

From: Brad Bellows
Sent: Tuesday, January 29, 2019 11:36 AM
To: Woodbury, Catherine <cwoodbury@cambridgema.gov>
Cc: O'Riordan, Owen <ooriordan@cambridgema.gov>; Jan Devereux <jan@jandevereux.org>
Subject: Tree Canopy and overhead utilities

Catherine,

Vice Mayor Devereux suggested I reach out to you with the following thoughts.

I commend the DPW on its efforts to preserve and expand our tree canopy. In reviewing the recent Urban Forest Masterplan presentations (Task Force presentations 5-7) I was surprised to find no mention of one of the biggest obstacles to canopy expansion, namely our reliance on obsolete overhead utility distribution, which renders nearly half of our sidewalks unsuitable for tree planting. While I have no illusion that the conflict between trees and overhead wires can be easily or inexpensively resolved, it seems sensible, while we are evaluating our canopy expansion options, to at least identify and quantify the utility impacts. Canopy preservation alone may not warrant the significant investments undergrounding would require, but in concert with the many other compelling reasons, including maintenance cost, storm resiliency, system modernization, and beautification, it might tip the balance. But to do this, we need data.

I therefore strongly encourage DPW to direct the consultants to address this in their final report, or if it's too late for that, to submit an addendum stating *how many additional trees could be planted on public property if overhead utilities were not a limiting factor, and the potential savings from pruning and damage reduction.*

I would also encourage DPW to consider undergrounding as an opportunity to address a host of challenges we face. In addition to climate change, many of our utilities are undergoing significant technological change, including distributed power generation (e.g., Cogeneration / CHP) and greater reliance on wireless technology. Our existing system is a hodgepodge of largely obsolete junk strung haphazardly across the public spaces of our city. There could be real advantages and long term cost savings in a more systematic and maintainable approach. Canopy expansion would be among the many benefits. I'd be interested in knowing whether or how recently DPW has looked into this?

The most practical way to begin implementing change of this scale would probably be to fold it into existing street or underground utility projects, so the cost could be shared. Perhaps it would be possible to identify potential demonstration projects?

I'd be grateful if you could share these thoughts with the Canopy Task Force, and would be happy to discuss further if you have a few minutes.

Sincerely,

Brad Bellows