



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

GREENER GREENVILLE: More trees on county playgrounds may be in the cards as County Council members say it's very likely a tree ordinance, defeated in November, could be brought back up in January.

Tree ordinance may sprout again next year

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BY CHARLES SOWELL
staff writer

Greenville County's tree ordinance may well be resurrected Jan. 8, said Council Chairman H.G. "Butch" Kirven, who supported the original measure.

After a 6-6 vote following a contentious public hearing in November, advocates have been quietly working to bring the measure back before Council.

Brad Wyche, director of Upstate Forever, said he thinks the ordinance has a good chance at reconsideration.

"It's good for the county, good for the environment and good for the property

owner," he said.

Kirven said, "All you need is seven votes, a simple majority to bring the measure back up." He believes preserving the county's tree canopy is a good move.

But finding those votes might be tough, advocates admit.

County Councilman Joe Dill, a Republican who voted against the proposal, said he could support a simpler version, but opposed the failed law because it would have created a new bureaucracy within the county.

"We could handle this whole tree thing with the codes enforcement people and if we needed to hire a >

> specialist, we could hire one," he said. "I just don't think all those pages (32) telling people how to plant a tree, and all the rest, were needed."

Dill said he and other Republicans wouldn't support making county government bigger.

"The evidence for the measure is overwhelming," Wyche said, citing several studies. "But you can't argue with people's impressions and those impressions carried the day last time. All you can do is present the facts and argue the merits of the case," he said.

Councilwoman Lottie Gibson also voted against the ordinance, although she says she plans to bring the measure back up in January. "The thing was

too long," she said. "We didn't need all that. In the end, nobody was satisfied with it, so it's probably a good thing it was defeated in the form it was in."

"There were supporters of the thing offering amendments to it for goodness sake."

County Councilman Sid Cates wasn't satisfied with the accuracy of numbers on the cost increase for a starter home.

"We had numbers around \$1,000 to \$1,800 from supporters of the measure," he said. "And we had numbers over \$4,000 from developers."

Folks with an ax to grind don't always give you the best numbers, he said. But even taking the low figures

into account, the actual cost to the homebuyer would be more like \$7,500 over the life of an average mortgage.

Tony Trout, who voted for the ordinance, declined to comment.

Another supporter of the original measure, Cort Flint, said he hoped council would bring the matter back up and said he was surprised by the "inaccuracies" expressed by opponents.

"I'd have liked to see a stronger measure passed," he said. "At the very least, we could have moved the thing on through to a final reading and thrashed out our differences then."

Those voting for the measure included Kirven, Flint, Trout, Jim

Burns, Xanthene Norris and Judy Gilstrap. Opposing were Cates, Dill, Gibson, Willis Meadows, Fred Payne and Bob Taylor.

The ordinance would affect large contractors working on big projects.

A Clemson University study published in 2006 found Greenville County lost 21 percent of its tree cover between 1985 and 2000. That amounts to 77,000 acres or 14 acres a day.

Wyche said forestland reduces storm runoff, absorbs pollutants, improves air quality and provides wildlife habitat. Trees also make property more valuable.

Contact Charles Sowell at 679-1208 or csowell@greenvillejournal.com.

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