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"For a more sustainable city and to protect the environment for the health and safety of all."

January 17, 2020

RE: Comments on the Urban Forest Master Plan Technical Report

Dear Mr. DePasquale, Commissioner O'Riordan, the City Council, and the UFMP team,

This is a groundbreaking, wide-ranging, and progressive report. Together with the Net-Zero Action Plan, the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, and the coming work from the Climate Resilience Zoning Task Force, this Technical Report forms an integrated foundational path the City can better direct its resources toward addressing the climate crisis using the tools it has available. Thank you to all involved with this Report.

Because of this excellent work, Cambridge continues to be a leader and to show by example how to address climate change at the municipal level. When viewed as a whole, these reports and plans provide a vetted and transparent public process, sanctioned by the City, and serve as guideposts to restructure our resources including staff, departments, and the city budget so that all aspects of the organization that is tasked to run our City forms a cohesive team and executes an integrated approach to climate action. We now have the information needed to move forward quickly -- and to serve as an inspiration to the thousands of other cities and towns grappling with similar issues.

From a high level, Green Cambridge is completely in alignment with each piece of this Report. We could not have framed the conversation or written the report better ourselves; it shares the values of our thousands of supporters and speaks directly to our mission to create a more sustainable city and to protect the environment for the health and safety of all.

Green Cambridge strongly believes that the number one priority for climate action at the local level is prioritizing a deep sense of shared responsibility in our public realm and among private property owners by reconnecting with each other in our community as we reconnect with our local environment. While behavior change and technological advances have undoubtedly begun to tweak existing socio-economic and infrastructure systems in the right direction, the creation of an everyday resilience deeply tied to the land we all share by broad-based cultural engagement with local ecological cycles is our ultimate path forward through this long emergency we face in our changing climate.

This Report turns this goal into actionable steps to galvanize collective action. Our urban forest is a living example of our local ecological cycle and land use, accessible and experienced by nearly everyone in Cambridge. It has the ability to serve as an outdoor classroom ready-made for building a stronger, more equitable community that we all desire. For these reasons, and for the incredible time, energy, and skill commitments the consultant team and the citizen advisory group has given us, we express our deepest appreciation.

We are lucky to have the expert knowledge we need to address the issues of our urban forest at our disposal; this is intellectual resource is one thing that makes Cambridge special. We are especially pleased to have had many Green Cambridge members and supporters on the task force, including our board member Elena Saporta. One of the impetuses of this process was our petition to the City for a Tree Task Force in spring 2017, and after years of advocacy, our creation of a Cambridge Tree Advisory Committee within Green Cambridge, a citizen science report detailing a change in our canopy, and many other efforts, it is wonderful to see this comprehensive Technical Report given life.

During this UFMP process, we were especially heartened to see the discussion and focus move from talking about trees to talking about the public realm. We all live in the public realm. It is where community happens. It is open to all. And it is the physical part of our urban fabric that the City controls.

The City must use this expert knowledge and develop and leverage its political will to do everything in its power to regulate the entire shared urban forest for the greater good, no matter whose property it grows from. Though our country was created on the foundation of property rights, it is the public discussion and regulation of how we use property that gives us strength as a city, state, and nation. The City can use its power and public property to both set the example and equitably provide for all community members that experience our 4,500 acres that are Cambridge.

With a specific focus on growing the canopy in deficit neighborhoods, we can take a step toward a more equitable city. The design of our public realm is a manifestation of what we collectively prioritize. Currently, if you were calculating the square footage of land use the City controls, you might think we value most the storage of privately owned vehicles on public property. We know this is not the value we hold dearest, so it has been wonderful to see the consultant team and citizen task force move from trees as a singular entity to how the city utilizes broadly the public realm. It is time for us to rethink our streets, and the recommendations outlined in this report are excellent examples of where to begin.

We are especially excited to see the recommendation to formally join with community organizations for outreach and education of the broader public in our urban forest. This is part of the DNA of Green Cambridge. In the past few years, since hiring our executive director we have evolved to become a place-based environmental education organization that utilizes urban agriculture, our urban forests, and urban wilds as teaching spaces. Our partnerships and collaboration with individuals, organizations, and groups from around the city -- including several City departments, public and private schools, neighborhood groups, non-profits, and businesses -- puts our work of connecting efforts and celebrating our local environment as unique. Consider us a trusted and primary partner in the implementation of the recommendations of this Technical Report. Indeed, among other programs, we have already worked with DPW, CRLS, and Lesley University to pilot efforts toward engagement with our urban forest through tree planting and education. We urge the City to continue its efforts to utilize its social resources like our pool of 1,800 public high school students. For example, if each high school student planted one tree each year, that would go a long way toward growing our canopy. More formally, a new vocational track in the school could develop a pipeline of skill-building for urban forestry careers.

Since 2018, we have been investigating how to begin a Heritage Tree program here in Cambridge, modeled after ones found in Seattle, WA, and Portland, OR. This tactic has shown effectiveness in other cities and so we're happy to see "Exceptional Trees" to be highlighted in the Report. Our big old trees are part of the living fabric of Cambridge, having the same shared value as our historic districts and buildings. People love them; they hold multi-generational memories that bind our community in addition to being an excellent living infrastructure that cannot be replaced by simply planting new trees in their place. It is imperative that the City use the pricing and replacement strategies highlighted in this Report to ensure their survival at the policy level.

Finally, Green Cambridge strongly supports a much more robust organizational response to climate change from the City. We live with a government structured to respond to 20th-century municipal maintenance and operations issues. We must take a critical eye toward how we organize our resources, as other municipalities have, to best address the issue of climate and environment.

The Report highlights this in terms of the urban forest: "There is no single department or individual who speaks for the urban forest. In order to be accountable and to ensure advancement, this study recommends developing clear mandates that are adopted across departments. These can be linked to other city priorities and efforts, like climate resiliency and social equity."

Other City priorities have an organizational unit to create accountability, manage the process, and to ensure that it stays on the larger agenda. We'll have greater success when our urban forest and public realm is not the sole burden of a part of one department or group of technical experts tasked with responding to the dire issues raised in this Technical Report. Uplifting and enhancing our existing human resources is critical.

For example, we have a traffic and parking department because these are cross-cutting issues that speak to the regulation of public property and public safety. Similarly, a *department of urban forestry and public realm* in Cambridge could coordinate among departments, engage the public through community partnerships, and ensure that the financial resources are in place to address the issue. Our neighbors in Somerville in 2019 reorganized their department structures toward this same end.

Thank you again for this report. We urge our administration and departments to use its leadership to put these recommendations into place in as an immediate fashion as possible. Know that Green Cambridge will use our capacity and connections to partner with you to see it happen and work toward a more sustainable future for all.

Sincerely,



Steven Nutter, AICP
Executive Director
Green Cambridge