

Unanticipated, Unexplained and Incongruous Data Emerges;
An Addendum to the Field Arborist Productivity Report

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Background

In April and July I made Open Records requests to examine the inspection records of the field arborists in the Bureau of Buildings for the first two quarters of 2010. The database records are presented and discussed in my report on field arborist production on the The Tree Next Door website (www.treenextdoor.org). The Field Book, Daily Report and nearly all other current Arborist Division Standards of Practice can also be found on the TTND website.

At the same time I also requested examination of the field books of the individual arborists. The field books provide the raw data for the database records. The Field Book Standard of Practice is clear about its use and its importance. It begins:

*The field book is a legal document and an official record of the arborist's daily field activities. A comprehensive field book shall be maintained by each arborist as part of his or her official record. **The field book is the property of the City of Atlanta** [emphasis in original].*

The Field Book Standard of Practice ends with the words "The field book shall be mirrored completely, entry by entry, in KIVA" – KIVA being the database in use as of June 2009, the latest date of issue of the Standards. KIVA was replaced this spring by a new database called Accela.

Backing up the Field Book Standard, the Daily Report Standard of Practice states "*It is the responsibility of the individual field arborist to transfer the relevant data from each day's field book entries to KIVA.*" It recommends transfer on the same day as the record was made, but demands "such transfer must occur within one day of the date of entry in the field book" [emphasis in original].

I received what appeared to be complete or nearly complete field book notes from all but one of the field arborists. cursory examination and quick spot checks of randomly selected entries of the field books I received indicated seemingly consistent compliance with the Field Book and Daily Report Standards.

Stan Domengeaux, however, reported that his field books had been misplaced. Five months of Mr. Domengeaux's field notes vanished. In July I received the first copies of his notes, covering June 4 -30, 2010. A few spot checks indicated potentially severe discrepancies between these field notes and the database entries. I transferred each field book entry by date, address and task performed into a spreadsheet for comparison with the database printouts for the same period.

Field Book/Database comparison**Table 1: Comparison of Field Book to Database entries for Stan Domengeaux, June 4-30, 2010**

| | Post | DDH | FCO | Ill Act | Other | Total |
|------------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Fieldbook | 16 | 77 | 10 | 4 | 31 | 138 |
| Database | 5 | 24 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 34 |
| DB not FB | 1 | 1 | | | | 2 |

Where**Fieldbook = Fieldbook records****Database = Accela database records****DB not FB = in Accela records but not in fieldbook****Post = Orange, Yellow and White sign postings****DDH = Dead, Dying or Hazardous tree evaluations****FCO = Certificate of Occupancy inspections****Ill Act = records of illegal activity****Other = Nuisance tree inspections, Site Compliance inspections, Site Visits, or Unknown**

As indicated in Table 1, fully 75 percent of the work Mr. Domengeaux claims in his daily field book entries is not documented in the database record. The select 25 percent of the records – with one notable exception – were entered into the database in a timely fashion, usually on the same day, occasionally on the next working day. The one exception is interesting: Mr. Domengeaux entered a DDH tree removal permit at 2830 Alston Dr. SE into the database on June 9. According to his field book, he inspected the tree on June 30.

I am perplexed by these figures. Mr. Domengeaux was disciplined with a suspension without pay in 2006 for “padding” his field book and daily reports with false inspection records. I can think of no valid reason for him to falsify his field book records now. At the same time I can think of no valid reason for him not to transfer legitimate field inspections into the database as required by the Standards of Practice. Perhaps Mr. Domengeaux has a compelling explanation. He should certainly be required to give one.

Table 2: Comparison of Stan Domengeaux’s Field Book and Database Entries by Quadrant, June 4-30, 2010

| Quad | FB Entries in DB | FB Entries not in DB | Notes |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| NE | 2 (6%) | 23 (23%) | |
| NW | 2 (6%) | 16 (16%) | |
| SE | 25 (71%) | 31 (31%) | Inc. 1 in DB, not in FB |
| SW | 6 (17%) | 31 (31%) | Inc. 1 in DB, not in FB |
| Total | 35 | 101 | |

Underreporting of field book entries occurs on all but three days in which Mr. Domengeaux reported no activities in either his field book or the database and one day in which he documents a posting in the database but not in his field book. On Mr. Domengeaux's most productive day, June 25, he documents 23 inspections in his field book – two in the NE, four in the NW, six in the SE and 11 in the SW. The inspections include 18 DDH evaluations, one FCO inspection, one report of illegal activity, and three “other” or “unknown” types of inspections. Only two of these field book entries, both DDH evaluations in the SE, are recorded in the database.

The database has a high proportion (88%) of entries for addresses in the SE and SW – fitting for an arborist assigned to those two areas. However, field book entries for inspections in the NE and NW account for 39% of the field book record that is not recorded in Accela.

I tried and failed to discern some pattern in this information. Table 1 indicates non-transfer of field book data to the database in all categories of activities and relatively consistent (25-40%) underreporting of activities in all the major categories. Table 2, similarly, shows high levels of non-reporting in all quadrants of the city.

Site visits

Stumped, I made some bike rides, visiting as many addresses as I could in a 2-3 hour time frame on each of three consecutive days. These site visits are concentrated in the NE and SE quadrants. They do not represent a random sample, surely, but they are perhaps representative.

Table 3: Field Inspections of Select Addresses Reported by Stan Domengeaux in his Field Book but not in Accela, June 4-30, 2010

| Status | Number | Percent | Notes |
|----------------|--------|---------|--------------------------------|
| New | 3 | 12% | 1 occ., 1 poss. occ, 1 vacant |
| Occupied | 4 | 15% | |
| Poss. Occupied | 5 | 19% | |
| Vacant House | 7 | 27% | |
| Vacant Lot | 3 | 12% | |
| DNE | 4 | 15% | Inc. 2 not found on Googlemaps |

Where New = New construction

Occupied = Appearance indicates probable occupation

Poss. Occupied = Appearance indicates possible occupation

Vacant House = Lock box on door, boarded-up, or obviously derelict

Vacant Lot = No house on lot

DNE = Does Not Exist

I judged the “status” of these properties simply by appearance. The addresses judged “possibly occupied” all were closed with shades drawn, but with some element – a chair on the front porch, a flag in a flag holder, a vehicle in the driveway – indicating the potential for occupancy. The “vacant house” and “vacant lot” categories were obvious. Two addresses simply did not exist, and the street names of another two could not be found on either Googlemaps or Mapquest.

A pattern of sorts may be emerging here, with over half of the addresses visited proving to be either vacant or non-existent properties. What this pattern means and why it exists is known only to Mr. Domengeaux at present. I have made another Open Records request to examine the complete records, including the Requests for Service that prompted the inspections, on each of the 101 inspections claimed by Mr. Domengeaux in his field book that do not appear in the database record for June, 2010. I will report my findings upon receipt of these records.