



At left, ODNR urban forester Alan Siewert gathers the walking group at the corner of Liberty and Main explaining how trees in the commercial district can create an inviting corridor and frame business signs. At right, Vermilion Tree Commission member Jerry Western at the corner of Huron and Main explains how trees increase home values and absorb storm water runoff. (Photojournal photos - Katy McElroy)

City council takes a tree-mendous walking tour through downtown

By Karen Cornelius

Vermilion City Council held a special meeting on Wednesday, July 24, starting at 7 p.m. in front of Ritter Public Library. The meeting was actually an outdoor field trip hosted by the Vermilion Tree Commission. The “Walk-About” through the Harbour Town area was planned by the commission members to make city officials and the public aware of the importance of trees. After an hour and one-half educational tour, it became clear that trees are not just nice, they are necessary for the health and well being of a community.

Vermilion Tree Commission chairman John Hill welcomed all seven council members: John Gabriel, Steve Herron, Scott Sherwood, Barb Brady, Frank Loucka, Steve Holovacs, and Craig Fortner and his son, Alex. Mayor Eileen Bulan, service director Robert Kurtz, city engineer Lynn Miggins, Vermilion Port Authority member Peter Corogin, and Alan Siewert from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, an urban forester and board certified master arborist, joined the group. Hill introduced the other commission members Jerry Western, Mike Klein, Margaret Wakefield Worcester, and Mary Moes. He also introduced Dana Corogin an ex-officio member of the commission and Vermilion Parks operations manager. Hill stated the evening was an opportunity to get a better sense of what trees can do and are doing and what the volunteer tree commission is doing to enhance and educate the community.

To dig into the real story of trees and their benefits, the Walk-About was centered around a large city-type block from the library, east on Liberty, north on Main Street to Huron Street, and then walking Huron west to Washington Street and back to the library. Most everyone has walked these streets before or even live

on these streets, but really focusing on just the trees for the first time was an eye-opener to many in the walking group.

Corogin spoke first as the group walked along Liberty Avenue. She asked everyone to look around to see that trees define space, add interest and textures to sidewalks and open areas. Trees often frame views of buildings, fields, water, and even historic lights in a streetscape. They create a sense of scale and a sense of shelter that make people feel comfortable. Glancing from the beautiful mature trees and streetscape trees there were voids such as the former gas station lot and the empty lot at the corner of Grand and Liberty that were not inviting. She told a personal story about a trip to upper state New York where they drove through a new community with parking and sidewalks but bypassed it for lunch in another town. They decided they chose that town because it was more welcoming to visitors with its streets lined with trees.

Commission member Western added that the corner lot once the ambulance garage was vacant and bare. During Third Thursday the band playing there was just scorched by the sun with the only observers standing further away under a little tree because there was some shade. Another Third Thursday band in Exchange Park settled under the shade of the many trees and the audience also was grouped under other trees for the shade. It just proves tree shade trumps personal space.

Worcester stood near the downtown intersection of Liberty and Main and explained how Vermilion businesses benefit from trees, a surprising concept to many. She said that studies show that customers have more positive responses when viewing a street lined with trees compared to a no-tree setting. Shoppers are willing to travel more and stay longer which means greater sales and higher tax

revenue for the city. Trees are an important part of creating a welcoming, interesting shopping place. The walk is cooler allowing shoppers to walk slower and gaze into more store windows. Worcester stated that studies also show that shoppers will pay more for goods and services on a tree-lined street. “Trees increase foot traffic 20-40 percent and increase retail rents by 22 percent, she said. Even merchants are perceived to be more friendly and more knowledgeable about their products which increases sales. Trees also reflect the city’s goodwill to residents and visitors for creating a healthier environment.

Chairman Hill pointed out the Honey Locust trees planted along Liberty and South Main’s streetscape and why they are the best trees for these locations where the environment is not so friendly to trees that have to be planted in vaults surrounded by cement sidewalks. Deciding what to put where so trees will survive is the challenge for the Vermilion Tree Commission whose purpose is to develop a sustainable urban/city forest, quite different from a rural one. “We can only select from a few trees that will withstand the rigors of the city,” said Hill. “You can’t just stick any tree in, it will die within a year.” Hill said in Vermilion’s zone, trees have to be hardy, have a water source, and withstand wind, salt, pest, and traffic exposure. “There’s a lot to consider because you want trees to last 50-60-70 years.”

Urban forester Siewert agreed. He said horticulturally speaking, the Honey Locust isn’t a pretty tree. “It has no flowers, it’s not sexy, but it’s functional. It does what it’s suppose to do.” Siewert said people get caught up in flowers, fruit, and sexiness when they want to choose a tree instead of considering that trees have to be part of the infrastructure. “People have to focus on trees that will be functional

because an urban forest must have functional trees.” Siewert also stated that the Honey Locust chosen for the downtown shopping district will grow and will frame or accent all the downtown signage which should be kept low, six foot or so on the buildings for visibility rather than higher over the Fischer building shops. “It’s an ongoing process. The trees will be an asset.”

Commission member Klein took the group over to Exchange Park, one of the jewels in Vermilion’s crown for its outdoor space, trees, flowers, and benches. “It’s great for tourism.” Klein stated that he has done a lot of research and trees actually have an impact on crime reduction. Studies have shown less graffiti, vandalism, and littering in natural outdoor spaces than in comparable plantless and treeless spaces. The greener the neighborhood, the fewer violent crimes and crimes against property. Tree lawn trees create a more pleasant walking environment, encourage a greater association to neighbors which leads to greater security, neighborhood awareness, and reduction in crime rates.

The group walked from the corner of Liberty north on Main to Decidedly Different and realized there were no trees along this stretch. Siewert called this a “sun desert” before walking into the shade. He said this stretch of commercial walk is a physical barrier, not a comfortable corridor for people who tend to avoid these areas. There was also a noticeable void from the Mayor’s office on the westside of South Main where there was no Honey Locust for this commercial corridor due to one merchant’s preference. Corogin speculated that perhaps Vermilion in Bloom could donate the missing tree because if people want an urban forest that’s what

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At left, Vermilion Tree Commission member Mike Klein talks about the benefits of trees for public safety and security. The greener the neighborhood, the fewer violent crimes and crimes against property. Older Harbour Town homes with front porches and large shade trees create a more pleasant, friendly environment. At right, Vermilion Tree Commission chairman John Hill emphasizes that trees require maintenance just as anything else, but only trees increase in value.



Parks manager Dana Corogin addresses the Walk-About group at Exchange Park, one of Vermilion’s jewels for its shady trees, flowers, and green space. Middle, is a Huron Street homeowner’s Northern Red Oak which provides overall benefits of \$255 every year. Far right, Vermilion Tree Commission member Mary Moes shows the group how to properly plant a tree using an example on Washington Street where the homeowner has paid for two new functional trees to grace the front lawn. *(Photojournal photos - Katy McElroy)*

Walk-about

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is best for the community not an individual’s preference.

Member Western stated that trees are not only good for business and reducing crime, but they have an impact on people’s health. He said studies have shown that when people in the hospital look out the window where there is a landscape, they heal faster than looking at a brick wall. Siewert added during the walk that there was an increase in mortality related to cardiovascular and lower respiratory-tract illness in counties infested with the emerald ash borer. Across 15 states in the study area, the borer was associated with an additional 6,113 deaths related to respiratory illness and 15,080 cardiovascular-related deaths.

Reaching the corner of Ferry Street and Main, the older Harbour Town homes with front porches and lawn trees created an interpersonal neighborhood where people see and talk to each other. There’s a friendly feeling, a sense of community. Going on to Huron, Western pointed out how the street runs down into Main so trees have an important role in reducing runoff. He pointed to a large 27-inch Northern Red Oak on Huron that will intercept 4,176 gallons of storm water runoff this year. The same oak located in front of this single family home will raise the property value by \$71 this year, and conserve 196 kilowatt hours of electricity for cooling. In one year, this

oak will reduce atmospheric carbon by 1,015 pounds. It will provide overall benefits of \$255 per year. If cared for and grows to 32 inches, it will provide \$288 in annual benefits. Chairman Hill added that while city trucks and buildings depreciate, trees appreciate. “Every tree counts. They provide value for the community, not to mention they provide a wonderful place for squirrels and birds.”

Winding up the Walk-About on Washington Street, commission member Moes came to two newly planted trees by the homeowner with help from the tree commission. She explained in detail how to properly plant a tree to ensure healthy growth. She said digging a hole as big as the pot doesn’t work. One has to dig a hole at least six-feet wide with a two-foot depth. All the soil should be dug up and mixed with compost. She said if the tree is in a ball, it has already lost 90 percent of its roots, but new roots will grow. It’s important to keep mulch one to two inches back from the trunk to allow trunk flare. She would stake a tree for one year and water it diligently for three years. Hill stated that you need the right tree, the right place, and the right time. The Vermilion Tree Commission is always available to assist residents with any questions they have about planting, removing, or caring for trees.

Returning to the library’s starting point, Siewert asked what would happen

if the Vermilion Tree Commission and the city do a perfect job with their urban forestry? Ironically, he said nothing will happen. No trees will die or poke people in the heads. “People don’t see street trees, they feel them. A canopy draws them in, helps them relax.” Hill said when people drive through Vermilion they slow down, there’s less stress, a greater sense of ease. “Trees do control traffic,” said Klein.

“You should understand how fortunate you are to have a tree commission,” said Siewert to the gathered group. “I’ve never seen a group pick up so fast, understand so much, and make so much progress in so short a time.” Due to the commission started in 2012 by city ordinance, Vermilion is now a “Tree City USA.” He hoped the Walk-About has changed attitudes and shown how valu-

able trees are. He said in some cities they have a tree levy to cover trees considered part of the infrastructure, perhaps \$15 per house per year. In Shaker Heights, it’s \$35 per year. In Vermilion property owners are responsible for the trees located in the city rights-of-ways. They must pay to remove or replace trees unless one falls in the street.

The Vermilion Tree Commission invites the public to its meetings every second Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Ritter Public Library Endowment Room. The public can also support the tree commission through donations with checks payable to “Vermilion in Bloom-Trees.” Contact Anne Maiden at the city offices for information on donations or questions about trees for the commission at 440-204-2402 or annemaiden@vermilion.net.

POLICE BEAT

July 18:
Animal on Oakview. Officer dispatched to Oakview in regards to a sick animal. Animal was dispatched on scene.
Theft at Coley’s. Officer met with supervisor at Coley’s reference an employee suspected of stealing tools from the business. Officer reviewed surveillance tape and observed a subject taking tools on multiple days. Officer collected the necessary information and requested a copy of the video footage and itemized list of items taken. Officer located the suspect at a family member’s house and later transported him to the police station for questioning. He was charged with grand theft.
Theft on Haber Road.
Psychiatric situation on Hilltop. North Central EMS arrived on scene and the subject was taken to Mercy Hospital for a voluntary evaluation.

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2x6 Chris’ Restaurant

3x8 Herman’s Furniture COLOR