

*THOUGHTS SHARED DURING THE OPEN FORUM ON MARCH 29, 2016,
ROSWELL, GEORGIA*

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Tonight, I would like to speak in support of the City Green by offering my expertise, hopefully to alleviate some concerns that have been repeatedly discussed about the project.

First, my expertise, which is in my knowledge of trees, landscape design and maintenance. I hold a master of landscape architecture degree and I've worked in both private and public sector positions over the past 15 years. In the private sector, I worked for three firms, one of which previously served as a consultant to the City of Roswell. For several years, I held a landscape designer position in Grounds Dept at the University of Georgia. While there, I wrote a grant that resulted in the designation of the Athens Campus as a Tree Campus by the Arbor Day Foundation, for which we inventoried almost 8,000 campus trees.

All this is to say -- that I know, and love trees. So, when I say that the removal of existing trees to make way for the City Green is not a significant loss, please understand this is not a statement that I make lightly.

Most of the trees proposed for removal are young loblolly pines intermixed with just a few hardwoods, namely oaks. Without getting into a lengthy explanation about forest development, I can say that of the mix of trees that we have in the front of City Hall will not sustain itself as a healthy urban forest in the long term. As most Georgians know, pine trees grow quickly and also break and uproot easily. While, they help to jumpstart the growth of companion hardwoods-- when not thinned intentionally or by mother nature, the effect they have on the growth of nearby hardwoods does not usually result in healthy or attractive shade trees. This is the condition we have now in front of City Hall. It's like an overgrown lawn of pines with what might have been a few nice hardwoods, with intentional thinning and management.

Secondly, the relocation of the Faces of War memorial has been discussed with so much emotion around it. For good reason, it is a moving tribute to veterans and should be a place of reflection. As such an intimate memorial, it has always been puzzling to me why it was sited so close to a major roadway. Particularly, as we have discussed tonight, because it is often necessary for road corridors to change in order to adapt or control new uses. Memorials should be protected, and in order to protect and enhance the experience of the Faces of War, it makes sense that it must move to be more thoughtfully placed to ensure its future.

Lastly, beloved places that are highly valued by people do not just appear. Sometimes it takes decades for the qualities to evolve that make valued public places. This is perhaps the most frustrating and rewarding aspect of being a landscape architect.

Young trees eventually become great trees that provide shade, shelter and shape to the spaces people congregate and enjoy -- design consultants must use their expertise to envision and design for future places and people.

This is the way we, as a community, must approach City Green. We may need to sacrifice our own comfort on hot days until the new shade trees have the chance to grow. We may need to accept that sometimes "in perpetuity" can allow for some flexibility in order to enhance and protect.

To close, I'll return back to Athens and one of the most beloved places in the Classic City-- the North Campus Lawn. For those who don't know it, it is the green backdrop to the first buildings on campus dating back to 1801- and it is also the vast green that extends out to the historic downtown and welcomes visitors onto campus. The oldest and most majestic of the oak trees standing are 100-150 years old. However, most, if not all of these were intentionally planted to replace what time or convention had removed.

Roswell has the same opportunity to adjoin its public and commercial spaces with this City Green. The proposed lawn and its flanking trees will be maintained as a place for gathering and connecting, and the trees will have the chance to grow into healthy shade trees. Though I doubt it will not take nearly so long for City Green to become a place for celebrations, proposals, reflection, recreation and everyday use. I expect many of those occasions will happen immediately, IF we are willing to be patient and plant for the future.