

Planning Commission of Peachtree City
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 23, 2026
6:30 PM

Call to Order

The Peachtree City Planning Commission held a regular meeting Monday, February 23, 2026 at City Hall. Chairman Scott Ritenour called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Others present were Vice-Chairman Andrew Kriz, and Commissioners Hans Gant, Jack Allen, and Robert Halverson, along with Kenneth Hamner. Also in attendance were Planning and Development Director Shayla Reed, Senior Planner Lora Hooks, Recording Secretary Martha Barksdale, and IT Specialists Ken Couch and Ryan Williams.

Pledge of Allegiance

Ritenour opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements

None

Presentations

None

Agenda Changes

None

Minutes

1. Planning Commission Meeting February 9, 2026

Allen moved to approve the February 9, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes. Gant seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Agenda Items

1. Discuss Text Amendment to the Land Development Ordinance, specifically Article XI - Vegetation Protection and Landscape Requirements (Kenneth Hamner)

Ritenour turned the floor over to Hamner, who reflected that they had been deliberating this Article 11 text amendment for about a year with the goal of banning invasive species and encouraging the planting of native plants in commercial, industrial, and institutional developments. There was a consensus on banning invasives and requiring natives on City-owned properties, but the Commissioners disagreed about the mandate levels over all and the flexibility for special gardens in private commercial developments. After the discussion at the December meeting, Hamner had distilled their suggestions into six ideas, which he thought they could debate.

- Option 1 – Keep ordinance as written
- Option 2 – Lower mandate and eliminate the special garden section

- Option 3 – Special use permit for non-native plantings
- Option 4 – Incentive-based: Tree Fund reduction
- Option 5 – Monetary disincentive for non-native heavy designs
- Option 6 – Invasive species ban only and encourage native plantings

Hamner went over the pros and cons of each option, noting that Option 1 had the highest native plant requirements (75%) and was most in line with native plant ordinances in other cities. It provided some flexibility by allowing non-natives in a special purpose garden for up to 10% of the site. Option 2 lowered the mandate to 60% and removed the themed garden provision.

Option 3 was an idea Halverson had after the meeting in December. It called for a property to meet all landscape requirements, but allowed for up to 25% non-natives with a special use permit and a fee paid to the City. Halverson said it would allow for more flexibility and let new property owners change the landscaping if they desired. However, it did put an additional burden on staff.

There was no native plant mandate in Option 4, but if the developer achieved 80% or more, they could see a reduction in any amount they owed to the Tree Fund. This could result in higher compliance rates, Hamner remarked, but with no minimum requirement, there could be low levels of native plantings. There were also ways that it favored large properties.

Option 5 also had no native percentage mandate, but owners choosing to go heavy on non-natives would incur an additional fee or cost. This was one of the most simple options. However, it could undermine the goal because large developers could opt to pay the fee and plant what they wanted. It might be difficult to determine the right amount for that fee, too. Hamner remarked that Option 6 was close to where they were now. It called for banning invasives and simply encouraging the planting of natives.

He said the next step was for the Commissioners to debate these options and come to a consensus. He would then revise the draft ordinance based on what they decided. There would be a public hearing at a future Planning Commission meeting, then the recommendation would go to City Council.

Kriz thanked Hamner for his work. He said he liked Halverson's permit idea, but had some questions. If the Planning Commission approved a landscape plan, and then the property owner wanted to change it, did it have to return to the Planning Commission? Reed said it did if the changes were substantial, such as changing the types of trees.

Gant said he wanted to see a higher percentage of native plants and thought incentives would support that. He also wanted an ordinance that was easy for the developers and the community to understand and having a standard baseline

would do that. However, he did want to allow for some percentage of individuality.

Allen noted that he and Hamner started on opposite ends of the spectrum regarding native plant requirements. He felt that a private property owner should be able to do with his property as he pleased, but admitted that Hamner had brought him around somewhat over the last few months. Allen said he could support something in between Options 2 and 3. He thought 60% natives was a fair requirement, but felt 10% for special uses was not sufficient, especially for smaller properties.

Kriz said he, too, could support a compromise situation that allowed for flexibility. He liked the special use permit but worried about the burden it would place on Code Enforcement to determine percentages. Halverson replied that a special use permit application would have to be accompanied by a landscape plan. He confirmed that it would apply only to new development and redevelopment. If they went with the permits, Kriz said he wanted to know what the fee would be and also thought 25% was not a high enough percentage to allow for creativity.

Halverson said he suggested 75/25 because that was in the original proposal, but he was open to changes. He also had wondered about what would be a usual and customary fee for something like this and how they could implement the fee system.

Meeting in the middle was the best way to accomplish this, Hamner remarked, and he said he could support Allen's proposal. He liked Option 3 but felt it favored large developments from a monetary perspective. Right now, he was leaning toward Option 2, which mandated a certain percentage of natives and eliminated a lot of the complexity in Options 3, 4, and 5. Hamner also reflected that even passing Option 6 would be a huge change from where they had been. He mentioned setting a percentage and moving ahead with Option 2. They could always revise it in the future.

Ritenour agreed that moving from no action to at least banning invasive species was a significant step. He also thought they should decide on something and move forward. If it didn't work, it could be changed.

Kriz stated that he preferred Option 2 because it was easy to understand.

Ritenour asked if they wanted to have something other than 60% for City-owned property? Hooks pointed out that the ordinance itself stated the City did not have to follow its own ordinances.

The draft had been sent to the City Arborist, City Engineer, Code Enforcement and the Public Works Director. The Public Works Director was concerned about the 100% native requirement, saying they made every effort to use native plants but frequently had to rely on non-natives, such as *Arborvitae*, for screening. The

arborist objected to sweetgums on the invasive plant list because they were not invasive, just nuisances. Sweetgums were native to the southeast, he added. The City Engineer asked to ensure they were not inadvertently prohibiting required plants, trees, or grasses listed in the storm water manual for ponds or in the erosion control manual. Code Enforcement had suggestions to add to the grasses list. Hamner said he had added those, and Ritenour noted they had removed sweetgum from the invasive list.

Hooks said staff was concerned that they had no professional to review this, like they would with the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), and ensure it did not conflict with other sections of Article XI - Vegetation Protection and Landscape Requirements. For instance, this draft had a list of prohibited plants, but elsewhere in the ordinance, a few of those plants were recommended in a section on tree protection on public property. Hooks said she was sure there were other conflicts, and a professional needed to check for that.

Staff had other questions. Did they need to add anything to the definition section of this chapter? When zoning districts were mentioned, such as GC or LI, the full list of zoning districts should be included. Section 1135 mentioned landscape reviews for common areas in subdivisions, but the city did not require landscape reviews for residential areas unless they were a condition of a rezoning. The Commissioners agreed that these plant requirements would only apply to Industrial and Commercial districts. Whatever they adopted had to be enforceable and able to stand up in court, Reed commented.

Ritenour said these were all very good points. Whatever they came up with would have to be reviewed for conflicts and contradictions, but these were inevitable whenever they made any changes. Enforceability would be key, and the Commissioners wanted to make Code Enforcement and staff's job as easy as possible.

Hooks brought up another potential problem with enforcement. She had a background in landscape architecture, so she was knowledgeable about plants and able to conduct landscape reviews, but the next person in her job probably wouldn't have that knowledge. Code Enforcement would have a tough time, too.

Allen noted that they had been talking about this for a year, but now staff had put up some hurdles. What did they think should be the next step? Reed said they knew this was not ready for adoption, and this was the first time they had gotten to a completed draft.

Kriz remarked that it was important to eliminate conflicts and asked Hooks to notify Hamner of any she had noticed. He agreed that the UDO would be helpful in spotting conflicts, too, and Hooks said that's what she thought. Kriz suggested they go ahead and develop the best ordinance they could, then hand it off to the UDO consultants.

Halverson asked if they could include language that said any decision would default to Planning staff in the event of a conflict. Reed said she would defer to the City Attorney in that case. Kriz said it was possible to have that type of language, but he would want the City Attorney to provide it.

Ritenour asked if they could agree on a direction, and Hamner said that was all he wanted, acknowledging there were a lot of realities that had to be addressed. Kriz said he was hearing a lot of Option 2 from everyone. Gant said he would like to see a higher percentage of natives than Option 2 mandated, but he was willing to go along with the others.

Was the 40% non-native allowance in Option 2 a minimum requirement? Halverson asked. Hooks said the landscaping requirement was a certain number of caliper inches based on the amount of impervious surface, unless there were requirements specific to the zoning. Hooks said a developer might want to provide more, but this would be 40% of what was required.

Gant said he could support Option 2, but was there a way to incentivize going higher? Allen said they had pushed away from that because it would put more of a burden on staff. Option 2 was much simpler for everyone.

There was still the Tree Fund for those who came under the required amount of caliper inches, Ritenour remarked. Hooks asked what about developments that were only able to accommodate a lower percentage of what was required? Kriz said to keep it simple: 60% of what was proposed on the landscape plan had to be native.

The Commissioners decided on Option 2, and Hamner said he would work on another draft and probably ask staff for advice. They would keep ironing out the details.

Mentions of residential areas needed to be removed from Section 1135, Ritenour said, including parking lot islands, such as in a subdivision's clubhouse area. Hooks said those amenity areas were treated as Commercial areas, and she believed they had to complete a landscape plan. She said she would check.

Ritenour said it would be nice to encourage native plantings in residential areas, but he didn't want to require it. Hooks added that new single-family lots were required to have two trees of at least two inches in caliper, inspected by the Senior Code Enforcement Officer. They could require that they be natives, but the Commissioners agreed that would open a slippery slope.

Ritenour thanked Hamner for his work, noting how far this had evolved from the original discussion. Hooks asked Hamner where he was getting his plant lists, and he said Athens-Clarke County.

No action was needed from the Commission now, Reed said. She said she and Hooks would be working with Hamner and also involving other staff members. Ritenour said there was probably some additional language that would be needed. Hamner stated he would write a new version of the ordinance, get staff's feedback, and bring it back to the Planning Commission.

New Agenda Items

None

Public Hearings

None

Member/Staff Topics

Hooks confirmed the next meeting will be held March 9 with a UDO steering committee meeting following. Reed reminded the Commissioners to let her know if they were interested in attending the Carl Vinson planning & zoning classes.

Adjourn

There being no further business, Kriz moved to adjourn at 7:30 p.m. Halverson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.



Martha Barksdale, Recording Secretary



Scott Ritenour, Chairman