

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – June 19, 2022 - 5:30-7pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attendance

CPP Members: Sophia Emperador, Sara Cohen, Ahron Lerman, Cindy Carpenter, Tracy Orr, Ruth Loetterle, Chantal Eide, Maggie Booz (*members not in attendance Sandra Fairbank, Vinita Bhaskar*)

DPW/City of Cambridge: David Lefcourt, Abby Bentley, Andrew Putnam, Kevin Beuttell

Guests & members of the public: Gretchen Friesinger, Charles Teague, Yakir Preisler

Meeting notes submitted by: Sara Cohen

Agenda Items:

1. Review of meeting minutes from May meeting
2. Presentation by Yakir Preisler about the **Urban Trees Ecophysiology Network**
3. Updates from City Arborists
4. Subcommittee updates
5. Other meeting items
6. Public comments

Review of meeting minutes

No minutes were reviewed at this meeting.

Presentation by Yakir Preisler about the Urban Trees Ecophysiology Network (UTEN)

Yakir Preisler (YP) presented his on-going research about urban street tree performance and the collaboration with the City of Cambridge to monitor trees in the East Cambridge and West Cambridge / Strawberry Hill neighborhoods. Items of note:

- There are similarities in performance between urban trees and trees in dry zones
- By 2050, around 70% of people will live in cities, making urban heat island effect an even greater issue
- “Trees reduce thermal stress for humans” through transpiration and shade
- City trees suffer from many stressors, including pollution and poor soil
- UTEN monitoring systems cost between \$1200-1500 per station
- In Harvard Yard, there are monitors on trees, and fake shade trees. UTEN will monitor which performs better in that location.

Preisler’s research investigates how urban trees are doing with climate change. Currently, there are 10 cities, including Cambridge with research stations. These stations measure transpiration (Sav-flo sensor) and biomass change or growth of the

tree (Andromeda sensor). Priesler is looking for the “super athlete” trees that perform well, and don’t just survive in urban conditions. Preisler is trying to monitor tree stress and quantify performance, looking specifically at Vapor-pressure deficit (VPD). High VPD is a stressful environment for trees.

CPP Comments:

Sophia: Have you considered World Bank grants or pilot programs?

YP: Not yet, please to send information. SE to send information

Sara: What kind of community engagement are you hoping to have?

YP: As an educational tool, we need to know the desires of the community. Every community has different needs for public street trees. We would want to know more about what people are looking for and what do they value in their street trees.

Public Question:

Gretchen Friesinger: Where else have you done these types of studies? How are this different from other studies?

YP: Other researchers aren’t necessarily asking how specific questions are cooling the human environment. They are often looking at the forest. In a city, every tree has completely different ecosystem. The urban environment provides a good opportunity to study stress. A tree looks fine, but are the trees plastic enough to respond to stress and the unique urban conditions? These are the questions UTEN is considering.

Updates from City Arborists

Abby Bentley (AB) presented the updates.

Tree planting is done for the season. The Forestry interns have started.

CPP Comments:

Chantal: How many trees have been planted?

AB: For this fiscal year, it is over 1200; Forestry met the goal for the spring. Exact number not known without looking.

Sophia: Can Forestry add the members to the forest friends email list?

Andrew Putnam (AP): Contact Kristen [LAST NAME] to add members to the list

CPP Progress update on Urban Forest newsletter: CPP would like to have an Urban Forestry/CPP Newsletter with highlights, like Fresh Pond day. Can CPP connect that to the Forest Friends list or have a link on the DPW website?

David Lefcourt (DL): Ask Kristin [LAST NAME]

No Public comments.

Subcommittee Updates

Outreach: Fresh Pond Day re-cap

- Great turnout, and anecdotally, good connections were made
- Table visitors liked the information on Forest Friends, and the Urban Forestry Master Plan green book was popular (almost all the books were away)
- CPP Next Steps: What other festivals are happening? Where can we table?

Update on Holworthy St. Pocket Park

- Kevin Buettell, DCR, and Neighborhood Friends group that includes CPP members met at the pocket park in Strawberry Hill to discuss adding pollinator plants and getting rid of invasive plant material
- DCR would like to formalize their relationships with “friends” groups for their parks. Does CPP or DPW have a list of those groups? Could this formalizing be a model for the City as well? Gary Chan was the contact with the City.
- Other questions that came up: How do we think about the broader urban forest, more than trees?

Other meeting items:

Nomination of CPP Co-chair

Sophia nominated Cindy Carpenter to be the Co-chair. “Cindy has been a member since 2021. Her commitment & dedication to enhancing and improving our surroundings through plantings at all scales, from a neighborhood to the city at large, is truly commendable. Cindy has a great positive attitude and realistic outlook on how we can move our CPP goals forward and how best to get our community involved as part of these solutions. With these sentiments I, Sophia would like to nominate Cindy as our new co-chair.”

Unanimous approval by the members.

CPP New Membership process

No update at the time of the meeting.

Linear Park - Design Updates – Kevin Buettell

Kevin Buettell gave an update on the Linear Park and walked through the current schematic plans. Vision for the park has not changed. Key to that vision is to increase safety, which includes widening the path to 14’, and reimagine the park to programmatically. The path will not be widened where trees cannot accommodate widening, and side/secondary path locations will be introduced where possible. There are several existing issues, including soil compaction at desire lines. DPW wants to identify areas for walking off the path to provide a framework for planting improvements in areas where no one is walking. The new planting will have woodland character, under a canopy of trees, and DPW wants to avoid planting the mid layer to keep open views, add in stumps to increase visual interest and habitat. Secondary paths will most likely be stone dust or stone. There will be areas for play made with natural materials. Lighting and furnishings will be upgraded. There is potential for a new Miyawaki forest at Harvey Street. Currently, there are plans to remove only 6 trees, in the following locations:

- 1 red maple at Russell Field

- 4 cherry trees near Cedar Street
- 1 additional cherry tree

There will be no connection at Wesley Ave during this project. The MBTA will not allow planting on their property.

CPP comments:

Maggie: the secondary paths at 5-6' wide seem wide? Could they be narrower?

KB: We want it to be wide enough for the anticipated pedestrian traffic.

Ruth: DPW is doing a good job advocating for the trees, however, I think the path width is being misrepresented. And the potential width change to the pathway will have a greater impact than is being represented. Is grading being considered? Looking forward to seeing the root air spading data. And DPW should consider promoting alternative routes for cyclists for increasing safety.

KB: The design program was put together by the City, and that is what the designer are working towards. The 14' width was determined by professionals and we will have pinch points around trees where we will have to adjust that width to be narrower. KB will look for clearly explaining the widening of the pathway in future public meetings. Grading has been considered, which is why the 1 red maple is coming down at Russell Field. KB will share arborists report.

Sophia: When are the next phase of design plans? There are species to help with compaction that should be considered. And other options, like paint or bumps for bike calming measures.

KB: Schedule not known at meeting, but can be shared next meeting. It was supposed to go to bid this year, but that is unlikely

Sara: Is Wesley Ave public?

KB: Yes, but the whole street voted against making the connection for now. Hopefully a future connection can be made.

Upcoming meeting agenda items

Sophia went next month's meeting – send any thoughts on location. If you would to join policy sub-committee, please reach out to Sophia.

Public comments:

Gretchen: Based on the Health and Environment hearing, it seems useful to connect to other committees that may be missing chances to plant trees. For instance, on the Mass Ave construction blue bikes are being prioritized over trees.

DL: DPW is involved in those conversations about Mass Ave.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on July 12, 2023 at 5:30pm, and will be advertised to the public in advance.