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Hon. Jim Grey
Mayor
1200 E. Main St.
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In the year since I sent you a report on the state of our urban forest, we have seen major improvements throughout the city in how we manage street trees and trees in parks and other public spaces. I congratulate you, and the dedicated staff of LFUCG for these improvements. There has also been a marked increase in the attention paid to our urban forest by the public and the news media. For example, the ancient bur oak on Harrodsburg Road that has received so much attention has stimulated a lot of discussion about the value of our trees. As I have told you and others, Fayette and surrounding counties have the largest number of ancient trees of any community in North America. I hope, over the coming year, to bring more attention to the value of these Venerable Trees.

Now, I would like to encourage you to take a big step in improving urban forestry in this city. I believe that some simple reorganization of city government could greatly improve the quality of our urban forest, while at the same time streamlining administration and saving money.

One of the hallmarks of cities with great urban forestry programs is the integration of all urban forestry activities into a single entity. We have not yet done that in Lexington. In the past couple of years, we have actually gone backwards by further dividing urban forestry. All the urban forestry activities in the city used to be the purview of Streets

and Road and of Parks and Recreation. However, at the beginning of your term, the two most senior urban foresters in Streets and Roads were moved into Environmental Policy.

At present, there are arborists, urban foresters and others with urban forestry responsibilities in at least three departments. The two most senior foresters have no technical support in the form of crews and are limited to administrative activities. Equipment for forest management is duplicated within two departments, Streets & Roads and Parks & Recreation.

You could do a lot to improve urban forest management in this city by reorganizing all urban forestry activities under a single department. In my experience, cities with the best urban forestry practices are those in which the administration of urban forestry activities are either in a single department or are tightly integrated. This could be done without any additional expenditure and might even save money.

The department best equipped for this integration is Parks & Recreation. Consolidation of all urban forestry staff into Parks & Recreation would create efficiencies that don't exist now. A Senior Urban Forester should be placed in charge of all urban forestry activities and should report directly to the administrator of Parks & Recreation. As an alternative, you could create a new Department of Urban Forestry within General Services or Environmental Quality and Public Works. However, Parks & Recreation has a lot more experience in urban forestry and is the biggest stakeholder in terms of acres and trees under management.

Whatever you decide, the Senior Urban Forester needs to have higher visibility within the community and within LFUCG. Ideally, the Senior Urban Forester would have direct access to the Mayor or access only one level removed. The Senior Urban Forester would be the senior advisor to all programs within the city that involve urban forestry.

I also recommend some changes to the relationship between LFUCG and the Tree Board. At present, there are several members of the Tree Board who operate tree care and landscape businesses in the city. This should be regarded as a conflict of interest. The Tree Board should be a citizen organization. In the past, the Tree Board has benefited from the technical expertise of these professionals. However, the role of advisor to the Tree Board should be played by the Senior Urban Forester, not by a person with potential conflicts of interest. There are also several experts in Lexington, including UK faculty members, who could serve as technical advisors to the Tree Board without conflicts of interest.

We are at a critical time in the life of the urban forest in Lexington. More attention is being paid to urban forestry issues, while at the same time our urban forest is in steep decline, perhaps even in crisis. The Emerald Ash Borer is rapidly altering the structure and function of the urban forest, and climate change is beginning to have an impact.

Jim, you have a real opportunity to substantially improve the quality of life in Lexington by restructuring the way we manage our urban forest. As with many business reorganizations, this will not come without opposition and stress. It should, however, not be costly and would have benefits that would last for decades to come.

I would be happy to assist in your urban forestry efforts in any way that I can.

Best Regards,



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