

City of Cambridge Committee on Public Planting

Meeting Minutes – April 12, 2023 - 5:30-7pm

Hybrid Meeting at DPW (147 Hampshire St) and via Zoom

Attendance

CPP Members: Maggie Booz, Cindy Carpenter*, Sara Cohen, Paula Cortes, Chantal Eide*, Sophia Emperador*, Sandra Fairbank, Ruth Loetterle*

CPP members not in attendance: Vinita Bhaskar, Ahron Lerman

DPW/City of Cambridge: Abby Bentley*, Kevin Beuttell*, Gary Chen (CDD), Ellen Coppinger*, David Lefcourt*, Andrew Putnam*

Guests & members of the public: Ellen Crocker*, Gretchen Friesinger*

(* indicates attendees who attended in person)

Meeting notes submitted by: Ruth Loetterle

Agenda Items:

1. Review of Meeting Minutes: Dec 2021, June 2022, July 2022, Sept 2022, Feb 2023 (public meeting and executive session)
2. Presentation by Gary Chan: Open Space Master Plan Update followed by Q & A
3. Updates on Linear Park - Kevin Beuttell
 - a. Project is now at 25% Design Documentation
4. Monthly updates from City Arborists
5. Other committee items
 - a. Outreach sub-committee updates:
 - Arbor Day Agenda/Events & CPP involvement opportunities
 - b. Announcements
 - Municipal Reforestation Bill (<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H905>)
 - Health & Environment Committee Meeting has been rescheduled to Tuesday April 25th at 3:00pm
 - c. Other projects of concern
 - Danehy-New Street Connector Path project – public meeting summary
6. Public comments

1) Review of prior meeting minutes

Minutes from five earlier months were shared and approved by the committee. They will be posted, bringing the public record of the committee minutes up to date.

2) Presentation by Gary Chan: Open Space Master Plan

The report: Our Parks Our Plan is an update to the Open Space Master Plan. The goal of the update is to establish a broad framework for parks and open space in Cambridge going forward addressing the quality of those spaces, and the challenges and opportunities they present. Completion is anticipated in the next few weeks.

The plan identified 12 goals falling into four categories of Accessibility, Environment, Activity, and Design and Management.

- Accessibility: Making spaces welcoming, and improving access to and within the spaces
- Environment: Protecting and enhancing natural areas and making them more resilient
- Activity: promoting healthy play and activity for all and increasing both active and passive recreation

- Design and Management: Bringing arts and culture to spaces reflecting community interests, while supporting the maintainability of spaces, and fostering support by residents through increasing opportunities for learning and community building

CPP Comments and Questions:

- SE: inquired re the next big step and short/medium/long term goals **GC**: already working on some goals, collaboration with all departments
- RL: commented on the importance of elevating biodiversity collapse to the level of concern for the climate crisis when stating goals for the environment
- PC: commented on the impact of other efforts by the City that are working to decrease open space—the construction of towers, emphasis on bikes, over development—more cooperation is needed across the City
- RL: Commented that the proposed redesign of Linear Park is a demonstration of that lack of coordination and commitment, where a park with a path through it is being redesigned as a major transportation corridor, with the anticipated loss of many trees
- SC: requested some further information regarding the enhancement of maintenance by the City; and suggested the encouragement of volunteerism **GC**: encouragement of the use of Commonwealth Connect by residents and the careful consideration of equipment and furnishings **KB**: natural systems present opportunities for less maintenance once established
- GC**: A copy of the presentation will be provided to the Committee

3) Monthly update from City Arborists – Abby Bentley

- Spring planting is just underway: Leahy has planted 55 of the 300 trees that they will plant. DPW to start planting just over 100 bare root trees early next week. The goal of 1000 trees for this fiscal year will be met due to the large number planted last fall. The longer window in the fall allows the planting of more trees. The healing in of trees through the summer in the DPW nursery permits the planting of those species that typically can't be dug in the fall. Next year's goal will be 1200 trees. Enlargement of tree pits occurs year-round.
- Summer interns: Tentative start date of June 5 for college students and July 1 for high school students. Anticipate staff of 6-8 interns and the supervisor from last year. Four new e-cargo bikes have been purchased They present an opportunity for naming and wrapping with messaging.

4) Update on Linear Park – Kevin Beuttell

25% Design Documentation has been submitted by the consulting team and being reviewed by the City staff team—Gary and Kevin are on the staff team. Goal is to have the character north of Harvey Street extend to the whole path; to be a park with a path through it. The City has reached out to the MBTA to be able to have space for planting trees adjacent to the MBTA bus yard where the park width is very narrow. A shade structure would be another option. The City will reach out to Somerville to extend the improvements just beyond the loop rather than at the City Line.

Design direction provided by the City to the consulting team:

- Leave ground plane as is where existing conditions are okay; reduce mown lawn
- Modify “conflict corner” at Russell Field to create a 90-degree intersection with striping to indicate that the area is a mixing zone
- Provide 14' wide pavement to meet City, not AASHTO, standards for shared paths, along with 2' width clear of vertical obstructions on both sides. Narrower zones occur at IQHQ and brick circle due to existing trees
- Air spade areas where trees abut the path to inform the appropriate path width
- Provide scattered seating areas
- Integrate play features into the landscape along a secondary route where the existing desire line departs from the pavement; design to be directed by tree roots
- Incorporate Miyawaki forest south of Harvey Street
- Provide irrigation only at entry points; provide quick couplers at regular intervals throughout the park for watering of all other portions
- Create connection to IQHQ development

- Reclaim park land currently within dog run area
- Selected artist to draw inspiration from **moss**
- Remove aging cherry trees near Mass Ave
- Maintain all brick columns at park entrances
- Replace brick in plaza between Mass and Cameron Avenues with unit pavers; eliminate asphalt path through the middle of the space

CPP Comments and Questions:

-MB: inquired re the path width **KB**: most is 14', with 2' clear each side. 2' clear zones will be stabilized stone dust or loamed and seeded

-RL: commented that the current path is only consistently 12' along Russell field. A wider zone exists at the MBTA access points. Much of the remaining path is 8'-6" or 10'

-SC: inquired re the timing of the air spading **KB**: air spading to be done ASAP. 3 full days have been contracted, with a rate established if additional air spading is needed. Arborists will make recommendations for decompaction of soil. Planting will be relatively small caliper material or bare root. Perennials to be quart size to help address compaction along the edges of the path

-SC: inquired re the consideration of alternate pavement types. **KB**: it is hoped that the existing subbase can be retained; porous asphalt would require its removal, so conventional asphalt is the recommended pavement

5) Announcements:

- Arbor Week events: CPP to assist UF with tabling on Tues, Wed, Thurs answering questions and handing out seedlings; six spots for volunteers are available. Kristin Kelleher to provide graphic and text for CPP members to forward to their contacts. RL to recontact Green Cambridge regarding their participation
- The Health and Environment Committee of the City Council to hold a hybrid meeting on April 25th at 3pm to discuss Urban Forest Master Plan implementation and other tree/planting issues
- Municipal Reforestation Bill is being considered in the state legislature to promote and support the planting of trees in all state municipalities. <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H905>
- End of term for existing members: DL will look into protocol for members to reup
- MB reported that a Strawberry Hill neighbor (Rustam Booz) the City has convinced the DCR (underfunded/under-staffed but land-rich) to turn land along the new Watertown-to-Cambridge Greenway into a pocket park. Kevin Beutell is working on the design. DCR will welcome the neighborhood-driven Friends of the Greenway, anchored by Cindy Carpenter, to participate in the care of the park and Greenway.
- MB attended the meeting regarding the Affordable Housing Zoning Overlay Version 2. Version 1 of the Overlay was passed in 2020 and was to remain in place until 2025 when it would be up for review. Version 2 greatly increases the allowable building heights for affordable housing two years before the stipulated review. This premature revision is not in keeping with Cambridge's adherence to and practice of good planning. Four City Councilors support the revision, Councilors Siddiqui and Mallon should be encouraged to adhere to the 2025 review.

Next meeting: Our next meeting will be held on May 10, 2023 at 5:30pm and will be advertised to the public in advance.

NOTE: The foregoing represents our understanding of the discussions and decisions made during this meeting. The CPP requests permission to quote or reference these notes.