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Parking Lot Renovations on Campus and the Removal of Mature Trees

Submitted by: Robert Pirro

5/14/2018

Question(s):

What is the purpose of the proposed renovation to the parking lot adjacent to the Center for Wildlife Education? How many mature trees will be removed in the process of renewing this parking lot? What efforts have been made to preserve the existing trees rather than removing them? If new trees are to be planted, how many of them will there be in the new lot? If new trees are to be planted, how long will it be before they provide shade equivalent to the shade that will be lost with the removal of mature trees from the lot?

Rationale:

The renovation of parking areas on Statesboro campus has been an ongoing process that has significantly altered some environmental conditions. For example, the parking lot adjacent to the Russell Union, which was renovated last summer (2017), saw the removal of many mature trees, an expansion of the paved areas, and the planting of saplings whose shade is minimal. The result is a parking lot of unrelieved asphalt and much less shade for cars than was the case before. In addition to decreasing shade and increasing water runoff, the wholesale removal of mature trees damaged the aesthetic attractiveness of that part of Statesboro campus. A broadly disseminated understanding within the university community of some of the costs and benefits of the current plan to renovate the parking lot near the Wildlife Center would be beneficial.

Response:

From Rob Whitaker: 5/21/2018

Parking Lot 42 Renovation

The redesign and construction of Parking Lot 42 is to address the internal circulation issues from the original poor design, to maximizing the number of parking spaces within the parking lot footprint and to address the overdue paving maintenance needs. In

addition, the efficiency of this parking lot will be improved in an effort to accommodate additional parking needs that will arise with the future development of the Center for Engineering and Research Building where Parking Lot 33 sits.

Currently, the design plans show all of the existing trees in the eastern section of the Lot 42 being removed. The Facilities Planning, Design and Construction team employs a licensed landscape architect who works in conjunction with the Landscape and Grounds Division of Facilities services to maintain the natural look of the campus. Together, the team is sensitive to the effects that projects have on the campus environment and abides by all state and local regulations where applicable.

The team strives to incorporate planting back 2 trees for every tree that is removed on a project. For this project, the majority of the existing trees were studied and determined to be water oaks. A landscape and planting plan has not been completed for this phase of the project yet, but will detail a specific number of trees to be planted back.

The timeline for when a tree canopy will provide shade to a parking spot is dependent on several items: the species of tree, the amount of rain received over time, the severity of the heat over the summer and cold throughout the winter.

Minutes, May 22, 2018

Parking lot renovations

There were parking lot renovations taking place over by the Wildlife Center and Pirro himself had submitted this RFI asking whether the mature trees in that zone would be removed, and the answer was yes, to increase the number of parking spaces, and that two trees would be planted for every one lost. It seemed to Pirro that the University's default position is that any lot renovation should increase the number of parking spaces, and he wondered if any studies had been done to see if there are lots on campus that are under-utilized. His own personal observations suggested this was so, and he wondered if better utilization of existing spaces could forestall the removal of trees. VP Rob Whitaker was not present to respond.

Janice Steirn (CBSS) had been on the Parking Committee, and she had asked essentially the same thing. She had been told that, yes, there are some parking lots that nobody uses, such as by the practice baseball/softball fields, and they had made them free and would give them to students, and the students wouldn't take them. She had tried to point out to them some of the research that has been done in Psychology that shows that if an individual has to pay even a small amount for something, that something is worth more to them than if they get it free because when we get something for free, we consider it literally worthless. And they didn't want

to hear that. She thought that by charging even a nominal fee for some of the under-utilized lots we'd get more takers. She noted that "although we are encouraged to do research, our university doesn't want to listen to much research."

Pirro thought a shuttle could be arranged for that lot so students wouldn't have to walk, but at any rate thought it would be useful to know how our parking lots are being used.

Dustin Anderson (CAH) asked Steirn to maybe forward that research on to Vice [Chancellor] Denley in regard to our textbooks as well, because if things that are free don't have value to our students that might make some sense to him.

Marshall Ransom (COSM) wondered how it worked that a tree is cut down to free up space for parking, but two new trees are planted and magically there is still space for parking. He asked what types of new trees and where they would be planted.

Pirro said that information wasn't provided, but in the RFI he had asked how long it would take for those trees to develop the same shade because he thought shade is what motivates people to walk and bike on campus, and these new trees would likely be immature.

Robert Costomiris (CAH) commented re: the tendency here to not use the resources that the university itself provides, that the parking decisions seem to be made without consulting any environmentalists who work on campus, like at the Center for Sustainability, about issues such as runoff. He noted that they can decide to cut down all the trees in a parking lot, and we find out about it five days before it happens rather than six months before. He also commented that they have a plan to destroy, but the plan to replant is vague and not finalized. He thought the planning system needed oversight.