2025
Adopt resolution establishing committee	Board	Oct 2025
Public call for applicants	City Clerk / PIO	Oct–Nov 2025
Appointment of members	Aldermen	Nov Recess Meeting
First meeting and charter vote	Planning Staff	Dec 2025
Annual plan for 2026 submitted	Committee	Jan 2026

Construction Impact Protections

Goal: Ensure that all protected trees—including heritage, historic, and specimen trees—are not inadvertently damaged, removed, or compromised by city-led or private construction projects.

- **Site Plan Review:**
 - Any public or private construction project requiring a permit must submit a Tree Impact Assessment if it involves grading, trenching, or excavation within 25 feet of a protected tree.
 - The Planning Department shall notify the Tree Committee of any such projects involving designated or candidate protected trees.
- **Mandatory Tree Protection Plan (TPP):**
 - Projects must include a Tree Protection Plan showing fencing, storage zones, and aeration methods.
- **City Construction Standards:**
 - All City capital projects must include tree impact checklists, consult arborists, and plan restorative landscaping.
- **Monitoring & Penalties:**
 - Site visits may be conducted before, during, and after construction.
 - Violations may trigger fines, replacement, or withholding of final inspection/CO.
- **Arborist Review Requirement:**
 - Any construction affecting a designated historic or heritage tree must include a certified arborist's report before permit issuance.

Enforcement: Fines & Tree Replacement Plan

A. Purpose

To protect the City's tree canopy and hold individuals and entities accountable for actions that harm protected trees.

B. Fine Schedule (for Consideration)

- Unauthorized removal of a protected tree: \$1,000 – \$5,000
- Improper pruning/topping: \$250 – \$500
- Negligent root damage: \$500 – \$1,000
- Intentional poisoning/vandalism: \$2,500 – \$10,000
- Violation of tree protection plan: \$500 – \$1,000
- Failure to install barriers: \$250 per day until corrected

C. Mandatory Tree Replacement

- Replace with trees of comparable canopy value as determined by the City's certified arborist.
- Minimum ratio: 1:1 for small trees; up to 3:1 for heritage trees.
- Replacement locations: on-site, elsewhere in city limits, or via Tree Reforestation Fund.

D. Additional Enforcement Tools

- Stop Work Orders
- Lien Authority for major violations
- Public Reporting for transparency

Tree Mitigation Fund Application

City Code Chapter ____, Section ____ prohibits the removal of any tree within the City without prior permission. When permission is granted by the Planning & Building Department, each removed tree is required to be replaced with two similar trees on the site.

If it is not feasible for the applicant to replant the required replacement trees on the same site, the applicant may instead contribute **\$300 per required replacement tree** to the **Tree Mitigation Fund**. This enables the City to plant the replacement trees in more suitable locations within the city limits, ensuring their health and longevity while benefiting the public as a whole.

A \$300.00 contribution to the City of Ocean Springs covers the cost of the tree, its installation, maintenance, and, if necessary, replacement.

Applicant Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

I prefer to contribute \$300 per required replacement tree(s) in lieu of replanting the tree(s) on my property.

Replacement for trees removed from:

Address: _____

Type of tree removed (species, if known): _____

Number of trees: _____

Reason replacement trees cannot be replanted on the site:

Please make checks payable to: **The City of Ocean Springs**