



**City of Durham**  
**CITY COUNCIL WORK SUMMARY**  
**April 22, 2025**

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A. **OPEN CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION SPECIAL MEETING.** Mayor Joshua Drake opened the meeting at 6:00 PM at Durham City Hall.

B. **ROLL CALL OF COUNCIL MEMBERS.**

Councilors present: Mayor Joshua Drake, Council President Leslie Gifford, Councilors Gary Paul, David Streicher, and Sean Lee

Councilors absent: None

Staff present: City Administrator Jordan Parente, Emily Guimont, City Attorney with Beery, Elsner & Hammond, LLP, and Trevor March, City Arborist with SavATree

Visitors: Residents Gretchen Downey, Susan Deeming and JR Tarabocchia

C. **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS.**

- Tuesday April 29, 2025, City of Durham Budget Meeting at 6:30 PM
- Tuesday April 29, 2025, Regular Meeting of Durham City Council at 7:30 PM
- Tuesday May 6, 2025, Town Hall Meeting, Juanita Pohl Center at 6:00 PM
- Tuesday May 6, 2025, Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission, Juanita Pohl Center at 8:00 PM

D. **TREE ORDINANCE DISCUSSION – MUNICIPAL CODE REGARDING DEVELOPED PROPERTIES.**

City Council held a work session to review and discuss proposed updates to the City's municipal Tree Ordinance concerning regulations for tree removal on developed properties.

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to understanding what constitutes a hazardous tree. The City's certified arborist presented the industry-standard method for assessing tree risk, which is based on an evaluation grid established by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). This method considers factors such as the tree's likelihood of failure, potential targets (like homes or power lines), and severity of impact. Most assessments rely on visual indicators such as trunk lean, root damage, fungal growth, or structural defects. In more complex cases, advanced techniques like air spading or thermal imaging may be used.

The cost associated with requiring an arborist report was another key issue. A basic risk assessment typically costs between \$200 and \$400, while more detailed evaluations can range from \$600 to \$1,000. Council members discussed whether requiring these assessments imposes an undue financial burden on property owners, especially in comparison to the much higher cost of tree removal itself.

The Council also discussed the policy implications of adopting language in the ordinance that either aligns with or diverges from arborist standards. For example, there was debate over whether the ordinance should refer to trees with a "significant likelihood of failure" or reserve the term "hazardous" for those with "near-imminent failure," which is the threshold used by ISA standards.

There was also discussion about the role of the City Administrator in determining whether a tree is hazardous. Several Council members expressed concern about requiring the City Administrator to independently evaluate arborist reports using a checklist of criteria, especially after having already determined that expert input was necessary. A possible alternative discussed was giving the City Administrator initial discretion but deferring to a certified arborist's judgment in more complex cases.

The Council noted that tree removal activity appears to have increased in recent years, with over 100 removals reported last year compared to an average of 50 in previous years. The City has not conducted a

formal tree canopy analysis in over a decade, and there was agreement that updated data is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of removals and development on canopy coverage.

The meeting concluded with a recognition that further revisions to the ordinance are necessary. Council members emphasized the importance of aligning ordinance language with industry standards, providing clear guidance to staff and residents, and balancing the goals of public safety and urban canopy preservation.

**E. COUNCIL COMMENTS & MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

The Council discussed the parameters for the upcoming Town Hall meeting on May 6, 2025 at the Juanita Pohl Center. There will be an agenda drawn up and a time limit set for two hours. The regular meeting for Planning Commission will be after the Town Hall meeting ends. The Town Hall meeting will be to discuss the municipal code only and not tree removals for properties in development (the development code). Lastly, it was agreed that a second Work Session will be held following the Town Hall meeting to consider the public feedback that is given.

**F. ADJOURN.** Mayor Drake adjourned the meeting at 8:21 PM.

**Approved:**

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**Joshua Drake, MAYOR**

**Attest:**

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**JORDAN PARENTE, CITY ADMINISTRATOR/RECORDER**