

November 20, 2024

Dear Members of City Council and Mayor Buffaloe,

As members of the Tree Board, we write to express our inability to support the current Ash Street Improvement Project in its proposed form. The mission of the Tree Board is to advise City Council on urban forest resources and the Columbia Urban Forest Master Plan, provide tree-related information to the general public, and serve as a conduit for citizens to communicate tree issues to the City Council. At a recent Tree Board meeting, a representative of a local interest group brought up the Ash Street Improvement Project to us and explained their worry for the number of trees that would be lost in the pursuit of this improvement project.

Unfortunately, the Ash Street Improvement Project falls short of our guiding objectives, undermining our collective commitment to sustainability, urban livability, and responsible city planning. Urban forests provide critical environmental, economic, and aesthetic value, significantly contributing to the quality of life in our neighborhoods. Yet, the current project fails to consider these benefits, jeopardizing our urban canopy without adequate efforts for preservation or replacement.

Some of our key concerns regarding the project include:

1. **Lack of Tree Preservation Efforts:** The design prioritizes utility corridors over tree canopy, with no alternative designs proposed to preserve existing trees.
2. **Adopt internal compliance that mirrors the Unified Development Code (UDC):** The city should create an internal policy that requires a tree preservation policy similar to what private projects must follow, including tree replacement. The Tree Board addressed this same policy concern via letter to council on May 20, 2019.
3. **No Tree Replacement Plan:** The current design does not accommodate tree replacements, nor does it propose measures to offset the significant canopy loss.
4. **Environmental Impact:**
 - o The removal of 104 mature trees equates to an approximate canopy loss of 20,900 square feet.
 - o Based on calculations using iTree Design, this results in a minimum annual loss of \$2,516.35 in quantifiable ecosystem benefits, including stormwater management (\$82.39), carbon sequestration (\$1,137.76), air quality improvement (\$13.88), and energy savings (\$1,282.32).
 - o The canopy loss will exacerbate the heat-island effect, increase stormwater runoff, and degrade the surrounding neighborhoods' environmental quality.
5. **Failure to Align with CAAP Goals:** The project is inconsistent with the city's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP), which emphasizes climate resilience and sustainability.
6. **Lack of Professional Consultation:** The absence of the city arborist and city forestry professionals during the planning phase undermines informed decision-making on tree management and preservation.

We urge the Council to reconsider the Ash Street Improvement Project and work toward a solution that integrates tree preservation and replacement while minimizing environmental impact. Engaging an arborist and exploring alternative designs will ensure this project reflects our shared values and long-term vision for the city. We stand ready to collaborate with the Council and other stakeholders to develop an approach that balances infrastructure needs with environmental stewardship.

Sincerely,

Samuel Wright, Chair	Michael Kyd, Vice Chair
Stephen Bybee	Jacob McMains
Max Miller	Patricia Quackenbush
Renee Scheidt-Hahn	