

MEETING NOTES



ISSUE DATE

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MEETING DATE

Dec 5, 2019

LOCATION

Cambridge
Rindge and Latin
School

CLIENT

City of Cambridge

PROJECT NAME/NUMBER

Urban Forest
Master Plan 2953

RE

Task Force
Meeting to review
Technical Report

ATTENDEES

City of Cambridge
Task Force
Reed Hilderbrand
Conservation Law
Foundation

1. Introduction by Catherine Woodbury

It's been half a year since we last met, and based on the length of the report, hope everyone appreciates the thoroughness. Owen could not be with us. Intent of the meeting tonight is to obtain feedback from the task force.

Introduction of the project team:

Reed Hilderbrand – Eric Kramer, Matt Soule, Stephanie Hsia, Gary Hilderbrand
Conservation Law Foundation – Deanna Moran

TF members present:

Mark Verkennis, Harvard University
Laura Tenny, MIT
Kathleen Fitzgerald, Resident
Lena Jean Nahan, Resident
Randa Ghattas, Resident
Ahron Lerman, Resident
Florrie Wescoat, Committee on Public Planting co-chair
Maggie Booz, Committee on Public Planting co-chair
Megan Nichols Tomkins, Chamber of Commerce
Caitlin Tamposi, Chamber of Commerce
Elana Saporta, Resident
Louise Weed, Resident
Joe Bendar, Cambridge Housing Authority
Tom Evans, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

2. Feedback from Task Force

What did you find most eye opening?

What are your largest remaining questions?

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Laura: The report was very well written and researched, organized. Commendation to the City and consultant group. Early takeaways- good data with overlay of corridors with heat island, demographics and spatial typologies – to start to observe those patterns is very useful. A lot to chew on and good discussion in the task force that was captured in it.

Mark: Phenomenal analysis- whatever the City does, will be backed up with data. This is a call to action and was startled by how much canopy loss was happening in the residential areas. To think about the City through the lens of the whole City, dynamic organisms.

Maggie: I never had doubts about importance of trees so nothing was surprising there, but it's a fantastic statistical analysis and I'm glad this document is out there. But, how do we open the eyes of the rest of the citizens because it is vital. It is a massive effort. We've got a serious problem. Degradation that is critically bad and how do we make everyone understand this and what do we do? Always felt it was the public realm and street trees, but it isn't – it's a private property thing- and it's finally sunk in.

Louise: Very good document. Shocked by some of the language- 'no one is in charge of the urban canopy.' But isn't there someone who is? So, what will happen with the proposals? Who the heck will take them on? Loves the ideas about the street, but who is going to take them on. Who will implement them. We have to decide what we want to do and make happen. Every Councilor and every citizen should own this issue. How are we actually going to make decisions and make a to do list? Someone has to take charge.

Elena: Cambridge once had a Parks Commission, so Cambridge should revisit this so someone is responsible for trees and it's not what DPW has to address.

Florrie: Struck by how much canopy is lost. Zoning has not much to say to prevent this. Currently there are no inspections prior to occupancy. Effect of tree protection is hard to quantify due to lack of data. Shocking that there's not much concern on the City's part.

Response (Eric): We have seen City implement many of our recommendations, particularly the practice recommendations. For Zoning, climate resiliency task force and working with them on a Cool Factor. We have traction from the work we've done.

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Florrie: We must demand that every City Councilor acknowledge this as an issue.

Kathleen: Not just City Councilors but we need a literal Lorax, someone who speaks for the trees, the parks, and interacting with the City manager. If the values are not shared by the City manager and Mayor, than initiatives will not get very far. A discussion of community building is somewhat missing from the report. The idea of victory gardens – we must be told and educated about what my backyard can do for the City. Amazing report, but struggling to get through it. We need innovative ways to get the word out - grassroots – collective action - block parties – Green Cambridge.

Tom: Fascinating report but underwhelmed by the goal to get back to where we were in 2009.

Response (Matt): This is due to the size of the trees we've lost, and the time it takes the replacements to grow to a similar canopy size. If we can plant the number of trees described on the report, we could be over 30% by 2070. It just takes time.

Maggie: What has been the loss rate since the task force started?

Response (Matt): The loss data was taken from LiDAR data and there hasn't been another flyover during this process.

Response (Andrew Putnam): Regarding permit applications, 349 requests for removals with 298 approved. Some violations and one or two unreported violations, but not able to know whether this is an increase because this is the first time we started tracking.

Maggie: Do we have data on tree hearings and whether trees get saved?

Response (David Lefcourt): We only do a tree hearing as a last resort. Most of the hearings are for developers and are for moving utilities/curb cut. In his 12 years, a handful of trees that were saved as a result.

Laura: Big takeaway is framing trees as infrastructure system. This should be part of the education outreach. Tree management sit in DPW is a sweet spot in some ways because can be treated like a utility. Need to have a way to negotiate

with utilities. For instance there was a National Grid proposal for a nearby town to remove all oaks and ash in their right of way. Ash because of EAB, but oaks because of gypsy moths which only do cosmetic damage, so that's not a reason to remove them.

Tom: Re: idea to move trees under a Parks Commission, Boston trying to get trees out of Parks department and putting it into the DPW which is aligned with concept of forest as infrastructure.

Ahron: Really liked the document and found it very comprehensive. Nuanced and specificity of some of the recommendations. Street types, yard types, scenarios, and having this breadth of data, feels exciting to read because there's a lot of low hanging fruit and feels achievable.

Which 5 strategies do you think should be the highest priority?

Lena: potential loophole in the tree ordinance – landlord was worried about the tree branches falling on neighbors yard, so took all the branches off of the tree. How broad is the definition of a hazardous tree?

Response (Andrew): regulations to determine a dead/dangerous – a certified arborist must certify that the tree is hazardous

Response (Deanna): Intentional damage/harm – hard to prove – there could be a violation – theoretically we could have pruning incorporated into the ordinance.

Elana: Would think this would be great to incorporate. Current arboricultural fashion to limb up trees within an inch of their life.

Caitlin: There needs to be capacity within City department to implement strategies.

Maggie: Should be a hierarchy in the City – someone advising the City manager – how do we build a hierarchy within the City to speak for trees. How do we get it to filter into the engineering department? This should be of highest priority – a tree czar. I tried to get trees planted on my street while it was being rebuilt, but it didn't happen.

Laura: Having a landscape architect on a planning board is a good one. Not sure

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if it should be one person or a group of people within many departments to review permits, etc.

Kathleen: Need a tree advocate in the City

Randa – integration of tree protection needs to go into everything- into any planning effort – into relationships. If we can integrate it effectively, will become much more powerful in how it gets messaged out. Not just trees, but about a good urban environment, equitable. Need to broaden out from just trees. She loves the scenario analysis, but bringing lenses into the different neighborhoods. Design strategies – the City should do this. Just need to change the discourse around this. Low hanging policies that could come into play.

Kathleen: Question about funding. What is the cost to plant per tree? Participatory budget suggests its \$2k per tree. Do we have the budget for this? It's not clear.

Response (Andrew): started a bare root farm. Cost fluctuates – and incorporate survivability for the first 5 years. The City has already ramping up number of trees the City is planting.

Louise: Bare root is a great idea. We planted dozen trees in Raymond Park, so how do you actually take care of them? Very interesting to have the community respond - there were many people who were angry. So we need to have the citizens feel like they are well taken care of so they don't respond in this way. We have a long way to go - community building is so critical.

Eric: How do we get planting on private residential property?

Flora: Louisville is giving a subsidy for planting on private land. Small incentive like that is important.

Louise: Subsidize arborists or landscape architects to save trees? Block parties – free trees. Organize/galvanize a group of people to save trees? Look at it from a granular level. Something like the solar campaign – you could do this and get this in return. What about something similar with trees – you could plant a tree and get this in return. Need a meeting of the minds, who can do this?

Maggie: Yes, we need grassroots efforts but those are citizen led, but the Task Force is here to advise the City. We have to look at it as 'What are we asking the

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City to do.' How to use the resources of the City to say, lets systematically do something.

Florrie: We need to publicize back of sidewalk program.

Councilor Zondervan: City can give funds to nonprofit to provide services.

Tom: Can the City have a discount program, similar to rain barrels, where they provide reduced cost trees since they are infrastructure?

Randa: Would love to see workforce development program that ties to tree planting, engage the youth, trees and landscaping as a whole to benefit the trees, equity + workforce + tree planting and fund through non-profit

Deanna: City could provide free trees or subsidized trees

Randa: Back of sidewalk – needs to be broader service- not just dropping in the tree. Is it an NGO or is it the City, funded through the Tree Fund?

Caitlin: Louisville does have a youth workforce program – summer jobs.

Ahron: I agree with what has been said. Worcester Tree Initiative – supported federal/state replanting efforts through youth programs. Has now taken up other tree events and was through larger government grants, so they act like a liaison between the State and the City. Working with non-profits would be the priority because of how much private land – this would be a long-term approach. Emphasizing tree importance across City departments.

Lena: I think education of landowners is very important, and a large percentage that view trees as a liability and perhaps see a problem when there isn't. Just like what was done with curbside composting – informational pamphlets – something distributed in that form would be good.

3. Tree Ordinance

Eric presented on the existing tree ordinance and proposed tree ordinance recommendations.

Intentions of the ordinance – we set some values that can translate into actions. Everyone is subject to the ordinance. If one removes a tree voluntarily, then

there should be a cost. Large trees provide greater benefits – so mitigation should be scaled so larger trees should be mitigated differently, and the largest trees should have a different category of protection. The process should be simple and objective. Simple formula for residential tree removals. Not all trees are equal – account for condition, species and location. Should be equitable – those on financial assistance do not pay penalties. Should not be about money but about replanting on-site, or off-site if not possible.

Why is everyone subject to the ordinance? Residential loss is the highest, and currently not covered under ordinance. The special projects only accounts for 5% of the loss over the last 10 years.

Protecting more trees by including trees with 6” dbh or more as significant trees.

Protect the largest through a special category called Exceptional Trees. Based on extrapolation, 30” dbh trees accounts for approximately 3% of the tree numbers but 8% of the canopy.

Current mitigation method is based on caliper inch. 40” dbh tree would be replaced by eight 5” cal trees. Based on trunk area, the number would increase greatly, though multiplied by condition, species, and location.

Example: 36” pin oak. Mitigation is \$250,000 versus \$30k.

Elena: Have we considered mitigating by canopy area instead of DBH?

Response: There’s no industry standard for evaluating canopy area.

Unintentional vs. intentional trees – are there different methods or multiplication factor?

Tom: A homeowner exemption is not creating equity. We should encourage this as a fairness application. Rental landlords vs. owner occupied will have different reactions.

Ahron: What size tree would a homeowner be required to plant? The 1” cal. is physically easy for homeowner to replant but not a 2” cal. which is much heavier.

Randa: It should be 1 for 1 replacements. Planting multiple trees is just not

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feasible.

Ahron: Should we evaluate the ISA species ratings through the climate susceptibility ratings?

Laura: I would caution against relying too heavily on the climate analysis because we don't actually know how species are going to react.

Randa: Fees are getting ridiculous.

Tom: Would a disclosure then be required for trees over 30"? Concern expressed for homeowners who don't understand the liability of having an exceptional tree on their property

Laura: Re: arborist fee, could the City negotiate a \$50 rate with a City-approved arborist? Would go a long way to get across the initial threshold.

Ahron: Exceptional tree – is there an easement type situation, like a tax benefit?
Response (Deanna): This would require state legislation.

Elena: Tree replacement that includes canopy area – test out?

Randa: This mitigation proposal will disincentive new tree planting in the future for residents and unintended consequences such as freezing the City in place. There should be some protections but this version is too punitive.

Laura: It could just be a one for one replanting with no arborist involved. I don't know about the fund payment.

Tom: The biggest losses are on residential properties. We can't stem loss without some kind of restriction.

Randa: Incentivizing not de-incentivizing. They have small lots, and some people want to grow food. It's about workforce, design, education, etc... A changing built environment that is sustainable – need a different model and this one feels stagnant.

Kathleen: First response of landlord is I'm going to cut down my trees now. Ordinance needs to be coached within a broader campaign. Without that, this would be received very negatively.

General Task Force comments:

Public outreach should focus on what you could plant on your property, then have a way to give them the trees to plant.

We need better marketing of the back of sidewalk program.

Develop a workforce development program based on tree planting.

This should not be a report that just sits on the shelf. Needs implementation.

Public Comment period:

PC1, Councilor Zondervan:

We need to do both disincentive and incentive. We could think about the date it was planted, no penalty if the tree was planted before a certain date. The City could replace trees and maintain them – this might be how to balance.

The City Manager has committed to increasing the budget for trees. There will be additional funding available. We could use the ordinance to commit the City itself, similar to the bike ordinance– City to plant or assist homeowners to plant trees through a mechanism such as affordable housing trust. There's a lot of flexibility. There needs to be a structured way to bring ordinance changes to the Council. There needs to be a deliverable that processes these ideas from the community and recommends what would be reasonable mitigation.

PC2, Unknown:

Virtually impossible to hear, so would ask for some consideration if this room is used again. Valiant effort to put value on trees. He thinks we should put the emphasis on the City, Harvard, and MIT and large property landowners.

Consider tax abatement for heritage trees.

PC3, Mike Nakagawa:

Submitted a letter to the task force.

Feels 15% target for commercial/industrial areas this is too low.

Wants to see more overlap with resilient task force and importance of zoning for encouraging canopy. Feels there should a tax abatement for having trees on one's property.

PC4, Unknown:

The City should develop a systematic response. The precedent for changing City

priorities should be the traffic advisory board which advised the City Manager but answered to the citizens of Cambridge.

PC5, Peter Cohen:

Point about how cities change – properties also change. Trees come down and have to be replaced. Vision may change. The ordinance rec do not account for this. Other values like how people use trees for privacy, aesthetic choices and safety concerns. Arborist fee may have consequences. Why should people pay for an arborist if the tree is dead? Quote for taking down 3 dead trees - \$1k to \$2k. This is massive government overreach and invites legal challenge. Use carrots and not sticks.

PC6: Councilor-elect Patty Nolan. Wants to emphasize the need for education and told example of fighting her neighbors re: not cutting down her mulberry tree. Importance of trees – health of city and kids, shared ownership. The more everyone- the City and individual people – knows about trees, the more people will understand the numbers. The mitigation numbers need context. She loves the work. The Public Planting Committee needs to have power and make sure the work gets implemented.

PC7: Steve Nutter. Green Cambridge. Thank you for all the hard work. He's been at Green Cambridge for 3 years and first effort was to call for a task force. The three task forces - Net zero task force, climate zoning task force, and urban forest master plan task force – all build together. Report is well done, eye opening and scary. Excited to move forward with the plan.

PC8, Chuck Hynes:

East Cambridge has a lot of trees that are over 30” caliper. The trees are taken down because it's breaking up the foundation. He thinks the City should help pay for the foundation to preserve the tree. When one of these trees gets taken down, the change is dramatic and it upsets people. In February, they lost 49 trees. They are running out of permeable land. There are 180 trees on Volpe. Build with preservation of trees in mind.

PC9, Unknown:

Member of the Mid Cambridge neighborhood association. He wants to emphasize the importance of education. Wants to compliment the quality of the report and loved what he read. Particularly on the question of setbacks, and how difficult it is to have a tree survive with no setback- the proposed affordable housing overlay had no concern for setbacks, and the speaker was glad it did not

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pass. He wants to share this quote: “If we do not get control of our canopy, the next endangered species will be us. “