



# Times-News

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## Area needs 'green infrastructure' too

By Katie Breckheimer  
Guest Columnist



Katie Breckheimer

Most of us understand what a community's infrastructure is — roads, water lines, sewer, and power lines, but what is "green infrastructure?"

According to ECO's Green Infrastructure Committee, it's a network of open space, trees, farms, parks, bike paths, and greenways — a kind of infrastructure that protects our health as well as our quality of life.

So, it was only natural (pun intended) for ECO to host a forum at the library a few weeks ago about trees. A panel of experts was on hand to present to the 75-plus people in attendance.

Times-News columnist Stephen Black opened the forum with a little history about Hendersonville's Tree Ordinance (created in 1988). City Council had appointed 10 to 12 people to start the discussions. As Black recalled, their first meetings were so rambunctious that council reduced the committee's number to four.

Four people from very different backgrounds, including Black, were asked to reach consensus on the first "tree rules" to be considered by council. It was no easy task. The four met regularly for well over a year until the mayor nudged them along by setting a deadline for the document. The final result was our current Tree Ordinance, and with it came an appointed Tree Board.

"A good thing to have; and a good place to start," said Dr. Robert Bardon with N.C. State University's Department of Forestry. "If you want to strengthen it [as most people in the audience did], then you need to create community support for it. People need to set the goals for what they want their 'tree-full' city to look like, then bring the stakeholders together to create the necessary buy-in."

Our Tree Ordinance isn't bad, Bardon said; it just may not reflect all of what we want. And, it may not be enforced the way we want it to be. Panelist Ed Schwartzman, an ecologist with North Carolina's Natural Heritage Program, spoke about the value of our county trees.

He said we live in one of the most diverse temperate forests in the world! We have this diversity partly because of the age and stability of our mountains, but also because of our geology, elevation, and rainfall. Henderson County is blessed with the large French Broad River basin, so we have many wetland trees. We have trees that don't grow anywhere else, like the Fraser magnolia, Carolina hemlock, and Table Mountain pine. Our county's large blocks of forested areas provide needed environments for wildlife. Species like wood ducks require large mature tree cavities, and owls, bats and flying squirrels need large forested areas to survive. We are very lucky to live amongst such rich biodiversity, and therefore we must be good neighbors in return. Being good stewards and protecting our trees requires forbearance and foresightedness.

Trent Duncan, with the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources, spoke about "the face of forestry," how it has changed in the last 15 years. How aesthetics, the physical beauty of trees and forested land, is becoming a stronger community value across the U.S.

Some private landowners have forest management plans, and use responsible tree harvesting practices for resource production. However, when the prescribed method of harvesting is clearcutting, most of us cringe at the harsh results — it feels inherently wrong to take down every single tree in a landscape.

Another panelist, Chris Berg, who worked as a redevelopment planner for Greenville County for many years, reported on that county's new Tree Ordinance (two months old). It sets the primary standard for tree density according to land use, and is tied to the County's Land Development Code, with oversight from their Planning Department.

It also sets standards for tree and plant buffers necessary to keep streams clean. It requires developers to submit a tree-saving plan for large-scale developments and recommends root-protection zones for saving trees during construction.

Progressive towns like Cary, Winston-Salem and Athens, Ga., all have good tree ordinances, but we must create our own, one that sets the standards we want.

What are our community goals? Do we (county residents) want a Tree Ordinance like Greenville County? We have a Land Development Code to tie it to.

Join ECO to help with the next steps; we need your support. The Green Infrastructure Committee meets on the third Thursday of each month at the ECO office. The Hendersonville Tree Board meets on the first Tuesday of each month at the City Operations Center.

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