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If changes in the proposed tree ordinance are approved, expect to see more trees fall in the name of development.

# Don't let group ax city tree ordinance

If giant oaks from little acorns grow, a revised tree preservation ordinance should be well on the way to maturity.

After all, the revision has been under way for three years. But, instead, it has suffered a deadly blow.

For 36 months, residents, neighborhood associations and developers have been negotiating over what was supposed to be a strengthened ordinance. Its goal was to keep the city's dwindling supply of forested tracts from being completely bulldozed under and paved over.

They've heard from hundreds of residents, sat through countless meetings and have debated and negotiated among themselves in search of an ordinance more effective than the one enacted in 1997.

The city also has spent \$38,000 on a tree preservation consultant, who weighed in with useful recommendations.

Despite the long, tedious process — during which an estimated 35,000 acres of trees fell to developers — the so-called stakeholders seemed to be moving toward a revised ordinance the city and its developers could live with.

But then the blight set in. As quick and as devastating as oak wilt itself, the city's Land Development Services Committee took the proposal for a revised ordinance and gutted it.

The committee, chaired by Susan Wright, recommended 11 changes in the proposed ordinance. Every one weakens the ordinance. Every single change benefits developers.

The proposal now goes to the Planning Commission, which will hold public hearings.

A city committee should not be allowed to gut the proposed tree preservation ordinance.



From the commission it goes to the City Council, which has scheduled a vote on the revised ordinance for March 6.

The tree-ordinance denouement has been profoundly discouraging for San Antonians concerned about saving the city's rapidly dwindling tree cover.

Those who have worked so hard to preserve a precious natural resource are left questioning whether the revised ordinance will be any better than the laughably weak current ordinance.

And, of course, they're left wondering what to do next. Some have suggested starting all over again. Others have suggested getting the revised ordinance in place and then tinkering with it as issues arise.

Neither is the answer. Residents of this community should say, "Enough!"

The Planning Commission should reject the recommendations of the Land Services Development Committee and accept the recommendations of the consultant, Mark White. The City Council should follow suit.

Residents should no longer settle for a tree ordinance so wimpy that it is practically useless.

Get on with it, council members. Put a tree preservation ordinance in place that's worthy of the name. Trees are falling while you dither, and this city is the poorer for it.