

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting
Meeting Minutes – January 12, 2022 - 5:30-7pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attendance:

CPP Members: Vinita Bhaskar, Maggie Booz, Cindy Carpenter, Sara Cohen, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide, Sophia Emperador, Sandra Fairbank, Joan Krizack, Ahron Lerman, Ruth Loetterle, Cynthia Smith.

DPW/City of Cambridge: Abby Bentley, Kevin Beuttell, David Lefcourt, Kate Riley, Erik Thorkildsen (CDD).

Guests & members of the public: Chrissy Gabriel (IQHQ), Anthony Galluccio, Howard Moser (VHB), JP Shadley (Shadley Associates), David Surette, (IQHQ), Jen Sweet (Haley and Aldrich), David Cree, Gwen.

Meeting notes submitted by: Ruth Loetterle

1. Guest presentation: IQHQ Design Team Presentation on Jerry's Pond

- Numerous community meetings have been held to date; the website www.IQHQcommunityprocess.com has been created to communicate with the community.
- The project includes five buildings, a new garage, public plazas, improvement to the plaza at the MBTA headhouse, and improvements to the existing bike/pedestrian path system.
- Existing trees - The existing forest on the north side of the pond will be impacted by the creation of pollinator gardens and meadows to accommodate stormwater; efforts will be made to minimize the impact on existing stands of trees. Two species comprise 70-80% of the forest – black locust and cottonwood. Per community advocacy, site improvements will create minimal disturbance within the rootzone of existing trees on the site. Boardwalks and overlooks will be constructed around the existing trees; helical piers will be used to install boardwalks to minimize disturbance to the rootzones. The wooded west side of the pond has not been developed; site improvements to the pond area are proposed for the historically developed east side. Nine specimen oaks at the southwest corner of the site will be protected
- Proposed planting for the pond is not finalized. Fifteen native tree species are currently proposed, with the final list to be determined by availability. Trees will be added at a variety of sizes, some will be whips. New trees will be planted following improvements to the subgrade and the addition of topsoil. IQHQ will provide maintenance of the new planting for a few years.
- The proposed development along Rindge Ave includes 300' of boardwalk over the existing steep bank. This is separated from the sidewalk by a sloped 10' planting strip. The sidewalk along Rindge Ave has been widened to accommodate two-way bike traffic; this is viewed as a secondary bike connection, with the major connection parallel to Alewife Parkway. Nine street trees are proposed for the south side of Rindge Ave.
- A pollinator garden and a community garden are proposed for the north side of the pond. IQHQ has been working with Green Cambridge on community gardens.
- An open-air structure is planned on the footprint of the old bathhouse to serve as both an ecocenter with involvement by Mass Audubon and as a picnic area for the community. Management of the space will be by Audubon and IQHQ.
- Signage will be installed to engage the public and explain the conservation efforts taken.
- Porous pavement will be used in areas further from Rindge Ave.

Comments/Questions:

- Maggie – How will the pedestrian path on the west side of the pond be separated from the adjacent natural area? JP – a 6' tall fence will be installed, black vinyl-clad chain link or other style.

How will the east side of the pond be illuminated? JP – Boardwalk handrails will have integrated lighting. How will the Eco-center double as a space for grilling and picnicking? JP – This dual function request came from the Friends of Jerry’s Pond and community surveys; the space will be reservable. Efforts have been made to balance the need for public space with the need for wildlife preservation. All seating is on the boardwalks in order to protect habitat and prevent erosion and contamination of the pond. The Mayor and the City Council pushed for more seating. IQHQ will manage the space when it is not being used by Audubon. All interior boardwalks will be closed after hours, except for the boardwalk along Rindge Ave.

- Cynthia S. – How will the project be phased? What are the connections through the site from the neighborhood to the north? JP – The project will span three years. It will start with the remodeling of the two existing buildings, then move on to the construction of new buildings and garage, and finish with the work around the pond. IQHQ with Green Cambridge is committed to the development of a tree nursery. N/S connections through the site will connect Whittemore Ave with the pond.
- Vinita – How will the project be closed at night? JP – Input from residents requested for safety. The City doesn’t want to regulate; this will be the responsibility of IQHQ. Rindge Ave internships have been providing community input.
- Ahron – Two of the species on the list, American beech and white pine are being impacted by disease pressure; their removal from the list is recommended. The addition of understory species is also recommended – American hophornbeam, witch hazel, smoke tree (not bush) and beautyberry. The addition of understory multi-stem or low-branching species are recommended for the planting strip along Rindge Ave to filter pollution and noise.
- Public question – Can the trees being removed from Jefferson Place be transplanted to this site? JP – this will be looked into.

2. Memorial Drive Reconstruction

- DCR’s proposal to put Memorial Drive on a road diet and relocating the bike and pedestrian path will result in the loss of fourteen major trees, including seven of the London plane trees, some of them 50” in diameter. DCR will be making a presentation of the plan at 1:00 on Jan 18. A group of people are meeting on January 13 to walk the site.
- The plan calls for the 10’ wide bike path and 5’ pedestrian path to be moved to the water side of the existing trees; this seems problematic as the edge along the river is very steep in this area.
- The plan has just come to the CPP’s attention. The City Council, Cambridge Historical Commission, and Mass Historical Commission also weren’t aware of the plan.
- The comment period ends on Jan 22; CPP will write a response.

3. Update by City Arborists

- Planting will begin again possibly in late March, whenever the ground thaws.
- The tree well and street tree discussion will happen next month.

4. Updates from CDD Rep Erik Thorkildsen

- The Lab building proposed for 3rd St at the former gravel parking lot/gas transfer site will be before the Planning Board on Jan 25th. The building will include performing arts space on the ground floor. The existing Japanese scholar trees on 3rd St will be preserved. The concentration of planting on the south side and the incorporation of continuous beds for street trees are positive aspects of the project. The inclusion of many ginkgo trees, a non-native species, is inappropriate; they should be replaced with native species.

5. Upcoming meetings

- A presentation by Mike Nakagawa will complete the presentations on the Jerry’s Pond project.